

**The Great Irish Famine: A Further Understanding of Its  
Complexities through the Use of Human Communication Theory**

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**I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of PhD is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.**

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## **Abstract**

### **The Great Irish Famine: A Further Understanding of Its Complexities through the Use of Human Communication Theory**

Submitted by Lisa Kelly Derby

The Great Irish Famine cleared a minimum of two million Irish individuals from the land by either death or emigration. These individuals, both those that died and those that left, did not have their needs met for many deep-seated political and economic reasons, but also because of failed communication practices. It is this latter, neglected aspect of famine studies that is the focus of this thesis. By using the lexicon of communication studies, many controversial aspects of famine history will be analysed and discussed.

Each of the five chapters that make up the body of this thesis focuses on one main aspect of interpersonal human communication and incorporates famine data into the concept or model. First, a basic profile of all the communicators that were involved in famine issues is given. The degree to which those communicators shared a field of common experience is shown to correspond with their level of communicative efficiency. Next, because the nature of communication is circular, there existed an 'ideal' model that would have preserved life and culture when famine struck. In most circumstances, the circle of famine communication was thrown off track. The details of a few of those derailments are described. Additionally, the publicly accepted ideologies of providentialism and political economy were at odds with the observable realities of the Irish Famine. In terms of human communication theory, the conflicts between the verbal and observational universes during the famine years are explained. Finally, the basic human components of all famine communication are those who were sending messages and those who were receiving messages. A final look at the senders and receivers is taken before the thesis is concluded.

The effects of the Great Irish Famine had world-wide impact. By viewing the events of that catastrophe through the lens of interpersonal human communication, it is anticipated that similar situations can be avoided in the future and a step toward the healing of cultural memory can be taken.

## **Acknowledgements**

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding  
In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will keep your paths straight  
Proverbs 3 5 - 6*

In all areas of my life I acknowledge the power and love of my Saviour, Lord, and friend - Christ Jesus. I do trust in Him with all of my heart and I don't lean on my own temporal understanding. The path that I have had to follow for this PhD thesis has been difficult, but it has been straight and true and I am so grateful. I am grateful for every circumstance and every person that the Lord has orchestrated to come into my path and help me along on this four-year journey.

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## Preface

The purpose of the research and analysis undertaken in this thesis was to produce a study of interpersonal and group communication. The anticipated outcome stated in the initial research proposal was 'the production of a critical communications analysis of the Famine'. Though the subject matter is an historical event, the purpose of this thesis was not to create a document of social history. The research methodology parallels that of historical research in that a great deal of primary, archival pieces of evidence are relied upon, however, the analysis and discussion of the evidence stems from a perspective of human communication rather than human history.

A primary object of this dissertation is to bring about the effective interaction between the theories of interpersonal human communication and the documented facts and records of the historical episode of the Great Irish Famine. During the initial phases of proposing the project and beginning to look at the available resources for research, my original desire was to use the principles and skills that I learned during my undergraduate degree in communication studies to provide some understanding of how to avoid catastrophes like the famine, at least where human communication was concerned. This desire has not been realised. As I began to investigate the famine, I discovered that many people did not think that it was a disaster at all, but instead that it was a blessing. This called for an investigation of underlying ideologies and belief systems, as well as communication in the more narrow, strictly defined sense.

Therefore, the revised purpose of this work is to reveal as many of the individual struggles, inner monologues, external dialogues, and correspondence as is possible under the constraints of this forum. From this depth of research into the human communication

patterns that occurred during the Irish Famine emerges a cohesive case study of theoretical principles played out in a practical sphere.

In his chapter, "Interpersonal Communication – A Meeting between Persons," John Stewart supplies a visual example of the variance of human behaviour. "If you tap my knee, you may cause a reflex jerk, but the behaviour that accompanies my reflex might be anything from giggles to a lawsuit, and there is no way that you can predict for sure which it will be. Like objects, persons sometimes react, but we can also *choose, decide, act*."<sup>1</sup> The choices, decisions, and actions of those faced with starvation during the famine years were extremely limited, but those of the individuals in a position to provide relief were manifold. If the potato blight and ensuing famine was the tap on the knee of the British administration to test its reflexes, the accompanying behaviour by each of the civil servants differed. The social and political climate that faced the men was broadly similar but each man's personal background, expertise, job description, and psychological rationale lead to different reactions. Some men responded to the communicative efforts of the Irish people with greater levels of compassionate relief than their other colleagues. In a study of interpersonal communication, the determining agents of these deviations in behaviour are of extreme interest. Therefore, this thesis has been devoted to their discovery and investigation.

The historian David Fitzpatrick has published an important work involving the letters of Irish emigrants to Australia. Although his focus is of a more historical nature than mine, I believe that my academic journey echoes his when he states: "My sense of

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<sup>1</sup> John Stewart, ed. "Interpersonal Communication – A Meeting between Persons," *Bridges, not Walls: A Book about Interpersonal Communication* (Menlo Park: Addison-Wesley, 1977) 12.

what is possible, and justifiable, in the writing of history has been altered in the course of preparation – the excitement remains”<sup>2</sup> After years of inundation in the voices and lives of those who faced the Great Irish Famine, I am still able to retain a sense of enthusiasm as I present the combination of interpersonal communication theory and the historical event of the Great Irish Famine. I trust that all who read it will glean a similar sense of academic stimulation.

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<sup>2</sup> David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994) ix

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**



## Chapter 1 Introduction

We can perhaps evoke some of the central concerns of this dissertation by recounting a grim scene on the road from Leenane to Westport, County Mayo, in 1849, as described in a contemporary publication. As Sidney Osbourne and his companion travel by carriage through the bleak famine-stricken countryside, a young girl runs alongside

A girl of about twelve years of age, of course barefooted, dressed in a man's old coat, closely buttoned, ran beside our car, going at times very fast, for a distance, quite surprising<sup>1</sup> she did not ask for anything, but with hands crossed kept an even pace, only adapting it, to our accidental change of speed, we, as a rule, refused all professional mendicants, we told her again and again, we would give her nothing, she never asked for anything. I saw my friend melting, I from time to time tried to congeal him, by using arguments against encouraging such bad habits, &c. He was firm, astonished at her powers, not so irritated, as I was, by her silent, wearying importunity, on she went, as we went, he shook his head at her, every quarter of a mile I thought the said shake softened in its negative character, I read fresh lectures on the evil of being led from right principles by appeals to our pity, through the exhibition of what excited our wonder, the naked spokes of those naked legs, still seemed to turn in some mysterious harmony, with our wheels, on, on she went ever by our side, using her eyes only to pick her way, never speaking, not even looking at us, she won the day - she got very hot, coughed - but still ran with undiminished speed, my companion gave way - that cough did it, he gave her a fourpenny, I confess I forgave him - it was hard earned, though by a bad sort of industry<sup>2</sup>

It was the cough that did it. The girl communicated a great deal without the use of a single word. Was this perhaps a premonition of the Great Silence that was to befall Irish culture? Words are not the only effective means of human communication, as this harrowing

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<sup>1</sup> Within quoted material throughout the thesis, spelling remains consistent with the original

<sup>2</sup> Sidney Osbourne, *Gleanings in the West of Ireland* (London T W Boone, 1850) 91-92

incident suggests by virtue of the young girl's determination, her endurance, her naked running legs, and her racking cough

Yet the young girl was not the only active communicator in the preceding exchange. She was joined in this act of interpersonal communication by two additional players and a myriad of external influences. First, Sidney Osbourne - the author of this journal entry and the calculating political economist. Secondly, Osbourne's companion - the giver of sympathy and charity. And finally, the third participant, the young girl herself - the suffering victim of not only the potato blight, but also of the social reality into which she was born. While these three individuals are not representative of every role that existed during the 1840's in Ireland and Great Britain, they are a good representation of some of the key roles, and will provide the focus of the fundamental breakdowns in communications during the Great Famine which is the main concern of this thesis.

Those who lived through and those who died during the Irish Famine had no script to follow. Instead, each individual responded to others as a result of the forces and influences around them. The three individuals in the scene on the previous page were reacting to the external responses of one another as well as to their own internal voices and consciences. In essence, the study of the forces upon the verbal or non-verbal monologues and dialogues of the human race has evolved into the modern theories of interpersonal human communication. This thesis is devoted to using the applications of those theories in an attempt to unravel some of the intricacies of the calamitous breakdowns in communication which beset the Irish Famine.

I present a work here that is not so much a study of what occurred during the Irish Famine, as it is a study of why, from a distinctive communications perspective. There are a number of questions that propelled the research undertaken for this thesis. Why did the failure of one crop produce such disastrous results? Why was relief organisation impressive but ineffective? Who or what dictated moral standards? Why were so many Irish individuals in a state of such abject poverty? Can blame be attributed to any person or group of people? What kind of moral universes did individuals inhabit before, during and after the Great Famine, and how were these affected by and effect in turn, communication networks? What communicative structures existed between individuals and groups before, during, and after the famine? Why have there been so many contradictory perceptions and descriptions of the famine? What factors caused the prolonged appearance of a naturally occurring fungus to be a watershed in Ireland's history? Why have some historians tried to discount the significance of the famine?

The archival data and empirical evidence brought forth in the course of this extensive journey to attempt to answer these questions relies heavily upon the many thousands of letters written in Ireland during the mid-1840's. Unfortunately, there are few firsthand letters from the people who were most at risk of starvation or death by famine induced disease, but there were many spokespersons for this social class. The list included priests, magistrates, landlords, local relief officers, and others.

The many different correspondents during the 1840's expressed varied opinions on how best to handle the situation of famine in Ireland. Some pleaded with the government for the release of additional funds in order to minimise the death count. Others argued

against gratuitous relief in the belief that the unfortunate deaths and forced emigration occurring in Ireland would ultimately produce positive results for the country and its people. Scientists and experimenters suggested additional ways to save the potatoes from decay. Of the thousands of letters mailed to the government bodies during the latter half of the 1840's, there were no two that were exactly the same. Every writer had his own set of influences that made his letter unique. The readers of the letters also had influences upon them that affected their responses to the information received. The full integration of the empirical data and the theoretical principles presented in this thesis will be supplied by a more detailed analysis of actual examples of famine communication. The research presented in this work has uncovered a symbiotic relationship between archival data and standard models of interpersonal communication. The lexicon provided by communication studies makes it possible to view the importance of ideological and cultural factors in terms of overall communicative success or failure. Not only has this study brought fresh insight to the saga of the Great Silence, but it has also augmented the body of discourse that relies on communicative models to yield greater understanding of human behaviour.

This review of human communication that occurred during the Irish Famine is not without relevance for understanding similar forms of catastrophe in the contemporary world. The information presented in this thesis may be utilised as a small gesture towards understanding the kind of communicative networks that might secure nations against the tragedies of famine. The North American orator Patrick Henry summarised this idea well as he confessed to his listeners, "I like the dreams of the future better than the history of

the past ”<sup>3</sup> This thesis will look toward the dreams of the future by applying the principles of communication theory to a dark segment of the history of the Irish people

## SECTION 1.1 - COMMUNICATION THEORY AND THE IRISH FAMINE

Many reasons have been adduced for the deaths and forced emigration caused by the famine. As a result of recent research, arguments, and interpretations, the famine debate has grown even more complicated and is still controversial. It is the argument of this thesis that aspects of famine rhetoric can be simplified by tailoring the major debates into the framework of communication studies. Positive and negative actions taken during the famine years revolve at some point around what was being communicated between people or groups of people. The study of human communication involves not only words, but attitudes, behaviours, actions, cultures, and much more. Certainly an immediate cause of the Great Irish Famine was the fungal disease *phytophthora infestans*, but an underlying structural cause of the deaths and emigration was the profound failure in communication between two cultures. It has been said that,

Communication requires a certain degree of sharing of meanings, linguistic and paralinguistic conventions, and frames of reference. It follows that the more different two cultures are, the more difficult the communication between their members.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Patrick Henry, *New Webster Quotation Dictionary* (New York: Lexicon Publications, Inc., 1987) 115

<sup>4</sup> Harry Triandis and Rosita Albert, “Cross-Cultural Perspectives,” *Handbook of Organizational Communication*, eds. Jablin, Putnam, Roberts, and Porter (Newbury Park, Beverly Hills, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1987) 266-7

This argument certainly holds in the case of the Irish Famine of 1845 - 1852

Communication between humans is already difficult, but as language and cultural variations impede the process, the chance of effective translation grows smaller

Innumerable kinds of cultural and linguistic differences existed between Britain and Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century What was it that caused some individuals to respond with compassion and caring to those who were dying and for others to pretend as if nothing was amiss? So profound is the capacity for communicative dissonance that, as in today's Holocaust denials, it was possible for some propagandists to argue that the Irish people invented the terrors of famine as an elaborate plot to gain 'easy' financial assistance By 1880, one Terence McGrath proposed that money went pouring in to assist the starving people, but when the contributors of relief went to look for the suffering hordes, they "could find no famine"<sup>5</sup> From the evidence of famine eyewitnesses, this statement is grotesquely untrue, yet it reveals that responses of all kinds were given to the events of the Great Irish Famine In reviewing the myriad of famine descriptions it must be admitted that it is not possible to change past events However, it is possible that by examining them in light of interpersonal and group communication, fresh insights to a one hundred and fifty year old debate might emerge

Throughout the thesis, many communication terms will be incorporated Each chapter takes on the goal of explaining one or more theoretical constructs or models and brings them into dialogue with empirical famine details to yield these fresh insights The following definitions of terms given here at the outset will assist in the attempt to bring the

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<sup>5</sup> Terence McGrath, *Pictures from Ireland* (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1880) 196

famine era communication into the parameters of a social scientific communication study

The term *message* “typically refers to the verbal and non-verbal cues each communicator conveys” The *channel* is “the vehicle or medium in which a message travels” The *sender* “refers to the individual who sends a message or the generalised source of a message” The *receiver* is the counterpart to the sender, being the “person who receives and deciphers a message” What must be remembered at this point is that communication is a continuous exchange of messages, so the sender and receiver are exchanging roles as each message is relayed Thus “actual sending and receiving of messages through designated channels” is called *transmission* *Encoding* and *decoding* occur before and after transmission, being the “process of creating, transforming, and deciphering messages” As we shall see, the ‘extra textual’ factors brought to bear on the encoding and decoding of messages exerted a vast – and often tragic – influence on communications during the famine *Feedback* is any type of “message sent in response,” and is given by both the senders and the receivers as soon as the first message is initialised Finally, “individuals formulate meaning by interpreting or making sense of the message”<sup>6</sup> The goal of each sender is to send the message in such a way that the intended meaning remains intact during the communication process At any stage in the communication process, noise – communicative dissonance – can impede the accuracy of the message *Noise* can be classified as audible sounds that inhibit transmission, or it can be internal prejudices that cause a message to be ‘heard’ in a different manner than it was sent Much

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<sup>6</sup> Definitions taken from Krone, Jablin, Putnam, “Communication Theory and Organisational Communication Multiple Perspectives,” eds Jablin, Putnam, Roberts,

of the discussion in this thesis revolves around various types of noise that hindered accurate famine communication

## **SECTION 1.2 – PREVIEW OF CHAPTERS**

It is proposed that chapter two should function as a cornerstone for the rest of the information discussed in this thesis. Every application of communicative principles to famine events must ultimately be based on an accurate understanding of the human or humans involved, therefore, an accurate profile of some of the key *dramatis personae* discussed in the text is important at the outset. This chapter will conduct a wide-reaching literature review and while it does not claim to be all-inclusive, it attempts to sufficiently supply the framework of understanding upon which the rest of the thesis can rely. It was determined early on that a description of ‘famine Ireland’ would be too broad and cumbersome, therefore, the research was narrowed to County Mayo. For this study of famine communication, Mayo proves to be a valuable microcosm, and, while the thesis is not restricted to utilising facts and information from Mayo the county is used as a guideline for a majority of the discussion.

The third chapter uses the theoretical model of ‘fields of experience’ to explain why some communicators are more apt to have effectual interpersonal communication than others. It is easily observed that a variety of responses were given to famine victims. Both proximity and moral conscientiousness are part of an individual’s field of experience and they affected action, but did any correlation exist between those factors? On both the

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Porter, *Handbook of Organisational Communication* (Newbury Park, Beverly Hills,



micro and macro levels, the fields of experience of each of the famine communicators are compared and contrasted in chapter three. The three areas upon which the most emphasis is placed are that of language, religion, and culture. Because the Irish and the English variations on those three themes so widely differed, there existed an “underlap,” or a series of chasms, in their fields of experience as opposed to an overlap. As a result, effective communication was severely impaired. Daniel O’Connell’s role in Irish history as we shall see, embodies many of these perspectives of over/underlapping fields at a personal level. Finally, the controversy about the region of Gweedore in County Donegal is used to amplify the application of the fields of experience model used in this chapter to an area beyond that of Mayo.

Chapter four chronicles specific examples of communicative demise. The perfect circular model of communication went awry in most instances of famine communication. The ideal model of circular communication that should have occurred during the Irish Famine in order to save human lives is described and then followed by many explanations of how this model failed when put into actual famine situations. The appropriate communicative message needed to save lives was not encoded or decoded accurately in most famine instances. The officials of the British administration worked diligent, long hours and met the requirements of their stations, and yet people died. It was not negligence, but ironically, following the lines of duty and officialdom that led to such drastic consequences. A communications perspective enables us to examine how this

could happen. It was often believed that the government was performing superbly. The chairman of the Foxford Relief Committee, G V Jackson wrote to the Lord Lieutenant

It is my own conviction that the government in each department has done and is doing all that any government can do to mitigate the horrors of the calamity we suffer under, but my own experience satisfies me that it is beyond the reach of human means to meet<sup>7</sup>

A few possible answers to this distressing contradiction are described in chapter four

The communicative model of verbal and observational universes is presented in chapter five. This chapter proceeds to argue that the verbal universe during which the famine occurred was in conflict with the observational universe presented by the famine. The individual lives of millions of Irish people were at the mercy of the concepts, propositions, and theories which served the interests of the expanding British nation, which was then in political control over its sister island. The philosophies of the economists and politicians of the 1840's are described and their effect on the Irish individuals is explained. The two principal ideologies upon which this chapter focuses are the notions of providentialism and political economy. Those in power were devoted to two systems of belief that spelled death or forced emigration for the Irish after their staple food crop was eliminated. The verbal and observational universes were in unresolvable conflict and a million people died as a result.

The final chapter devoted to the presentation of evidence is chapter six, "Senders and Receivers." As the chapter title implies, a concise, final effort to the investigation of who was sending messages and who was receiving messages during the years of the Great

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<sup>7</sup> G V Jackson to the Lord Lieutenant, 7 February 1847, Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers O 1411, cited in Liam Swords, *In Their Own Words*, 131

Irish Famine is undertaken. Several more letters of those involved with the Irish Famine are analysed in order to clearly hear the voices of the communicators. Although the term 'souperism,' or the exchange of food, clothing, or shelter for religious affiliation, has much to do with religion and was mentioned in chapter three as an area of underlap between the Irish and the English, it is included in a more in-depth manner in this chapter dealing with the senders and receivers of messages. There is perhaps no better example of manipulation of interpersonal communication than in the reality of the souperism that occurred during the Irish Famine.

Chapter seven makes up the conclusion to the overall argument. Although each chapter contains a concluding section of its own, there are many concluding remarks that can be made only after all of the material has been presented. The Great Irish Famine of 1845 to 1852 was a turning point in Ireland and a dark stain on the annals of world history. The application of interpersonal human communication theory cannot provide all the answers to famine questions, nor can it produce an ideal plan to avoid all future famines worldwide. However, it can shed an enormous amount of light on the reasons why so many people perished or were forced to emigrate from their native shores during the late 1840's when so many people, from their own perspectives, were acting in good faith. Noise, and profound communicative dissonance, can still occur, despite the best will in the world – if, indeed that was even present. From this understanding, a great deal can be learned of how to avoid similar communicative situations in the future.

Several pieces of archival evidence are reproduced in the appendices. The first is the statement made by the English Prime Minister, Tony Blair, on 31 May 1997 regarding

the “massive human tragedy” of the Great Irish Famine. Secondly, a copy of the letter written by Sir James Donbrain – a key figure in my analysis – on 21 June 1846 is included. Appendix C is a copy of a letter that includes the signature of Richard Pennefather and identifies him as the Under Secretary. There is some confusion in the public record regarding the name of the Under Secretary, so this letter confirms that his name was indeed Richard Pennefather. This letter can also be used as an additional example of the transient nature of administrative responsibility. Appendix D, a letter also signed by Richard Pennefather, is included to supply an example of his notations written at the top of the letter as they are referred to in chapter four. The inclusion of this particular sample in the famine record is interesting because it would not have been as readily available to researchers if the Reverend Tighe Gregory had not written his own response upon Pennefather’s letter. The beginning of Gregory’s letter is visible at the bottom of this piece of correspondence. Appendix E contains the instructions for local relief committees written by the Relief Commission on 14 March 1846 and includes two sample cover letters. Other crucial copies are shorter in length and transferred directly into the text of the thesis.

## Chapter 2

### A Profile of the Communicators

*During their busiest period the officers of the Relief Commission were working a twelve-hour day. When Routh mentioned an indisposition caused by this amount of work, he was told by Trevelyan, in his usual brusque manner, that, given the prevailing circumstances, there was no time to be ill.*

*This Great Calamity*  
Christine Kinealy

*The majority of the men were tall, and had once been of powerful build, but want had reduced them to feeble spectres. On every face inadequate nourishment had graven lines and carved hollows. In each could be traced a certain similarity of expression, which was already noted and named by the peasantry themselves, 'the drag'. A few weeks of insufficient food, and wolfish wrinkles appeared round the thin lips. With the drag came a weakening of the vocal chords and throat - the voice grew harsh and feeble, and almost unconsciously those who were affected by the famine in this way, became chary of speech. That little or no noise came from their ranks added to the nameless horror that the hungry host excited.*

*The Hunger: Being Realities of the Famine Years in Ireland, 1845 to 1848*  
Andrew Merry

## **Chapter 2**

### **A Profile of the Communicators**

Communication between human beings occurs in a myriad of ways. A gesture, a look, and a spoken or written word are just a few of the most prominent examples. Humans are aware of their need to communicate. However, as long as their basic needs for survival are being met, most humans give little thought to the methods or patterns that comprise interpersonal or organisational human communication. Individuals are often satisfied with basic language skills and although some humans are born with more abilities for effective communication than others, the prime objective of all communication is to meet needs.

The disappointing but challenging drawback of human communication is the impossibility of completely effective communication. Despite egalitarian ideals, the human race has yet to prove capable of communicating with one another without one person or people group taking the advantage over the other. Wars have been fought because people were not able to come to agreements without resorting to violence. People have been shunned and ridiculed by coarse words and harsh actions. The proliferation of languages and cultures have made diversity itself a problem in communication. Not everyone is born with equal ability and status, so communication between people is affected by multiple factors.

Whether humans are conscious of all of these factors or not, they exist and they affect the ability of humans to communicate with others around them. So, in order to more effectively analyse human communication, the theoretical study of communication studies has evolved. While much research and discussion has blossomed in this field in the

twentieth century, it actually has its roots in the traditions of the ancient Greek society. This origin makes it “one of the most ancient of academic studies”<sup>1</sup>. Their oral traditions and philosophical debates laid an excellent foundation for the study of human communication.

One of the results of the scientific analysis of communication is a greater awareness of the capacity to use communications to achieve social hegemony, in the sense of “the power or dominance that one social group holds over others”<sup>2</sup>. Hegemony exists “when events or texts are interpreted in a way that promotes the interests of one group over those of another”<sup>3</sup>. Hegemony is a by-product of a process of communication in which a group of individuals is not able to ensure that their needs are given the same level of priority as another group. The ultimate goal of communication studies should in fact be to eliminate the effects of hegemony by equalising all human ability to communicate. As this is unlikely to happen in the present social order, researchers in communication studies can take small steps toward this utopian goal by examining the history of communicative attempts to achieve hegemonic control and by laying a basis to prevent similar situations in the future. In this connection the Great Irish Famine of 1845-1852 is a useful reminder of the tragedy that can ensue from one-way communicative hegemony.

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<sup>1</sup> Stacks, Hickson, & Hill, *Introduction to Communication Theory* (Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1991) 97

<sup>2</sup> James Lull, *Media, Communication, Culture* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1995) 31

<sup>3</sup> Steven Littlejohn, *Theories of Human Communication* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1992) 247

## **SECTION 2.1 - CHAPTER OBJECTIVES**

The primary goal of this chapter is to provide a description of some of the representative individuals and groups that were involved in the human communication process that took place during the Irish Famine. The disparate characters of those doling out relief and those in receipt of it provide a marked contrast from which the descriptions will embark. Further descriptions of individuals that operated between the two extremes will also be included.

County Mayo is brought to the forefront of the discussion in this chapter. As was mentioned in the introduction, this county functions as a famine microcosm which this chapter seeks to expand and use as a tool to understand many of the famine communicative aspects. It is the object of chapter two to describe famine communicators in both the immediate and wider context in which they were communicating. The purpose of these descriptions is to create a framework which will be employed in the following chapters to more fully understand how the theories of communication were at work in the events of the Great Irish Famine.

## **SECTION 2.2 - COMMUNICATIVE CONTRAST: THE COMMISSIONERS AND THE 'FEEBLE SPECTRES'**

The largest source of empirical evidence used in this thesis is found in the correspondence engaged in by the Relief Commission. The men of this commission were distinguished and qualified in their various offices, and the record of administrative service left by them is formidable. Their twelve-hour days could not even be disturbed by mere illness, as we have seen, because the British government required their service.



However, the question that follows is, if the commissioners laboured so intensely, why did one million Irish individuals perish and one million emigrate? This question has been a driving force behind the research and writing of this dissertation and obviously possesses a complexity that extends beyond the limits of this work. As the thesis develops, explanations of this seeming contradiction will emerge; but, at this stage, the focus is only on the contrast between the commissioners and those at which their relief attempts were aimed.

Sir Charles Trevelyan, the Permanent Secretary to the Treasury recorded two lists of commissioners in his book, *The Irish Crisis*. His list of the first commission is as follows:

*The First Relief Commission, appointed by Sir Robert Peel's Government.*<sup>4</sup>

Rt. Hon. E. Lucas, Chairman (afterwards retired).  
Com.-Gen. Sir R.I. Routh (afterwards *Chairman*).  
Colonel D. McGregor  
Lieut. -Col. H.D. Jones, R.E.  
Sir James Dombrain.  
Professor Sir Robert Kane.  
E.T.B. Twisleton, Esq.  
Theobald McKenna, Esq.

After the passing of the Temporary Relief Act in 1847, the list is as follows:

*The Second Relief Commission, appointed by Lord John Russell's Government.*<sup>5</sup>

Major-Gen. Sir J.F. Burgoyne, K.C.B., Chairman  
T.N. Redington, Esq.  
E.T.B. Twisleton, Esq.  
Com.-Gen. Sir R.I. Routh  
Lieut.-Col. H.D. Jones, R.E.  
Colonel D. McGregor

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Trevelyan, *The Irish Crisis* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1848) 76. See also Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1994) 41. And Christine Kinealy, "The Irish Poor Law 1838-1862", Ph.D. Thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 1984, 77.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

The five men who figured most prominently in this investigation of communicative aspects of the famine are Colonel Harry Jones, Edward Twisleton, Sir Randolph Routh, Sir Robert Kane, and Sir James Dombrain. The other six members of the Relief Commissions were still active and diligent in their roles, but left a smaller record from which to draw implications of interpersonal communication. A brief description of each of the five active commission communicators will be helpful to draw contrasts between the commission and the peasantry.

Colonel Harry Jones attended fourteen out of the eighteen commission meetings in January of 1846 and his commitment level to the success of the Relief Commission and the public works appears to be high. The average age of the men on the commissions at the beginning of the famine was 49 and Jones was slightly older at 53. He was born at Landguard Fort on 14 March 1752 and after his education at Woolwich, he joined the Royal Engineers at the age of 16. From that point on, he went forward to lead a distinguished career. From 1810 to 1814, he served in the campaigns in Spain. By 1835 he was appointed as a commissioner for fixing the municipal boundaries of English boroughs, but the time with which this thesis is most interested are the years of 1845 to 1850, during which he was appointed as the Chairman of the Board of Works in Ireland.<sup>6</sup> It was crucial to have a member of the commission as a representative for the needs and procedures of the public works. In this way, the Relief Commission could be made aware of the most current status of the public works.

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<sup>6</sup> *British Biographical Archive, Index, Vol. 3* (London: Bowker - Saur Ltd, 1990) 1027 Microfiche - 625, 36-38. References: Boase, F. *Modern English Biography* 6v 1892 – 1921, and Ward, T. H. *Men of the Reign of Queen Victoria* 1885.

Edward Twisleton was among the younger commissioners at the age of 36 when the famine began. He had received the nomination of the Irish Poor Law Commissioner on 5 November 1845, only 15 days before the first meeting of the Relief Commission. If one were to label the personality type of Twisleton, it might be that of an 'idealist'. He had only made the transition from the university setting to that of working with the Poor Law in 1839. Twisleton resided in Ireland, but until the Poor Law Extension Act was passed in 1847, he had no separate authority from the Poor Law Board in England.<sup>7</sup> He approved of the separation granted through the act as he felt that "it was embarrassing for the English board even nominally to continue in control of the Irish Poor Law."<sup>8</sup> Yet by 1849 Twisleton had grown so weary of the treatment that Ireland received from the British government that he resigned his post. He took a defiant stance against England's attempt to manipulate the Irish Poor Law when he resigned rather than implement the Rate-in-Aid Act. This act resulted in a tax to be levied equally on all parts of Ireland, but required nothing from the rest of the United Kingdom. For an individual frustrated after many attempts to save lives and being thwarted by bureaucracy, it is understandable why Twisleton resigned his position. "The rate-in-aid clearly showed the attitude of the government to Ireland. If the political union of 1800 were complete, the rate-in-aid should have been levied not on Ireland alone but on England, Scotland, and Wales as well."<sup>9</sup> After the famine ended, Twisleton returned to the world of academia. His "chief literary work was the elaborate *The Handwriting of Junius* in which the theory of Sir Philip

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<sup>7</sup> Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, 41, 181

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 81. As taken from: Evidence of Twisleton, *Select Committee on Irish Poor Law, 1849* 682-4

Francis being the author of the letters is most strongly substantiated”<sup>10</sup> Not a single archival biographical reference that was found made any allusion to his resignation as Irish Poor Law Commissioner, but instead each concentrated on his education, family life, and literary work <sup>11</sup>

Sir Randolph Routh represented for the Relief Commission the voice of the Commissariat Department of the Army Routh completed his education at Eton, but he did not continue at Cambridge as he had intended because of the sudden death of his father Instead, he entered the Commissariat Department and served his first post in Jamaica in 1805 In 1809, he participated in the Walcheren expedition, then served in the Peninsula War By 1812, he was the Deputy Commissary-General and then became Senior Commissariat Officer in 1815 and served at Waterloo He was sent to Canada in 1826 just after he was made Commissary-General and stayed there until 1843 He had received his knighthood in March of 1841 In November of 1845, when the failure of the crop was a reality, Routh was assigned to the commissariat post in Ireland and he stayed in this post until October, 1848 He and his subordinates were responsible for the actual distribution of the governmentally supplied relief stores during the famine For his services in Ireland, Routh was made Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath on 29 April 1848

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas P O’Neil, “The Organisation and Administration of Relief, 1845-1852,” *The Great Famine*, Dudley Edwards and Desmond Williams, eds (Dublin Browne Nolan Limited, 1956) 248

<sup>10</sup> *British Biographical Archive, Index, Vol 4* (London Bowker - Saur, 1990) 1864 Microfiche - 1102, 426-430 Reference Sanders, L C *Celebrities of the Century Men and Women of the 19th Cent* 2v 1887

<sup>11</sup> Twisleton’s education was noteworthy He “matriculated from Oriel College, Oxford, on 14 February 1826, was a scholar and exhibitioner of Trinity College 1826-30, graduated B A 1829, taking first-class honours in classics, M A 1834, and was a fellow of Balliol College 1830-8 ” *Dictionary of National Biography, Vol XIX* (London Smith, Elder and Co , 1909) 1317

Routh provides an excellent example of an individual who was wholeheartedly dedicated to the rigours of British bureaucracy. It is his signature or initials that approved or disapproved the government grants supplied as an incentive to the collection of private donations, as well as responding to the many inquiries about supplying those who lacked food with the provisions they required. After it had been decided in the winter and spring of 1846 that only Routh, Twisleton, and Kane would meet daily while the rest of the commissioners came together just once per week, Randolph Routh attended fifty of the fifty-one meetings that were held between 24 February and 25 April. His dedication to the responsibilities placed on him by the British government is exemplary. However, the morality of his actions during the famine is questionable.

Routh maintained his title of Head of the Commissariat throughout the famine years, but the food depots operating under his command closed gradually during the year preceding the harvest of 1848.<sup>12</sup> Although the potato crop of that year failed, it fell solely to the funds of the Poor Rates to provide food for those previously dependent on the Commissariat depots. Routh seemed to have no regrets in pulling out from his more active role as he made no public stand in defense of the hungry as did his colleague Twisleton. From the outset of Routh's involvement in famine relief, he voiced his concerns on providing too much relief. He wrote to like-minded Charles Trevelyan, "I fear we cannot take any initiatory steps for seed potatoes, and that if we did, the people would rest on their oars, and throw the whole labour on the Government. We may assist hereafter some very bad cases, but cautiously."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, 237

<sup>13</sup> Sir R. Routh to Mr. Trevelyan, *Commissariat Series*, 9 January 1846, 6

Routh was certainly cautious in his giving of relief, cautious that the least amount of money possible would be spent and that his involvement would not hurt the private merchants or affect their trade in any negative way. In fact, far from distributing the grain at a reduced price with government subsidisation, the “Indian meal which had cost the government less than £13 per ton was sold at the depots at £19 in the end of December”<sup>14</sup> Routh explained actions such as these by his justification of what constituted a *reasonable price*. He wrote on 4 October 1846, “The term ‘reasonable prices’ means reasonable with reference to market prices and foreign importation rates. We cannot expect to secure a rigid economy in the consumption of our own stock, but by the existence of high prices. An artificial cheapness in one quarter should be the source of calamitous results in another”<sup>15</sup>. Routh’s ideas of ‘calamitous results’ fell along the lines of merchants going out of business, not hordes of people starving because they could not afford the ‘reasonable prices’ being charged for food. In his role in the Commissariat, he kept the corn traders in London satisfied and encouraged private enterprise to profit in the midst of privation. This diligence earned him public commendation and the Order of Bath. There is little evidence of Routh using the Commissariat to place the preservation of life at the highest level of importance. Instead, the evidence is overwhelming that he encouraged others to drive prices up by his example. Lord Monteagle explained to Routh that he had determined “to sell for the present at the exact cost price,” but Routh wrote back, “Your Lordship judges very rightly of the necessity of selling at least at prime cost, and I think you should

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas P. O’Neil, “The Organisation and Administration of Relief, 1845-1852,” *The Great Famine*, 226. As noted from *Commissariat Correspondence* 1: 104, 481, 506-7.

<sup>15</sup> Randolph Routh to Lord Monteagle, 4 October 1846, Ms. 13,396 (4), Monteagle Papers, NLI.

add the ten per cent ”<sup>16</sup> Routh died in London, just six years after the Great Famine had ended <sup>17</sup>

Sir Robert Kane was an intelligent and motivated member of the commission who was involved in many more organisations and pursuits than the Relief Commission alone. Along with Edward Twisleton, Kane was also among the youngest of the commissioners, turning 36 on 24 September 1845. But unlike Twisleton, the fervour of youth did not grow cold under the bureaucratic confines of organisational structure. Instead of withdrawing from public service, Kane involved himself in more commitments to public life than he was able to fit into his crowded schedule.

Of the five commissioners who were most actively involved in famine communication, Kane was the only Catholic member. His mother was Ellen Troy, of a Dublin Catholic family that included the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. Troy, who was also a member of the Royal College of Surgeons.<sup>18</sup> His father was John Kane, a manufacturing chemist.<sup>19</sup> From this distinguished heritage Robert established for himself a life of political, academic, scientific, and religious prominence. He received his education at Trinity College, Dublin and then studied medical and practical science in Dublin and in Paris. From 1831 to 1845 he was an appointed professor of chemistry to the Apothecaries' Hall of Dublin. During this period of time, he was also made a licentiate

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<sup>16</sup> Monteagle to Routh, 17 September 1846, Ms 13,396 (7), Monteagle Papers, NLI. And Routh to Monteagle, 19 September 1846, Ms 13,396 (5), Monteagle Papers, NLI.

<sup>17</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography, Vol XVII* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1909) 326. References: [Gent Mag 1859, I 82, Ann Register, 1858 Appleton's Cyclop of American Biogr., Allibone's Dictionary of Authors, Army Lists after 1819, official information.]

See also the Relief Commission minutes in RLFC 1/1 and the RLFC 3/2/21 (Mayo) series.

<sup>18</sup> *British Biographical Archive, Index, Vol 3*, 1038. Microfiche - 633, 68-82. Reference: Cameron, Sir C. A. *History of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland* 1886.

<sup>19</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography, Vol X*, 1126-1127.

and then a fellow of the King and Queen's College of Physicians. A third major affiliation was made in 1834 when he became a professor of natural philosophy to the Royal Dublin Society. He retained this post until 1847. As well as these first three memberships, Kane also became the secretary of the council of the Royal Irish Academy. In the midst of these many commitments, Kane also originated the 'Dublin Journal of Medical Science,' was an editor for the 'Philosophical Magazine,' contributed to numerous scientific publications and journals, and published *Elements of Chemistry* and his landmark work, *The Industrial Resources of Ireland*. He received numerous awards, among which were the royal medal from the Royal Society of London and the gold prize medal from the Royal Irish Academy.

The years of Kane's life, however, that this thesis is most concerned with are the years 1845 to 1852. In 1845, he received the appointment of president at the Queen's College in Cork. He did relinquish his post at the Apothecaries' Hall in this year, but his other memberships remained intact and of course in this crucial first year of the blight, Kane received and accepted his appointment to both the Relief Commission and to the Scientific Commission.<sup>20</sup> In the spring of 1846, Kane was appointed by the Lord Lieutenant to sit on the Central Board of Health. This board was initiated by the passing of the Temporary Fever Act.<sup>21</sup> William MacArthur admits in the "Medical History of the Famine," that Kane "would never have been appointed [to the Board of Health] if the advice of any representative body had been sought. Kane had long ceased the practice of

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<sup>20</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography, Vol X*, 1126-1127. References [Personal information, Archives of the Royal Irish Academy and the Royal Dublin Society, Philosophical Transactions, Proceedings of the Royal Society, London, 1890, Dublin University Mag 1849, Burke's Knightage, Men of the Time, 1887.]

<sup>21</sup> William P. MacArthur, "Medical History of the Famine," *The Great Famine*, 289-290



medicine, and, as Graves said, he was absolved of all blame for the shortcomings of the board through his uniform non-attendance at its meetings”<sup>22</sup> He was overcommitted and was not physically able to attend all of the commissions and boards that he had pledged himself to. It is unreasonable to expect Kane to labour twenty-four hours per day, but it can be said that it would have been wiser for him to limit his activities in order to give his best efforts for success.

In fact, Kane’s involvement during the famine years extended even further. According to the report of the trustees of the Indian Relief Fund, Sir Robert was named as a trustee to assist in overseeing the distribution of funds raised by “the benevolent inhabitants of Calcutta”<sup>23</sup> And, at Kane’s suggestion, the Museum of Irish Industry was established at Stephen’s Green in 1846 with himself as the director.<sup>24</sup> In the same year, the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Heytesbury, honoured Robert Kane with a knighthood.<sup>25</sup> It is clear, then, that Sir Robert Kane was potentially the most publicly active member of the commission and was given due recognition for his involvement. However, it is evident that the volume of administrative involvements engaged in by Kane did in fact take a toll in his inability to give undivided commitment to any one of these activities. Although he received public admiration and acceptance, he failed to distinguish himself in the saving of Irish lives.

In contrast to the record of Sir Robert Kane and Sir Randolph Routh, Sir James Dombrain continually appears in the famine record as one who voiced dissent to Britain’s

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<sup>22</sup> William P. MacArthur, “Medical History of the Famine,” *The Great Famine*, 313

<sup>23</sup> *Distress in Ireland. Report of the Trustees of the Indian Relief Fund, Shewing the Distribution of the Sum of £13 919 14s 2d.* (Dublin: J. Browne, 1847) 3

<sup>24</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography, Vol X*, 1126-1127

Irish Relief policies Dombrain has left the largest record of radically active famine relief, yet among all the relief commissioners, he is the subject of the least biographical information It is worth surmising whether this lack of official information is due to the fact that he fell out of favour with the establishment, leading perhaps to efforts to downgrade the record of his services to the British government From an archive containing 324 of the most important English-language biographical reference works originally published between 1601 and 1929, Dombrain has only one entry This is found in the sixth volume of the *Modern English Biography* It records that he was born in Canterbury in 1793 His father's name was Abraham James entered the Navy in 1808 He became the Deputy Comptroller General of the Coast Guard in England in 1816 and went on to hold the position of Comptroller General of the Coast Guard in Ireland from 1819 to 1849 He introduced and organised that force After an inspection of the Irish squadron of revenue cruisers in 1844, Dombrain was knighted by Earl De Gray, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland Dombrain was on active duty at least until 1849 when the potato crop failed for the final season, but Trevelyan made it a point to exclude him from the list of commissioners appointed by Lord John Russell Trevelyan published *The Irish Crisis* in 1848, well before the crisis of the famine was actually over but after it had been discovered that Dombrain had expressly criticized the policies laid down by the government The author of this thesis has yet to find an actual record of Dombrain's official dismissal, but it

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<sup>25</sup> *British Biographical Archive, Index, Vol 3*, 1038 Microfiche - 633, 68-82 Reference *Men of the Time Biographical Sketches also of Women of the Time* 1856

appears that his services were simply disregarded after he fell out of favour Sir James Dombrain died on 24 September 1871<sup>26</sup>

The interaction between these five members of the Relief Commission brings forward many of the key issues at stake in this dissertation Why were some of the commissioners sympathetic to the plight of the starving Irish and others were not? They worked long hours and were extremely organised, but this thesis contends that they accomplished very little of actual value The very word 'value' is also of utmost concern in this study Economic and moral value are different but relate to one another and will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five Each one of the men who were selected for the Relief Commission were experts in their fields A wide range of experience and practical knowledge was represented each time the commissioners met together However, the records of their service to the crown imply that they were honoured and esteemed not by valiant efforts to save human life, but by their ability to ride out the storm of famine in Ireland with as little disruption as possible The only changes that would be viewed as positive were changes that caused Ireland to conform to the model of Britain

As a result of this policy, Edward Twisleton grew exceedingly concerned about the course which the Irish Famine was taking He warned Trevelyan that if the amount each pauper had cost to relieve was included in the Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission, "people should say we were slowly murdering the peasantry by the scantiness of our relief"<sup>27</sup> It is important to register the fact that such individuals did see

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<sup>26</sup> *British Biographical Archive, Index, Vol 2* (London Bowker - Saur Ltd, 1990) 549 Microfiche - 333, 48 Reference Boase, F *Modern English Biography* 6v 1892 - 1921

<sup>27</sup> Cecil Woodham Smith, *The Great Hunger* (London Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1962 Reprint - Glasgow Collins, 1984) 372

through the rigid economic orthodoxies of the day. Yet his contemporaries did not acknowledge his efforts to save human life because his radical thoughts and speeches were not welcomed or praised in that era.

Before Twisleton resigned his position, he made an effort to present his strongly held views to the public and to preserve them for posterity. He announced before a Parliamentary Committee his verdict on the stinginess of the government relief

I wish to remark that it is wholly unnecessary that there should be a single death from starvation this year in Ireland. For a comparatively trifling sum it is possible for this country to spare itself the deep disgrace of permitting any of our fellow subjects to die of starvation. I wish to leave distinctly on record that, from want of sufficient food, many persons are at present dying or wasting away, and, at the same time, it is quite possible for this country to prevent the occurrence there of any death from starvation by the advance of a few hundred pounds.<sup>28</sup>

It is unlikely that an addition of merely 'a few hundred pounds' would have made any difference whatsoever to the outcome of the famine, but it would have helped destitute individuals. Twisleton's point is very telling. Human beings were dying purely from the fact that they were unable to acquire and ingest sufficient quantities of food. The Irish people were starving, as much from administrative rigidity and insensitivity, as from the potato blight itself.

### **SECTION 2.3 – THE 'FEEBLE SPECTRES': CRIES FROM THE GREAT SILENCE**

These 'feeble spectres' who perished or emigrated left very few traces of individuality because they were virtually powerless and for the most part illiterate. In relation to this study of famine communication, the starving hordes were the antithesis of

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<sup>28</sup> Christine Kinealy, "Was Famine Inevitable? The Response of the Government to the Great Hunger," *Douglas Hyde Conference Proceedings* 21

the five Relief Commissioners who have just been described. They existed on opposite ends of the communicative spectrum. The three million Irish people who were most at risk of starvation during the famine have been described in a number of different ways. The descriptions range from the most dire and sympathetic to the callous and ironic. The manner in which the receiver perceives the sender of a message does have a bearing on the response that is given. The following descriptions of the Irish peasantry, a short cross-section of contemporary observations, will reflect this.

Asenath Hatch Nicholson was an American woman who traveled extensively in Ireland shortly before the famine, and again while distributing relief during the famine. Her account in *Ireland's Welcome to the Stranger* "is one of the most valuable records we have of Ireland on the eve of the Famine."<sup>29</sup> The descriptions provided by Nicholson in *Lights and Shades of Ireland* are eyewitness accounts of the 'wolfish wrinkles' and the 'harsh and feeble' voices that starvation produced. Nicholson recounts the first time she saw a person actually suffering from starvation:

reader, if you never have seen a starving human being, *may you never!* In my childhood I had been frightened with the stories of ghosts, and had seen actual skeletons, but imagination had come short of the sight of this man. And here, to those who have never watched the progress of protracted hunger, it might be proper to say, that persons will live for months, and pass through different stages, and life will struggle on to maintain her lawful hold, if occasional scanty supplies are given, till the walking skeleton becomes in a state of inanition – he sees you not, he heeds you not, neither does he beg. The first stage is somewhat clamorous – will not easily be put off, the next is patient, passive stupidity, and the last is idiocy. In the second stage, they will stand at a window for hours, without asking charity, giving a vacant stare, and not until peremptorily driven away will they move. In the last state, the head bends forward, and they walk with long strides, and pass you unheedingly. The man before-mentioned was emaciated to the last degree, he was tall, his eyes prominent, his skin

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<sup>29</sup> Maureen Murphy, ed. *Annals of the Famine in Ireland*, by Asenath Nicholson (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1998) 5

shriveled, his manner cringing and childlike, and the impression *then* and *there* made never *has* nor ever *can* be effaced, it was the *first*, and the beginning of these dreadful days<sup>30</sup>

The 'dreadful days' continued Nicholson described the hungry crowds as she distributed food from her basket "There was no fear of violence, but the dreadful importuning, falling upon their knees, clasping their emaciated hands, and the glaring eyes fixed upon me, were quite too much Hunger, in its incipient stages, never sleeps, never neglects its watch, but continues sharpening the inventive faculties, till, like the drunkard's thirst, intrigue and dissimulation give startling proof of the varied materials which compose the entire man"<sup>31</sup> The hunger also began to take over the children completely "and the gladsome mirth of children everywhere ceased"<sup>32</sup> Nicholson painted poignant word pictures of what was occurring in Ireland to the starving people She beckoned

come to this land of darkness and death, and for leagues you may travel, and in house or cabin, by the wayside, on the hill-top or upon the meadow, you shall not see a smile, you shall not see the sprightly foot running in ecstasy after the rolling hoop, leaping the ditch or tossing the ball The young laughing full faces, and brilliant eyes and buoyant limbs, had become walking skeletons of death!<sup>33</sup>

The streets began to become full of the dead and the dying Corpses often were unable to be buried for days and the dogs and rats partook of their flesh Shocking cases were discovered of entire families lying dead in their cabins, or of the dead laying still amongst the living because they were not able to be moved<sup>34</sup> Those who remained alive had little energy to invest in their personal appearance Many went about begging in near-

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<sup>30</sup> Asenath Nicholson, *Lights and Shades of Ireland* (London Houlston and Stoneman, 1850) 224-225

<sup>31</sup> Asenath Nicholson, *Annals of the Famine in Ireland*, Maureen Murphy, ed , 45

<sup>32</sup> Ibid , 63

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Stephen Campbell, *The Great Irish Famine* (Strokestown Colour Books, 1994) 36

nakedness Those who were exhausted by malnutrition had insufficient strength to ‘trouble greatly about personal cleanliness’<sup>35</sup>

In June of 1846 before the episodes of starvation began, the *Ballyshannon Herald* reported on a demonstration given by the gaunt people at risk of complete starvation The procession was

‘preceded by a wretched looking creature carrying a long pole, from the top of which was suspended a loaf of bread’ They halt occasionally and the leader explains the loaf symbolizes that, although there is plenty of food in the country, it is beyond the reach of the poor because of its price and their lack of employment<sup>36</sup>

The most important single example of interpersonal famine communication was the repeated message of those who had insufficient food for human survival Taking on the role of ‘sender’, the Irish people communicated to those in a position of power and authority over them their need for sustenance Although some positive response was granted, the ‘receivers’ of their messages failed to meet the needs of the senders and many perished or fled The public demonstration was one manner in which the communicants attempted to give a greater degree of power to their message The visual display of the bread, the key to survival, being out of reach of the paupers was an effective method of coding the message

Because Mrs Nicholson perceived the senders as human beings who deserved the right to have sufficient food for survival, she worked tirelessly to relieve their suffering On the other hand, if the receiver’s perception of the Irish paupers was that they were idle, undeserving, sub-humans, the chance of responding positively to their cry for food was

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<sup>35</sup> Sir William P MacArthur, “Medical History of the Famine,” *The Great Irish Famine*, 271 See also Margaret Kelleher, *Feminization of Famine* (Cork Cork University Press, 1997) 47,49

greatly lessened. When “ ‘Paddy’ is given the ape-like features increasingly common in hostile images of the Irish,”<sup>37</sup> the observers of that perception are less inclined to decode the message and respond in the manner hoped for by the sender.

During the Irish Famine, British readers were given verbal and pictorial reports of the status of the Irish people. In *The Illustrated London News*, over forty pictures of the Irish Famine appeared from 1846 – 1850. Margaret Crawford studied the image versus the reality of those pictures and concluded that though the words on the page described great suffering, the pictures did not fully coincide with the verbal poignancy.

In the case of emaciated human figures, many artists working in the 1840s were unfamiliar with such a visual image and so failed to capture the full horrors before them: consciously or unconsciously they filtered out some of the more shocking human features of famine.<sup>38</sup>

Gaunt looks, haggard faces, and clothing in tatters were placed on anatomically strong limbs. They were limbs that did not match the following eyewitness account of one of the members of the Society of Friends, an organization well remembered for its graciousness and charity during the famine.

My hand trembles while I write. The scenes of human misery and degradation we witnessed still haunt my imagination, with the vividness and power of some horrid and tyrannous delusion.... We entered a cabin. Stretched in one dark corner ... were three children huddled together, lying there because they were too weak to rise, pale and ghastly, their little limbs ... perfectly emaciated, eyes sunk, voice gone, and evidently in the last stages of actual starvation. On some straw ... was a shriveled old woman,

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<sup>36</sup> Brendan Ó Cathaoir, *Famine Diary* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1999) 55.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Gray, *The Irish Famine* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995) 49.

<sup>38</sup> Margaret Crawford, “The Great Irish Famine 1845–9: Image Versus Reality,” *Ireland: Art and History*, Raymond Gillespie and Brian Kennedy, eds. (Dublin: Town House, 1994) 88.



implored us to give her something, - baring her limbs partly, to show how the skin hung loose from the bones<sup>39</sup>

This description of a face to face encounter with starvation has little in common with the sardonic representations of the famine Irish in the British publication, *Punch*. On 12 December 1846, a cartoon of the groveling, simianised Irishman begging alms from John Bull appears. The cartoon is titled, "Height of Impudence". After the failed 1848 rising, the cartoon "The British Lion and the Irish Monkey" appeared in the magazine. The drawing attacked the Young Irelanders and portrayed "the movement's most extreme leader, John Mitchel, as a monkey – at once comic and dangerously incendiary – threatening a magisterial and contemptuous British lion."<sup>40</sup> *Punch* further portrayed the senders of the primary message of the famine as the unworthy recipients of the hard earned tax money of the English working class. Published on 24 February 1849, "The English Labourer's Burden" pictured the leprechaun-like man on the shoulders of the honest English labourer.

The verbal and visual representations of the Irish poor that have been described thus far give an idea of the spectrum of public perception. To bring this section full circle, each of the commissioners had an individual perception of the Irish. The five commissioners received the messages from the Irish senders and each one responded in various ways. If they believed that the Irish people would be best served by losing a portion of the population so that the rest could become more prosperous and more like Britain, they made decisions accordingly. If they tended to see more of the individual

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<sup>39</sup> *Transactions of the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends during the Famine in Ireland 1846 & 1847*, 83, As quoted in *Ibid*, 83

<sup>40</sup> Peter Gray, "Punch and the Great Famine," *History Ireland* (Summer, 1993) 29

humanity and the right for the senders to continue living, the commissioners were more liberal in their relief policy

## **SECTION 2.4 - ADDITIONAL COMMUNICATORS**

The men of the Relief Commission and the people who were most at risk of starvation were certainly not the only active famine communicators. Thousands of other individuals were involved in the complex patterns of communication that emerged in the British Isles during the 1840's. Those involved with the British administration had the greater educational advantage and more political power. Thus, they wielded more communicative power. Those involved with the administration will be clarified first. The administration of 1845-1852 and the network of famine relief that it produced was a complex, changing, politically motivated organisation. This organisation produced prodigious amounts of written communication and now, 150 years later, with the help of organisational communication theory, key elements of the structure responsible for the welfare of the Irish population can be analysed. Indeed, "interpersonal communication is the essence of organisation because it creates structures that then affect what else gets said and done and by whom."<sup>41</sup> One of the overall goals of this study is to clarify exactly what was getting said and done by whom during the regrettable famine years. Organisational communication will be crucial in this attempt. In Nancy Euske and Karlene Robert's "Evolving Perspectives in Organisational Theory: Communication Implications," we find an excellent summary of the importance of communication that might be applied to the

organisation of famine relief and the transition to studying the organisation itself. It is true that “communication underlies most organisational processes, contributes to both the development and the enactment of structures, and is shaped by a number of organisational and individual characteristics, including size, department, autonomy, and upward aspirations. Without communication, organising could not occur.”<sup>42</sup> It is the purpose of this section to clearly explain the network of famine relief. This will be accomplished by written explanation and a visual diagram of the organisations. After this is in place, the communication patterns occurring between the segments of the network will be more easily apparent and understandable.

**SECTION 2.4.1 - THE BRITISH ADMINISTRATION**

**List of Key Individuals in Famine Relief  
Who Were Not Members of the Relief Commission**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>
Sir Charles Trevelyan	Permanent Secretary at the Treasury
Sir Robert Peel	Prime Minister
Henry Goulburn	Chancellor of the Exchequer
Lord John Russell	Prime Minister (Succeeded Peel)
Charles Wood	Chancellor of the Exchequer (Succeeded Goulburn)
Lord Heytesbury	Lord Lieutenant of Ireland
Lord Bessborough	Lord Lieutenant of Ireland (Succeeded Heytesbury)
George William Frederick (Earl of Clarendon)	Lord Lieutenant of Ireland (Succeeded Bessborough)

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<sup>41</sup> Karl Weick, “Theorising About Organisational Communication,” *Handbook of Organisational Communication*, eds. Jablin, Putnam, Roberts, and Porter (Newbury Park, Beverly Hills, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1987) 97

<sup>42</sup> Nancy Euske and Karlene Roberts, “Evolving Perspectives in Organisation Theory Communication Implications,” *Ibid.*, 42

Charles Trevelyan was one of the few key figures who maintained his level of relief responsibility for the duration of the famine. From 1846 until the end of the famine, he worked closely with Charles Wood in order to distribute funds for famine relief. Not only were they responsible for disbursing grants and loans, the Treasury was given the task of overseeing the importation and distribution of the actual food required in Ireland.<sup>43</sup> Although the ultimate decision to supply Ireland with food and money lay with Parliament, the like-minded political economists Trevelyan and Wood managed to keep a tight rein on the famine budget.<sup>44</sup>

In the first year of distress, beginning with the partial crop failure of 1845, Trevelyan worked under the leadership of Tory Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel. Peel had previously expressed sentiments of resentment towards the Irish, writing about the Irish MP's as those who "receiving ten times as many favours as the English members do not give us one-tenth of their support."<sup>45</sup> However, as his duty to Ireland impressed itself upon him during the 1845 harvest, Peel seems to have been able to successfully put aside his prejudice and act in a manner to best help Ireland even if his course of action should prove a detriment to his own political career. In addition to secretly purchasing £100,000 worth of Indian corn while working directly with Henry Goulburn instead of Trevelyan,<sup>46</sup> Peel successfully brought about the repeal of the Corn Laws.<sup>47</sup> This action among others

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<sup>43</sup> Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, 74

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 72

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in S J Connolly, "Aftermath and Adjustment," *A New History of Ireland V*, W E Vaughan, ed (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 7

<sup>46</sup> Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, 38

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 36-7

caused him to lose his seat as Prime Minister, but earned him the general respect of historians by his handling of the first year of the famine <sup>48</sup>

Although Peel formally tendered his resignation in December of 1845, Lord John Russell was not able to establish his Whig government until shortly before the anticipated harvest of 1846 <sup>49</sup> On the first of August, Trevelyan recommended to the new cabinet that the best course of government action was to interfere as little as possible with the grain trade <sup>50</sup> Russell's government, while retaining the titular leadership roles, virtually surrendered the power of decision and policy to Trevelyan and the Treasury

The final three individuals to be examined all served as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland during a portion of the famine era As the Lord Lieutenant was a cabinet position, the 4th Earl of Bessborough replaced Lord Heytesbury and was sworn in on 11 July 1846, less than two weeks after Prime Minister Russell officially took office <sup>51</sup> Lord Bessborough passed away in May of 1847 <sup>52</sup> Confessing in a letter to Lord Monteagle that he dated 'April ?, 1847,' "I have been too ill to do any business" <sup>53</sup> The 4th Earl of Clarendon then became the final famine era Lord Lieutenant

The Lord Lieutenant worked with the Chief Secretary and the Under Secretary in Dublin Castle, and resided in the Vice-Regal Lodge in Phoenix Park Also titled Viceroy, the office of Lord Lieutenant was responsible for the implementation of Irish policy,

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<sup>48</sup> J S Donnelly, "Famine and Government Response, 1845-6," *A New History of Ireland*, V, 276

<sup>49</sup> Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, 37

<sup>50</sup> J S Donnelly, "Famine and Government Response, 1845-6," *A New History of Ireland*, V, 294-5

<sup>51</sup> Chronology, *A New History of Ireland, Vol VIII*, eds Moody, Martin, & Byrne (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1982) 322

<sup>52</sup> Ms 152, page number 45, NLI

<sup>53</sup> Bessborough to Monteagle, April 1847, Ms 13,397 (2), Monteagle Papers, NLI

civilian government, and military forces of the Crown. However, while this branch of the government was required to fulfil these duties, the Lord Lieutenant himself was called upon to complete a more ceremonial role in Anglo/Irish affairs. Much of the political power of Ireland fell into the hands of the Chief Secretary<sup>54</sup>. Three active Chief Secretaries during the famine years were the Right Honourable Sir Thomas Francis Fremantle, the Right Honourable Henry Labouchere, and the Right Honourable Sir William Meredith Somerville<sup>55</sup>.

Hundreds of individuals took part in famine relief, but the preceding descriptions cover the men with the most publicly active relief roles. It can be argued that other individuals should be added to this list, but for the sake of clarity, it is more than sufficient for the future analysis of communication between the individuals and their wider “network.” This network encompasses all the individuals into a manufactured organisation that takes on the responsibility for the lives of the Irish hungry. We will now turn to what this network did with that responsibility.

#### **SECTION 2.4.2 - ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN RELIEF**

It has been said that hindsight is always better than foresight. This is particularly true when examining the lack of continuity of policy in the midst of the famine crisis. Decisions were made as situations arose. No one expected the shortage to continue for the length of time it did, therefore no long term plans and goals were implemented. Changes in funding, distribution, laws, and more gave no sense of security to the givers or receivers.

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<sup>54</sup> Information regarding office of the Lord Lieutenant summarised from *A Dictionary of Irish History Since 1800*, eds D J Hickey & J E Doherty (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan and Totowa: Barnes & Noble, 1980) 316.

of famine relief. For example, in the spring of 1847, when the soup kitchen aid policy was reversed, the funds depended on the poor rate so “local organisation had to be changed from parochial divisions to poor law units. This entailed the reconstruction of the committees for the third time”<sup>56</sup> No human individual can expect to do his or her job to the highest standard if continued change and reconstruction is occurring. Sir John Burgoyne admitted in a letter to Lord Monteagle that the system of relief was less than perfect. He wrote “We did not think it quite prudent to turn off at one sweep to their own resources, from being fed, two millions and a half of persons, so we ordered 55 of the unions that were least oppressed, to discontinue on the 15th August, - about 30 more on 29th August, and the remainder finally on 12th September, and I feel satisfied that this will be the easiest mode we could adopt, and at the best periods for the cessation of an awful system”<sup>57</sup> It is this ‘awful’ system and the many others that were in operation during the famine years that this section will describe in further detail.

The use of the Organisation of Famine Network Chart (Figure 2.1) will widen the roles of the individuals discussed thus far. As the scope broadens, the roles played by individuals blended with the wider organisation and both positive and negative communication occurred within the network. When all else is stripped away from the famine debate, the Irish individual was pleading with the British administration for either their own life or for the lives of their people. Both the individual and the administration sent and received messages, yet the crisis in communications gave rise to great quantities

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<sup>55</sup> Names listed in *The Dublin Almanac, and General Register of Ireland* (Dublin: Pettigrew and Oulton, multiple years) 1846–86, 1847–86, 1848–232.

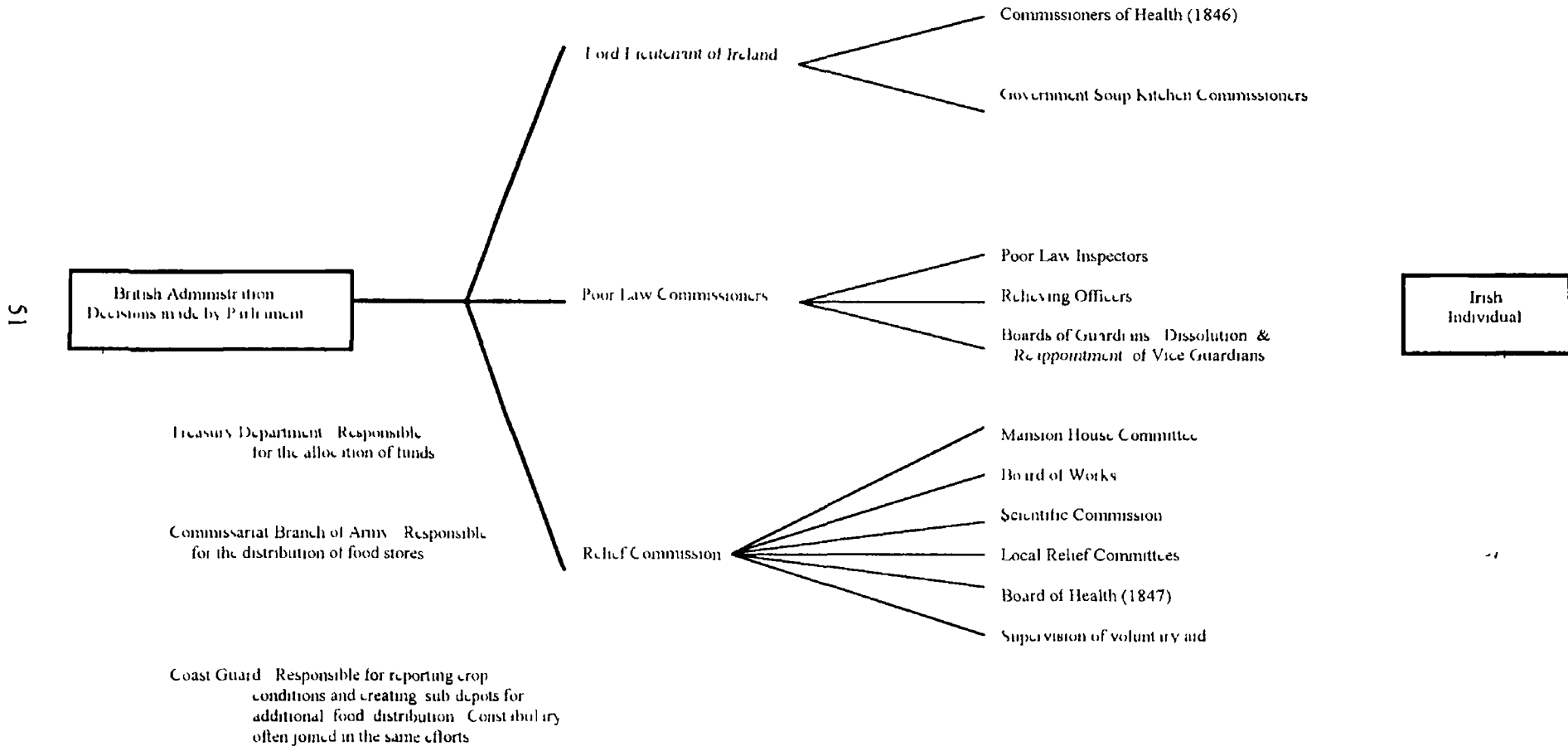
<sup>56</sup> Thomas P. O’Neil, “The Organisation and Administration of Relief, 1845–1852,” *The Great Famine*, 238.

<sup>57</sup> Burgoyne to Monteagle, 27 August 1847, Ms. 13,397 (1), NLI.

of 'noise' Noise came in the form of commissions, legislation, political agendas, economic pressures, greed, hunger, and countless other factors Using the chart, the sub-organisations of the network will be disentangled Each sub-organisation will be identified as producing positive or negative noise The standard for positive noise is the attempt to save human life



**Figure 2 1**  
**Organisation of Famine Network**



The basic job description of the Lord Lieutenant has been defined, but can now be seen visually as the first arm of the British administration in Ireland. As his role was primarily for ceremony, only a feeble attempt to give the Lord Lieutenant visible power for famine relief decisions was made. On 24 March 1846, the Lord Lieutenant was empowered to appoint up to five unpaid Commissioners of Health and salaried medical officers as he saw fit. Unfortunately, this measure was far too short sighted and the attempt at a Central Board of Health completely expired 31 August 1846. The five commissioners that met and then disbursed were Sir Randolph Routh, Sir Robert Kane, Edward Twisleton, Esq., Sir Philip Crampton, and Dominick John Corrigan, Esq, M D.<sup>58</sup> Routh, Kane, and Twisleton were not released from other obligations after this commission dissolved.

In late January of 1847, approximately three and a half months after the Lord Lieutenant's health commissioners disbursed, Lord Bessborough was commanded to select and appoint a commission to superintend the publicly funded outdoor relief, or soup kitchens. The relief organised by this commission was separate from the relief given by the Poor Law Unions or private charities such as the Society of Friends. However, much of the funding was to come from the rates and from donations, as the government wished to spend as little as possible on the scheme.<sup>59</sup> To this commission, Lord Bessborough reappointed Twisleton and Routh, and he added Harry Jones of the Board of Works, Duncan McGregor of the constabulary, Thomas Redington, his own Under Secretary, and Sir John Burgoyne, who was granted leave of absence from his position of inspector of

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<sup>58</sup> Sir William P. MacArthur, "Medical History of the Famine," *The Great Famine*, 290-1

<sup>59</sup> Thomas P. O'Neil, "The Organisation and Administration of Relief, 1845-1852," *The Great Famine*, 237-41

fortifications in Ireland<sup>60</sup> This is the same Burgoyne who admitted in August of 1847 that the system he and his commission developed was in truth, 'awful' As many members had multiple other responsibilities and meticulous paperwork was necessary before the kitchens could open, the scheme was only 61% operational by 15 May 1847,<sup>61</sup> and it started its discontinuation just three months later If, however, the main purpose of the commission was to spend as little money as possible, then it achieved a certain amount of success Burgoyne wrote, "Altogether the results of our operations has been attended with less evil than I had anticipated - we shall get off I think for an expenditure not exceeding two millions, which is much less than I expected"<sup>62</sup>

These two attempts of relief by the Lord Lieutenant in no way claim to be the sum total of the involvement of that office, however, they can be considered to be largely indicative of the effectiveness of this administrative branch The communicative noise engaged in by this office created a fruitless commission that expired before its potential could be reached and a disunited soup kitchen administration flowing with 14 tons of paperwork, but lacking funds<sup>63</sup> This noise is classified as negative

The thinking behind the next sub-organisation to be discussed, the Poor Law Unions, was very much in line with the Act of Union of 1800 As England and Ireland were a United Kingdom, it would follow that Ireland should become as much like England as possible in terms of economic structures Therefore, in addition to intending to meet the needs of Ireland's poor, 'the Irish Poor Law was regarded as a medium through which a

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid , 237 As noted from *Commissariat Correspondence* u p 55-7

<sup>61</sup> Ibid , 239 Only 1,248 of the 2,049 electoral divisions were under the scheme This yields 61%

<sup>62</sup> Burgoyne to Monteagle, 27 August 1847, Ms 13,397 (1), NLI

number of changes could be introduced which would, the government hoped, transform Ireland into a more productive society<sup>64</sup> It was thought that the Irish economy should be changed from “subsistence potato-growing and small holdings, to one based on wage labour and a more capitalised system of agriculture The Whig government believed that the workhouse system could play an important role in the transition period”<sup>65</sup>

The Poor Law Commission in Ireland was under the leadership of Edward Twisleton The commissioners were trained in the English system but were told to treat pauperism in Ireland even more harshly than in England They did eventually receive autonomy through the Poor Law Extension Act of 1847<sup>66</sup> In the summer of 1847, nine men were given the title of Poor Law Inspector and as their name implies, they were to inspect the Poor Law Unions and report back to the Commissioners Relieving Officers were also appointed at this time in order to compile lists of the applicants for relief and return them to the Guardians for review There was to be one Relieving Officer hired by each board These were paid positions and they were authorised to dispense immediate relief as they saw fit The Boards of Guardians were not paid positions, but they were to meet at least once per week if not more<sup>67</sup> In September of 1847, the Boards of Guardians of Ballinrobe, Castlebar, and Westport unions were all dissolved and reappointed with paid vice-guardians Although this was done with the intention of teaching the other guardians a lesson, thirty-nine more boards were dissolved and reappointed With the major

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas P O’Neil, “The Organisation and Administration of Relief, 1845-1852,” *The Great Famine*, 238

<sup>64</sup> Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, 23

<sup>65</sup> Christine Kinealy, “The Role of the Poor Law During the Famine,” *The Great Irish Famine*, ed Cathal Poirteir (Cork, Dublin Mercier Press, 1995) 105

<sup>66</sup> Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, 23, 181

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid* , 24, 184

exceptions of the Clonmel, New Ross, and Scariff vice-guardians, who proved to be incompetent, the hiring of paid guardians was heralded a success. The number of deaths from starvation decreased and the collection of poor rates increased.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the disregard for Irish customs by the commissioners and the widespread hatred of workhouses by the public, the Poor Law Commission did make some positive interventions into the fray of communication within the network. The increased collection of rates itself is not classified as positive, because ultimately the rates were taken from the starving people in one way or another, but as they were required by law, the vice-guardians were far more successful at receiving the rates from the land owners than their predecessors. Attempts to further open communication channels can be seen through the insistence on hiring paid Relieving Officers and vice-guardians. Twisleton himself set the standard for the Irish Poor Law Officers by his own resignation when the unjust Rate-in-Aid became law. Those in charge of the Irish Poor Law have laid a strong case that despite the fiscal rectitude inflicted on them by the Treasury, their attempts at organisation and communication produced positive effects and helped to save lives.

The Relief Commission was intended to be a temporary combination of influential and intelligent men to see Ireland through the crisis of partial potato crop failure in 1845. The Relief Commission had influence in every aspect of famine relief. The administration looked to the commission to know what was taking place at every level of relief and the Irish individuals looked to the commission to save them from starvation. From every perspective taken in the network, the commission was involved to some degree. This was a formidable task taken on by a small group of men.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid , 187, 211, 215

Although certainly not limited to the six sub-organisations branching from the commission, the exchange of communication between the commission and these sub-organisations is crucial to the investigation of famine communication. The Mansion House Committee reconvened on 31 October 1845 with Lord Cloncurry as chairman. The committee had been active during the shortages of 1831 as an agent of relief. The committee had the support of the Mayor and the Lord Lieutenant and at that time, it was the most accessible organisation for the Irish individuals to make their needs known to the government. The committee received hundreds of letters from the people of Ireland and by 7 November, they laid out five requests to the government in order to best ensure that famine not occur. They asked for a 1.5 million pound loan to raise the quantity and lower the price of food, that the corn laws should be repealed or suspended, that the exportation of oats be forbidden, that public granaries be erected, and that employment be provided for the destitute.<sup>69</sup> These requests gave much room for discussion for the Relief Commission that met 13 days after the requests were submitted. The course of relief did in fact meet many of the needs expressed by the committee and as the committee provided a channel for the individuals to make their needs known, it is certainly characterised as producing contributions to the overall communicative system.

The communication contributed to the network by the Board of Works is contradictory in terms of its negative or positive influence. The purpose of the Board of Works was to supply relief to those facing hardship by supplying them with paid labour. This was not a new concept because public works “were a traditional way of relieving

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<sup>69</sup> Committee information summarised from J. S. Donnelly, “Famine and Government Response, 1845-6,” *A New History of Ireland, V*, 273, 277. As taken from *Freeman's Journal* 13 and 20 November 1845. And Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, 33, 162.

periods of exceptional distress within Ireland”<sup>70</sup> Therefore, the communication infrastructure was basically established Yet, in the case of the Great Famine, the applications for work far exceeded the funds that were allocated Additionally, the works were only approved if they did not yield any benefits for particular landlords at the expense of the government The proposals for projects were called memorials and they followed a strict path through the administration that is visually represented in figure 4.7 The organised methods of the Board of Works seem to indicate a positive influence, but because the pay was meagre and the works were predominantly useless the final result for the people concerned was negative

The Scientific Commission consisted of Dr Lyon Playfair, Dr John Lindley and Professor Robert Kane This commission had a triple task ahead of them They were to recommend what should be done to preserve healthy potatoes, convert diseased potatoes to some useful purpose, and to procure seed for the 1846 crop<sup>71</sup> From the strict view of an attempt to achieve positive communication the commission succeeded in that they supplied 70,000 copies of directions for ventilation of potatoes, with 30 copies going to each parish priest to distribute and 10,000 copies being distributed to all the local agricultural societies<sup>72</sup> This was a considerable administrative achievement However, as the information was faulty scientifically, the pamphlets did absolutely no good and disrupted the farmers negatively

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<sup>70</sup> Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, 54

<sup>71</sup> J. S. Donnelly, “Famine and Government Response, 1845-6,” *A New History of Ireland*, V, 274

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 275-6 As noted from T. P. O’Neil, “The Scientific Investigation of the Failure of the Potato Crop in Ireland, 1845-6,” in *Irish Historical Studies*, V, No. 18, September 1946, 128

The local relief committees proved to be another accessible sub-organisation to make the individuals' needs known. The attempts of local committees to plead for the lives of those suffering around them certainly did produce some positive effects into the communication process. Unfortunately, the positive communicative efforts were hindered because the committees suffered internally. "The inefficiency of clerks, moreover, was very apparent, many could not make up and render the simple accounts and returns required of them, yet so negligent of pecuniary details, and wanting in habits of business, were many members of Committees, that they left the control of them to these parties."<sup>73</sup> Thus, the committees were making strides toward communicating the needs of those around them, but were many times hindered by their own incompetence.

The next sub-organisation, the Board of Health, that was found to be necessary again in the spring of 1847, did communicate effectively to the Relief Commission the quantities of food necessary for the people and the best ways in which to distribute this food.<sup>74</sup> The last sub-organisation listed deals with the supervision of voluntary aid. The most active charitable institution was the Society of Friends and consistently its members were able to document careful and detailed accounts about the ravages of famine.<sup>75</sup> The Society of Friends was effective in conveying these accounts to the Relief Commission and

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<sup>73</sup> R M Bromley to the Relief Commissioners, "Supplementary Appendix to the Seventh, and Last, Report of the Relief Commissioners," 31 December 1847, *British Parliamentary Papers: Famine Relief in Ireland, Vol 8* (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1970) 276

<sup>74</sup> Thomas P. O'Neil, "The Organisation and Administration of Relief, 1845-1852," *The Great Famine*, 240-41

<sup>75</sup> Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, 125



the commission in fact relied heavily on the effectively managed relief established by the Society<sup>76</sup>

Although many of the sub-organisations were not effective, there was still an observable amount of positive communication occurring during the famine years. So why did the enormous loss of human life occur? This question cannot be easily answered, but despite every example of positive communication sent into the network through the guise of the Relief Commission, lives were predestined to be destroyed by the moral and economic philosophy in place in the administrative network. The individuals working on the Relief Commission did not knowingly sentence one million to death, but they did send one million to their death by their participation in a commission that worked effectively, if not deliberately, to wipe out the lowest classes of Irish individuals. It has already been stated that the Relief Commission was looked to by the individual to be the saviour from starvation, but at the same time, it was looked to by the administration, the Treasury and Parliament in particular, to be the impenetrable wall to preserve the existing social system. Of the six sub-organisations relating to the Relief Commission, each of them made positive contributions, of different kinds, to the communicative network. The commission did its best to continue driving this positive force up the ladder of communication, higher into the seat of power in the system. It failed under the negative pressure of changing policy and inefficient, inconsistent governmental interference. The final blow to peasants and landlords alike is the enactment of the Gregory Clause just six months after mass death began. To become eligible for relief, any tenant that held more than a quarter of an acre of

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<sup>76</sup> In 1848, the Quakers assisted the Commission by distributing nearly 200,000 pounds of seed from the government supply to the most impoverished districts. Ibid., 161

land had to surrender his holding to his landlord<sup>77</sup> With one fell swoop, the indebted landlords now had an opportunity to clear all impoverished tenants from their lands The Irish peasant clung to his land, but many also surrendered in order to cling to his life and be eligible for relief Changing from one policy to another and gradually stripping away the most basic human rights from the Irish individuals created a wall through which no effective communication could pass The Relief Commission, that had been established by Peel's government and remained active during Russell's government, unknowingly provided the foundations for that impenetrable wall

### SECTION 2.4 3 – PRIESTS AS FAMINE SPOKESMEN

A primary group of communicators that attempted to break through the barriers of that impenetrable wall were Catholic priests Writing on behalf of their starving parishioners, the letters of priests yield some of the most harrowing descriptions of famine suffering For this reason, many priests came under severe scrutiny and accusations of exaggeration The next few pages will review several letters written by priests and lodged into the famine communication construct The role played by priests as famine spokesmen will also be examined

"During the famine the Catholic clergy played a leading role as conduits of information and social controllers"<sup>78</sup> As information conduits, some priests felt that their chances of receiving favourable results would be increased if they informed the local Justice of the Peace of the status of the people and he, in turn, wrote to the government Bernard Owen Cogan, Justice of the Peace of Colloney, forwarded letters to the

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<sup>77</sup> James S Donnelly, "Mass Eviction & the Great Famine," *The Great Irish Famine*, 159

<sup>78</sup> Cormac O Gráda, *Black '47 and Beyond* (Princeton Princeton University Press, 1999) 56

government from John Coghlan and Peter Brennan, both parish priests. The letters speak of the fever raging through the population and of the lack of employment. Brennan attempts to convince the Justice of the Peace that his attention to the people of his district is imminently necessary. “O Sir, had you witnessed the scenes at which I must be hourly present and had you heard the melancholy reports which are every succeeding moment carried to me by many of my parishioners, you would censure me most severely for having deferred so long to press this matter on your attention.”<sup>79</sup> Coghlan also appealed to Cogan to make the Lord Lieutenant aware of how desperate the Irish situation had become and for him to urge the government to action. “In the name of our common humanity, I call upon you, Sir, who well knows this barony and its destitution, to lay before his Excellency the heartrending situation of this district.”<sup>80</sup>

Coghlan found that writing through the channel of Cogan, the Justice of the Peace, did not produce the desired effect. Therefore, he and other priests wrote directly to the Lord Lieutenant in hopes that their pleas would be responded to favourably. On 28 May 1846, the Lord Lieutenant was informed that “700 families are without food or the means to procure it.” Father Edward Waldron told the Lord Lieutenant that “150 of the poor of these parishes (Kilmolane and Ballycolla) died of sickness and starvation these three months past. I fear many more will soon be on the same list.”<sup>81</sup> The priests desired to make it clear to the Lord Lieutenant how many people were at risk of starvation and

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<sup>79</sup> Peter Brennan, PP to Bernard O. Cogan, JP, 19 March 1846, RLFC 2/Z 5748. Cited in Liam Swords, *In their Own Words* (Blackrock: The Columba Press, 1999) 32.

<sup>80</sup> John Coghlan, PP to Bernard Owen Cogan, JP, 18 March 1846, RLFC 2/Z 5748. Cited in *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>81</sup> James Henry, PP to the Lord Lieutenant, 28 May 1846, Distress Papers 1593, and Edward Waldron, PP, to the Lord Lieutenant, 1 May 1847, Chief Secretary’s Office Registered Papers Z 5670. Cited in *Ibid.*, 37 and 178.

required governmental assistance in order to stay alive. As people began to perish, the priests then wanted to make the Lord Lieutenant clearly aware of how many Irish individuals had already died as a result of the loss of sufficient nutrition and that more were still at risk. The priests felt that the people had very few options for survival left open to them. The parish priest of Kilmovee, John Coghlan, informed the Lord Lieutenant of the state of the people in his district:

Their landlords have done nothing for them, nor is there any appearance of their assisting them with either food or spring seeds. Their only recourse is to fly to me for succour. My only hope of relieving them is an appeal to your Excellency's humane benevolent interposition.<sup>82</sup>

The people ran to the priests and the priests ran to those in authority. Bernard Durcan, parish priest and chairman of the Swinford Local Relief Committee, teamed forces with the medical doctor, Ulic Burke to request grants from the commission and more specifically, the Commissary General, to match the donations that they had received.<sup>83</sup> The priests believed that if the government knew how desperate the situation had become, surely they would grant relief money. Donal Kerr, author of *'A Nation of Beggars'? Priests, People, and Politics in Famine Ireland, 1846 – 1852*, explained that the effects of famine in 1847 were more shocking than years past and relief monies were even more required. "Used as they were to rural distress, Black '47 appalled the clergy. Their horror at the terrible scenes they were witnessing was combined with a feeling of frustration at their own helplessness. Frantically they appealed for help, hoping that if the suffering of the people were known relief would surely come. 'How I wish the real sufferings of the people could

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<sup>82</sup> John Coghlan, PP, to the Lord Lieutenant, 15 March 1847, Distress Paper 4912. Cited in *Ibid*, 157.

<sup>83</sup> Bernard Durcan, PP, and Ulic Burke, MD to the Relief Commission, 4 March 1847, RLFC 3/2/21/42.

reach the ears of the rich of this life', wrote Flannelly from Clifden."<sup>84</sup> The belief here seemed to be that if only communication were successful, relief would be forthcoming.

Priests became so heartbroken at the plight of the population that they began wishing for death over continued sights of starvation. The Bishop of Cashel and Emly, Michael Slattery, called the famine years an 'Extermination going on under the protection of the law.' He told the Bishop of Dublin, Daniel Murray, "Oh, that I ... could fly from this wretched country into some solitude where I might ... die in peace."<sup>85</sup> Slattery was not alone in his desire to perish rather than continue being plagued by the spectres filling his sights. Asenath Nicholson described one priest that she spent the day with. She wrote:

Not one impatient word ever escaped him through the whole, although their unreasonable importunities were dreadfully tormenting. I had heard so many relieving officers and distributors scold and threaten, and had struggled so hard myself to keep patient without always succeeding, that I inquired how he kept without scolding. His answer was, 'Sure, as I can give them no money, I should give them kind words.' Here were cabins torn down in heaps, and here were the poor, wretched, starving women and children, crawling together by the side of ditches, or in some cabin still standing, to get shelter from the rain, scattered too, over a wide extent of country. 'What shall I do?' said the despairing priest. 'Let me die rather than witness daily such scenes as I cannot relieve.'<sup>86</sup>

Many priests did, in fact, perish. By 27 December 1847, approximately seventy-five Catholic priests had died as a result of the famine. Almost forty had died while still in Ireland, twenty-five perished ministering to the Irish while in Britain, and thirteen died in Canada.<sup>87</sup> Cormac Ó Gráda supplies a more detailed account of some of the deaths of priests within Ireland. "In Cloyne and Ross, perhaps the worst-affected diocese, seventeen

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<sup>84</sup> Donal Kerr, *'A Nation of Beggars'? Priests, People, and Politics in Famine Ireland, 1846 - 1852* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 43-44.

<sup>85</sup> Both Slattery quotes from Slattery to Murray, 5 February 1847, Murray Papers, Dublin Diocesan Archives. Cited in Donal Kerr, *'A Nation of Beggars'?*, 40.

<sup>86</sup> Asenath Nicholson, *Annals of the Famine in Ireland*, 132.

Catholic priests had died by late November 1847 'by reason of their attendance on the suffering poor' Cork and Ardfert accounted for eight more and Limerick for another five<sup>88</sup>

Though many priests wished for death and many actually perished, there still existed a sanguine hope that the government would come to the rescue of the Irish people. Priests held up this ray of light as a means of quelling violence. Kerr records that "When 10,000 Mayo peasants marched into Castlebar to protest that, 'there is not a stone of sound potatoes among the whole of us' the curate, Fr James M'Manus, told them that 'the Ministers of the Crown were a humane and good government' He reminded the people 'that Lord John Russell, than whom no better man lived, had declared, 'that no person in Ireland should die while England had the means to prevent it' "<sup>89</sup> M'Manus' speech could well be in reference to Russell's Parliamentary speech given on 17 August 1846. Lord John Russell argued that the Irish Famine was 'a case of exception' and he rendered 'it imperative on the Government and the Parliament to take extraordinary measures for relief' He told Parliament that the course he proposed to pursue

will show the poorest among the Irish people that we are not insensible, here, to the claims which they have on us as the Parliament of the United Kingdom, that the whole credit of the Treasury and means of the country are ready to be used as it is our bounden duty to use them, and will, whenever they can be usefully applied, be so disposed as to avert famine, and to maintain the people of Ireland, and that we are now disposed to take advantage of the unfortunate spread of this disease among the potatoes, to establish public works which may be of permanent utility<sup>90</sup>

It was on this promise that priests and people hung their hopes

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<sup>87</sup> Brendan O Cathaor, *Famine Diary*, 158

<sup>88</sup> Cormac O Gráda, *Black '47 and Beyond*, 94

<sup>89</sup> Donal Kerr, 'A Nation of Beggars'?, 35 As noted from the *Tablet*, 5 September 1846

<sup>90</sup> *Hansard*, LXXXVIII, 17 August 1846, 777-778

Russell's promises, however sincerely they were meant, did not come to pass. Their result gave more benefit to Britain than to Ireland because they assisted in causing the priests to encourage peace over protest. Priests all over the country were basically single-handedly keeping mobs of hungry, angry peasants from turning to violence.<sup>91</sup> The "clergy believed they were being faithful to the role of 'ministers of peace'" and they were also following closely the teachings of Daniel and John O'Connell. As the chairman of the Repeal Association, John signed the following address:

The government is doing all that in them lies to supply for this most sudden and utter destruction of your food. Remember what your religion teaches and commands – PATIENCE, PEACE, AVOIDANCE OF CRIME, CONFIDENCE IN ALMIGHTY GOD, AND RESIGNATION TO HIS HOLY WILL.<sup>92</sup>

This faith in the government helped the priests to dissuade the people from committing acts of violence.

This false confidence left an opening for the first of many types of attacks against the priests. The leader of the Young Irelanders and the revolutionary publication, the *Nation*, voiced criticism of the priests:

The *Nation* has accused the Catholic Church of not speaking out against the 'murder' [of] its people. While discharging their local duties 'with a devotion unsurpassed in the annals of martyrdom', the priests should have excoriated the non-interventionist policy of the government, thunders an increasingly agitated John Mitchel.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Donal Kerr, '*A Nation of Beggars*'?, 35. See also the *Tablet*, 11 November 1846, I. Murphy, *The Diocese of Kallaloe, 1800-1850* (1992), 210, the *Nation*, 10 and 17 October 1846.

<sup>92</sup> Cited in Donal Kerr, '*A Nation of Beggars*'?, 36. Kerr's reference. According to O. MacDonagh, *O'Connell: The Life of Daniel O'Connell, 1775-1848* (1991), 585, this statement was issued against John O'Connell's, and probably Daniel O'Connell's, own better judgement.

<sup>93</sup> Brendan O Cathaoir, *Famine Diary*, 136.

Yet as the famine wore on and the death toll mounted, priests did begin to denounce the governmental policies. This course of action brought them still further into criticism and accusations. After voicing dissent of the government's inaction, the priests "are accused of being abettors of murder, and to have stimulated [*sic*] to crime"<sup>94</sup>. It can be surmised that famine priests must have felt that no matter how they spoke out for the people's best interests, they would come under attack from some quarter.

O Grada's three concluding remarks about the role of clergy in the famine bring clarification to their participation as famine spokesmen. He asserts

First, in a context where some people were bound to see famine relief as a means of patronage, most priests were honest and eager to single out the neediest and to lobby on their behalf. Second, in an era of evangelical revivalism, some sectarian tension was inevitable, yet there is ample evidence too of clergymen working in harmony or "vying with one another in acts of benevolence". Third, some Catholic bishops left themselves open to criticism for not speaking out more during the famine, and some priests for persisting with grandiose church-building schemes, but on the whole the famine would have been worse but for the clergy's efforts.<sup>95</sup>

Priests played a crucial role in famine correspondence. Though they may have received more criticism than answers to their pleas, their letters yield a window into the situations of the Irish individuals. As a spokesman for his people, Father James Henry, a Parish Priest in Sligo, captured many of the issues of importance in this thesis in a single missive. He wrote,

If the failure were local, confined to one particular district, the contributions of benevolent individuals might save the peasantry from starvation, but it is, alas, universal. From all quarters the accounts are most disheartening, and yet the grain is leaving the country as fast as it can be exported, in order to enable the tenants to meet the demands of the landlords. All this is very

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<sup>94</sup> James Fitzpatrick, parish priest of Castletownroche, cited in Donal Kerr, *'A Nation of Beggars'*, 62. Ironically, this letter was also printed in the *Nation* on 28 August 1847, most likely in an attempt to exonerate the priests.

<sup>95</sup> Cormac O Grada, *Black '47 and Beyond*, 57-58.



distressing, but we must only hope that Providence will not desert the people in their extremity<sup>96</sup>

This priest made his message more public by sending this letter to the *Sligo Champion*. He gave a voice to those who were not able to be heard on their own. The next section of this thesis veers away from the subject of spokespersonship and proceeds to bring a particular Irish county to the forefront of the discussion.

## SECTION 2.5 – MAYO: A COUNTY IN CHAOS

In multiple ways County Mayo can be compared in this study to a ‘picture within a picture’. Facts relevant to the whole of Ireland can be best illustrated and understood by applying an academic magnifying glass to Ireland’s north west county of Mayo. Much of the interest in human communication originates in the comparison of the individuals in positions of economic and/or political prominence with the individuals on its periphery. The whole of Ireland existed on the Celtic periphery of Britain, Mayo existed on the periphery of industrial Ireland, and the peasantry of Mayo living outside its central corridor existed on the periphery of the fertile core of Mayo. County Mayo time and again reveals a picture within a picture from which conclusions can be drawn.

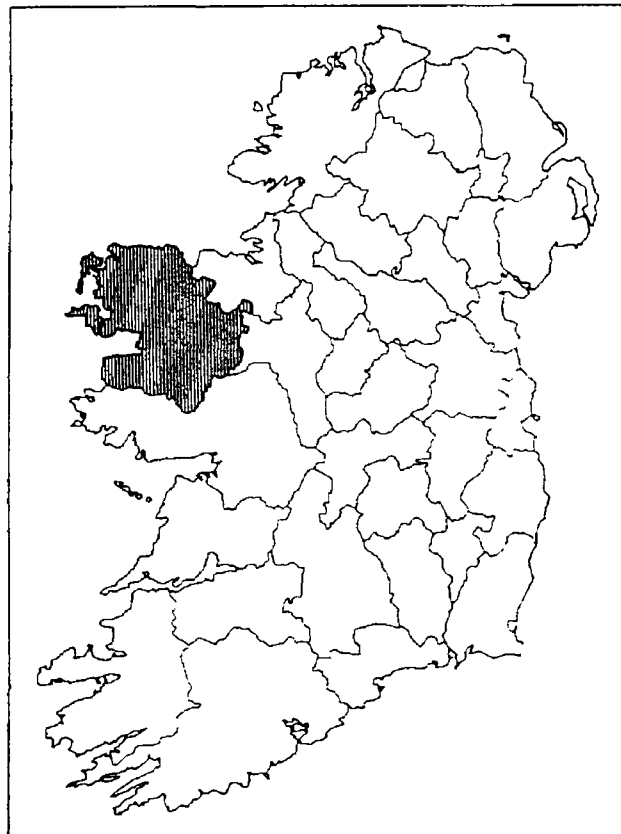
The dichotomy of rich land and poor land, skilled labour and unskilled labour, landlord and peasant, educated and uneducated, Protestant and Catholic is seen at its starkest within County Mayo. It is for this reason that a description of County Mayo is an excellent focus for capturing nuances of the famine. Each county fared slightly differently during the 1840’s, but, no matter which Irish county one considers, at the root of communication failure was the difference between core and periphery.

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<sup>96</sup> James Henry, PP to *Sligo Champion*, 17 November 1845. Cited in Liam Swords, *In*

County Mayo was established by Elizabethan administrators after the year 1570 from 2,084 square miles of the region of Connacht<sup>97</sup> Donald Jordan asserts that the goal of the administrators “was not to create viable economic units but to replace the fluid tribal boundaries of the Celtic aristocracy with tidy English ones and in the process complete the pacification of Ireland”<sup>98</sup> The Elizabethan administrators passed this philosophy on to each successive administration and its implications will be more thoroughly discussed as the thesis proceeds Mayo is located in the north west of Ireland, with fairly inhospitable but ruggedly beautiful terrain

**Figure 2 2**  
**Ireland Showing Location of County Mayo<sup>99</sup>**



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*their Own Words*, 21

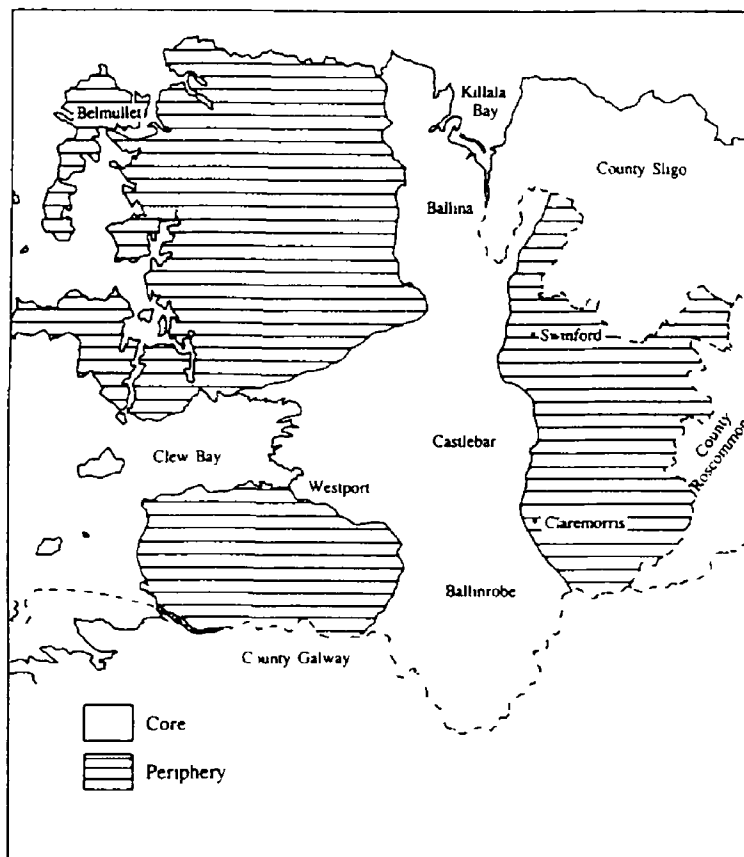
<sup>97</sup> Donald Jordan Jr , *Land and Popular Politics in Ireland County Mayo from the Plantation to the Land War*, (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1994) 13

<sup>98</sup> Donald Jordan, *Land and Popular Politics in Ireland*, 5

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid* , 16

It contains a central corridor with some of the richest land in Connacht “From the time of the earliest inhabitants of the county, the central region of Mayo has been the nucleus of settlement and the avenue through which political, social, and economic changes penetrated Mayo. In contrast, residents of the peripheral regions, hindered by rough terrain, poor quality land, and few passable roads were cut off from contact with the more dynamic parts of the country”<sup>100</sup>

**Figure 2.3**  
**The Core and Peripheral Regions of County Mayo<sup>101</sup>**



The periphery and core relationship of County Mayo is a concise example of a similar relationship between Mayo and Ireland, and even broader Ireland and Britain. As Jürgen Osterhammel explains, in his *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 13

*colonialism without colonies*, situations in which dependencies of the ‘colonialist’ type appear, not between a ‘mother country’ and a geographically remote colony, but between dominant ‘centers’ and dependent ‘peripheries’ *within* national states or regionally integrated land empires. The theoretical construction ‘internal colonialism’ was developed to categorize such cases, particularly the relationship between England and the ‘Celtic fringe’ of the British Isles (Wales, Scotland, Ireland)<sup>102</sup>

Osterhammel further supplies appropriate working definitions for this study. He writes, “‘Colonization’ designates a *process* of territorial acquisition, ‘colony’ a particular type of socio-political *organization*, and ‘colonialism’ a *system* of domination”<sup>103</sup>. The manner in which Ireland was dominated by Britain was to increasingly force those living on the periphery to adopt the politics, culture, language, and religion of those living in the core. This process of acculturation continued for several centuries in Ireland but was never fully successful. The varied reactions of the different famine communicators were affected by the nature of colonialism that was present in nineteenth century Ireland.

Donald Jordan Jr.’s research into the land and popular politics of Mayo from the days of plantation all the way until the land war provides valuable information for the present discussion. Jordan illuminates the motivations behind British attempts to ‘civilize the natives’.

During the reign of Charles I two plantation schemes were put forward for Counties Roscommon, Sligo and Mayo, in part motivated by a desire to civilize the natives. According to a memorandum drawn up in support of the first plantation scheme in 1628, a plantation would lessen the dependence of the populace on the old lords’ families, “ascertain, settle, and establish his Majesty’s tenures for ever hereafter,” bring Protestantism, double the king’s revenue, “mix the British with the natives, and so avert

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid , 17. Original source: Adapted from the Irish National Committee for Geography, *Atlas of Ireland* (Dublin, 1978) 28.

<sup>102</sup> Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997) 17.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid , 4.

rebellion” and set a good example to the natives to “become laborious,” and “set up Englishmen who can hold the office of magistrate”<sup>104</sup>

The continued colonisation of Mayo and Ireland retained the intention of subduing the native, Gaelic individuals. The colonisers proposed to accomplish this by convincing the natives that their own language, religion, and culture were substandard and to take on that of Britain. Osterhammel reinforces this explanation: “Rejecting cultural compromises with the colonized population, the colonizers are convinced of their own superiority and of their ordained mandate to rule”<sup>105</sup>

However, what actually transpired was that “Gradually, Mayo society was becoming one split into two groups – large landowners and tenants. The former were becoming increasingly Anglicized and Protestant, while the latter remained Roman Catholics whose religious and economic position deteriorated during the century”<sup>106</sup>. The situation worsened for the peasantry as the post-Cromwellian land grants were made

As was the case elsewhere in Connacht, the Cromwellian settlement of Mayo was chaotic. Often, it was carried out callously, indiscriminately and in apparent violation of the principles established by the 1625-3 acts and directives. Moreover, its administration was officially characterized as being prone to “frustration, fraud and injustice”<sup>107</sup>

However, by the end of the seventeenth century, the ownership of land reached a place of stability, and Jordan brings the history of Mayo’s plantation era to a close with a powerful statement of potentially successful colonisation: “By the beginning of the eighteenth

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<sup>104</sup> Donald Jordan, *Land and Popular Politics in Ireland*, 26

<sup>105</sup> Jurgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, 17

<sup>106</sup> Donald Jordan, *Land and Popular Politics in Ireland*, 27-28. See also, J.M. Graham, “Rural Society in Connacht, 1600-1640,” in N. Stephens and R. E. Glasscock, eds., *Irish Geographic Studies in Honour of E. Estyn Evans* (Belfast, 1970) 192-208

<sup>107</sup> Donald Jordan, *Land and Popular Politics in Ireland*, 30. Quote reference from Simington, ed., *The Transplantation to Connacht*, vii

century it was clear that the retention of land and the maintenance of position and authority required acceptance of the established church and acknowledgement that power emanated from London”<sup>108</sup>

Thus, the focus is now brought to the state of affairs in Mayo during the 150 years that preceded the famine. The emphasis will lie first upon the economy and second upon society. Regarding economy, the areas of agriculture, migratory labor, and industry shall be addressed.

Pre-famine Mayo was agriculturally monopolized by the rundale form of land tenure. This method of farming division involved the sharing of arable, non-arable, and pasture land among a group of farmers. This created an extremely interactive community as one farmer’s land might be scattered in as many as thirty or forty pieces amongst all of his other neighbours. Within twenty years of three or four persons beginning a rundale farming system, ten or twenty families would be actively involved. While, on one hand, this provided safety and solidarity, its shortcoming was that virtually no individualism could be tolerated. In addition, many did not want to improve land that would be reallocated to another person the following year. Each rundale system became synonymous with a term that will arise in future discussions and that is the term ‘townland’.<sup>109</sup> Rundale farming and the townland phenomenon was certainly a crucial aspect of pre-famine Irish culture.

The rundale system by which the land was worked was a legacy from the days when each clan or sept held undisputed right to an area of the cultivable land, within the clan land portions were

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<sup>108</sup> Donald Jordan, *Land and Popular Politics in Ireland*, 36

<sup>109</sup> Rundale farming. Ibid., 110-114. Rundale and townland synonymy credited to *Devon Commission*, iv 280-9

reallocated annually among the individual members, a custom that deterred recipients from making improvements and embarking on reclamation to enlarge their holdings<sup>110</sup>

The townland system did not coincide with the British plan for Ireland's development. Its continued existence was essentially symbolic of Britain's failure to successfully bring her sister island into a more civilized agricultural state. Yet the rundale farming infrastructure was appropriate for Mayo's topography. In his doctoral dissertation, *Mayo and Beyond: Land, Domestic Industry, and Rural Transformation in the Irish West*, Eric Almquist asserts

there were sound ecological reasons for the persistence of common land-tenure practices in Mayo and neighbouring counties. The region has vast quantities of grazing land which had to be effectively managed by tenants rather than landlords, and a usufruct system was quite rational in the context. The variety of physical geographical forms and micro-climatological niches in the Mayo region is astonishing, even within small townlands. Pockets of good, fertile land are scattered in and about patches of bogland, and hence it does not seem surprising that villagers farmed scattered plots rather than compact, discrete holdings<sup>111</sup>

The establishment of a townland system gave the inhabitants the advantage of solidarity. Individually, they were helpless in comparison with their landlord, but together they became more financially and culturally secure. It had distinct benefits over the agricultural system favoured by the British. "The rundale system provided a means through which grazing land could be shared and seaweed fertilizer and peat could be distributed equitably

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<sup>110</sup> Kenneth McNally, *Achill* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1973) 66

<sup>111</sup> Eric Almquist, "Mayo and Beyond: Land, Domestic Industry, and Rural Transformation in the Irish West," Ph.D. Thesis, Boston University, Boston, 1977, 11

In addition, it fostered a general spirit of co-operation that minimized the risks associated with cultivating fragile crops on poor soil”<sup>112</sup>

Another form of land tenure disdained by the British was known as conacre. Conacre farming was different from rundale in that the small plots of land were not owned by the farmers corporately, but were rented by labourers by the season to grow single crops of potatoes. Farmers with land to spare would divide their farms into smaller plots and charge sometimes exorbitant fees for these plots of less than a single acre.<sup>113</sup> In this manner, those that did not own their own land could support themselves from year to year by the produce of their conacre plot. So in a similar manner to the rundale system, many people could survive on a small portion of land. Unlike rundale, conacre did not produce the townland kinship aspect of subsistence living, but the overdependency on a single crop, the potato, was common to both systems. When the blight appeared in 1845, the many people involved in rundale and conacre farming had no back up resources to see them through the famine. Although it is widely accepted that three million Irish individuals were dependent on the potato, as there was no lease involved in the conacre subdivision, an accurate figure of the number of people using this system is very difficult to determine. However, it is known that Mayo was the second most thickly populated county in Ireland by the 1841 census. It was second to Armagh, but in Ulster fewer people were dependent upon single crop agriculture.<sup>114</sup> The concluding results of the potato blight on both the

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<sup>112</sup> Donald Jordan, *Land and Popular Politics in Ireland*, 56. Quote from Desmond McCourt, “The Rundale System in Ireland: A Study of Its Geographical Distribution and Social Relations,” The Queen’s University, Belfast, PhD Thesis, 1974.

<sup>113</sup> Peter Gray, *The Irish Famine*, 26.

<sup>114</sup> E R R Green, “Agriculture,” *The Great Famine*, 89.



conacre and rundale farming systems in Mayo was tremendous suffering, death, and emigration.

A third manner in which many Mayo inhabitants provided themselves with a living was by seasonal migration. At least three pounds could be made in a single harvest and up to five pounds could be brought back if the migrant went in time for haymaking. This method of earning money in a relatively short amount of time was an effective way for the Irish to help support their families.<sup>115</sup> “The tenants on Lord Westmeath’s estate on the Mayo-Galway border paid their rent in one lump sum for the year with their English earnings.”<sup>116</sup> Yet there is some discrepancy on the actual number of seasonal harvesters leaving from Mayo. Sources range from approximately 3% to 33% of Mayo’s total population working in England each year.<sup>117</sup> Disregarding the conflicting figures, Mayo’s inhabitants profited by seasonal migration until the onset of the blight when the yearly journey lost its allure. The Liverpool port was overly crowded and there was too great a supply of workers for the farming needs.

The existence and importance of seasonal migration in Mayo and in pre-famine Ireland reinforces the argument of their periphery status. Almquist cites an economic characteristic of internal colonialism as follows:

The movement of native labor is determined solely by forces exogenous to the periphery. Typically great migration and mobility of natives occurs in response to price fluctuations of exported primary products.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 116. Green also recommends Barbara M. Kerr, “Irish Seasonal Migration to Great Britain, 1800-38,” *IHS*, iii: 365-380.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Barbara Kerr cites the 1841 Census as 1 in 37 seasonal harvesters in *IHS*, Vol. III: 370. E.R.R. Green wrote in Edwards and Williams’ *The Great Famine*, “The heaviest seasonal migration was from co. Mayo where over a third of the population went to work as harvesters.” [Page 116.]

<sup>118</sup> Eric Almquist, “Mayo and Beyond,” 283.

Further characteristics include that in the periphery “there is a relative lack of services, a lower standard of living, and a higher level of frustration ” Additionally, “the peripheral economy is forced into a kind of development that is complementary to the center and thus becomes dependent on the extra-regional markets ”<sup>119</sup> The peripheral economy of Ireland and specifically County Mayo was drawn into a particular type of industry that complemented well the needs of Britain The crucial industry that affected peasants of the early nineteenth century was the manufacture of yarn and cloth for the linen industry

A key point of Almquist’s study “is that the Irish linen industry was critical to the pre-Famine demographic and economic history of County Mayo ”<sup>120</sup>

A remote country with poor soils, common land tenure, and a paucity of local wage-labor, Mayo was drawn into the British mercantile economy early in the eighteenth century The linen trade was welcomed by landlords seeking to maximize gains, it eventually became an economic necessity for smallholders trying to survive in the face of increasing population stress on land <sup>121</sup>

The greatest industrial advancement in pre-famine Mayo was the growth of the Irish linen industry Northern Connacht was drawn into the cultivation and spinning of flax into yarn and cloth when Ulster could no longer procure sufficient quantities from local producers By 1750, weaving and spinning was a common fixture in cottages across most of the northern half of Ireland In response to the trade, the cities of Mayo’s central corridor – Castlebar, Ballina, and Westport – began to thrive with linen-related activities The

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid

<sup>120</sup> Ibid , 292

<sup>121</sup> Ibid

expansion of the trade reached into the homes and lives of those living in Mayo's periphery as well <sup>122</sup>

Unfortunately, economic prosperity in Mayo was not to be realised "Particularly during the industrialization process, economic inequality within the British Isles increased rather than decreased, as industrial transformation failed to occur in the Celtic periphery on the English scale" <sup>123</sup> The linen industry arose only as a complement to Britain and had no local demand Therefore, when the machine production of yarn took precedence to hand spun yarn in the 1830's, the market declined quickly in Mayo Jordan records "The collapse of the linen industry rippled throughout the Mayo economy, dashing hopes that the economic growth of the previous century would continue" <sup>124</sup>

Within the central corridor, the economy was somewhat sustained by the export of grain and livestock, yet, the county as a whole became impoverished during the two decades prior to the Great Famine As was the case elsewhere in Ireland, the county's small farmers turned more and more exclusively to the potato for sustenance, as it was a crop capable of producing an adequate supply of food on a small parcel of land" <sup>125</sup> The economic state of County Mayo on the eve of the famine typified the potato dependent Irish, with barely enough potatoes to make it through the "blue months" and a cash crop or the sale of a pig to pay the rent The market economy of 1845 left few options for the Irish peasant after the potatoes failed Yet the pre-famine economic status cannot be fully contextualised without a brief review of Mayo's societal status

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<sup>122</sup> See Donald Jordan, *Land and Popular Politics in Ireland*, 59-60 and see Eric Almquist, "Mayo and Beyond," 4-5

<sup>123</sup> Eric Almquist, "Mayo and Beyond," 2

<sup>124</sup> Donald Jordan, *Land and Popular Politics in Ireland*, 64

<sup>125</sup> Donald Jordan, *Land and Popular Politics in Ireland*, 69

Ireland's Great Famine was made all the more severe by the fact that when the British government looked to 'Property to support Poverty' the landlord and peasant relationship was virtually bankrupt. A crucial aspect of Mayo's communicative history is the long standing relationship between the peasantry and the gentry and the fact that before the years of the Great Famine, the relationship had completely changed. As this thesis proposes to unravel intricacies of the famine years by focusing upon the communication that was occurring between individuals and groups, the change in relationship between the classes is of extreme importance. In the "Social Order and the Ghost of Moral Economy in Pre-Famine Mayo," Desmond McCabe argues that the 'moral economy' of Mayo maintained its gentry/peasant "love," however precarious, despite the violent uprisings in other parts of the land. A further description of the 'moral economy' as it is defined and discussed by E P Thompson will be given in chapter five, however, it is sufficient at this point to focus on the existence and dissolution of the lingering trust that existed between the landlords and tenants of County Mayo. "Central elements in describing the society of early nineteenth century Mayo are the concepts of deference and paternalism" <sup>126</sup>

The clientelist theory of Samuel Clark holds that 'a person of higher socio-economic status offers protection or benefits to a person of lower status, who reciprocates by offering some general support or some kind of service' <sup>127</sup>

McCabe acknowledges that in other parts of Ireland, the symbiosis between landlord and tenant did not last as long as it did in County Mayo. Because Mayo was perhaps the last county to lose the relationship of protection in exchange for service, every communicative

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<sup>126</sup> Desmond McCabe, "Social Order and the Ghost of Moral Economy in Pre-Famine Mayo," *'A Various Country' Essays in Mayo History 1500 - 1900*, eds Raymond Gillespie & Gerard Moran (Westport FNT - Mayo News, 1987) 95

issue of concern in this thesis became all the more pronounced in County Mayo when the more open pre-famine channels of inter-class communication were broken

Three possible contributing factors to the endurance of the relationship were proximity, religion, and language, and the importance of these will be underlined as the thesis continues. In the statistical survey of 1802, the Mayo gentry were regarded as “less prone to absenteeism than those of other counties.” Although McCabe argues that religion was most likely not a significant factor, the affinity can still be recognised between landlord and tenant because “the proportion of Catholic landlords was substantially higher than that of most other counties.” Finally, “the widespread linguistic ability may be doubted,” but “Edward Wakefield remarked, in his account of Ireland in 1812, on the fluency of Mayo landowners in Irish, which often had its uses”<sup>128</sup>

As the relationship between the gentry and the peasantry under the moral economy began to disintegrate, communication was made more difficult. McCabe contends that the decade of the 1820’s was the turning point, and that by the end of the famine of 1831 the moral economy in Mayo existed no longer. Until 1831, landlords and peasants met to communicate with one another regarding periodic scarcity. However, “In later periods of distress, such as 1835, 1839, and 1842, there was no recurrence of such efforts to meet their landlords”<sup>129</sup>. The peasantry had little choice in the situation in which they were faced and when the potato blight of 1845 fell upon the crop, the channels of communication on which they had previously depended were closed. Tensions and undercurrents grew and what little faith remained among certain members of the peasantry

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid. McCabe’s endnote. Samuel Clark, *Social Origins of the Irish Land War* (Princeton, 1979) 21

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 96-97

was destroyed as they witnessed a failure on the part of the landlords to meet the needs of the starving population during the Great Famine

It seems that there was a distinct change in the tenor of landlord-tenant relations in Mayo in the decades before the Great Famine, particularly between 1838 and 1845. Political change decidedly estranged some landlords. The evictions of the Famine period erased the final vestiges of peasant trust in landed power.<sup>130</sup>

The general sense of contentment and well being in pre-famine Mayo was completely disrupted by the shock of eviction, starvation, and disease. The people had no food to eat, and the health care facilities were grossly insufficient. In 1836 there was only one medical dispensary in Mayo to cope with its 366,328 people and it was unlikely that it received any more assistance in the decade before the famine.<sup>131</sup> As well, the dependence and respect previously given to the landlords of Mayo could no longer be relied upon.

The coming of the blight and the ensuing famine caused all kinds of cultural upheaval in Mayo. "From 1849 to 1854 over 26,000 Mayo tenants were permanently dispossessed. With only 4.2 per cent of the inhabitants of the country, Mayo was the scene of no less than 10.5 per cent of all evictions in Ireland during the years 1849-54."<sup>132</sup> Any vestige of the gentry/peasant love referred to by McCabe was wiped away as a result of the clearances, and it was never to return to Mayo's society. Long term consequences of the evictions caused the land to be changed from farming to grazing and ranching. "The land agent Thomas Miller estimated in 1858 that as many as 800 English and Scottish farmers had secured leases of large holdings in Mayo and Galway, which were almost

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid , 107-108

<sup>130</sup> Ibid , 111

<sup>131</sup> Cecil Woodham Smith, *The Great Hunger*, 24

exclusively devoted to the raising of livestock”<sup>133</sup> A large number of those clearances occurred on the Mullet Peninsula, on Mayo’s north-west coast in the barony of Erris

The engineer Patrick Knight described the poverty that existed on the peninsula

‘The general population are amazingly poor,’ Knight wrote, ‘subsisting, or rather existing, on a piece of ground, quite insufficient in other parts for the support of a family’<sup>134</sup> There was scarcely more than one blanket per household, nearly a third of the people were ‘wanting clothes’, and 734 men had no shoes The only ploughs and carts – three of each – were owned by a landlord and two clergymen The peninsula’s 1,732 families had 1,967 cows - slightly more than one per family Rents were as high as any in Mayo - further evidence of burgeoning commerce, since something had to be sold to pay the rent<sup>135</sup>

He believed that the root of the poverty was the absence of rich land, but if the bogs and sandbanks were reclaimed, Knight asserted that the peasantry would be much better off

However, ‘the chief obstacle to improvement, Knight believed, was the ‘system of commonage practiced in the country’”<sup>136</sup> This is borne out by Tom Yager’s study of the same region

What appears most remarkable about the improvers’ vision, looking back across the chasm of the Famine, is their untempered optimism in proclaiming that, with a little work and a dose of rational organisation, the impoverished population would soon live in comfort<sup>137</sup>

The primary method to achieve a stronger economy that was adopted by the Mullet Peninsula landlords was eviction Between the years 1841 - 1851, 580 houses were

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<sup>132</sup> James S Donnelly, Jr, “Landlords and Tenants,” *A New History of Ireland V Ireland under the Union, I 1801 - 70*, ed W E Vaughan (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1989) 340-341

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 343

<sup>134</sup> Patrick Knight, *Erris in the Irish Highlands and the Atlantic Railway* (Dublin, 1836) 59 Cited in Tom Yager, “Mass Eviction in the Mullet Peninsula During and After the Great Famine,” *Irish Economic and Social History*, XXIII (1996) 28

<sup>135</sup> Tom Yager, “Mass Eviction in the Mullet Peninsula During and After the Great Famine,” *Irish Economic and Social History*, XXIII (1996) 28

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, as noted from Patrick Knight, *Erris*, 59

unroofed and their inhabitants evicted. This figure amounts to 35 per cent of Mullet's houses. The barony of Erris lost a slightly lower percentage of inhabited dwellings with its loss of 32 per cent.<sup>138</sup> The barony of Erris was not the only Mayo barony to suffer severe clearances. The Earl of Lucan, who owned 60,570 acres of Mayo, frequently evicted entire townlands of his tenants. He was known to have stated that he 'would not breed paupers to pay priests'.<sup>139</sup> Instead, he cleared a minimum of 429 families and converted the land into large pasture ranches and either retained or leased it. For example, he "evicted 2000 people and levelled 300 houses between 1846 and 1849 in Ballinrobe parish, one of the richest grazing regions in Mayo. In 1856 he gave a twenty-five-year lease on this Cloona Castle estate to a Scottish farmer James Simpson, for an annual rent of £2200".<sup>140</sup> The "improving landlords felt it necessary to extirpate a local, communal land system and to find a way of relieving overpopulation".<sup>141</sup> By ridding the land of its people, the scattered plots of communal farming could be made more orderly and ultimately more prosperous. Without adequate funds for emigration, eviction was a virtual death sentence.

Yet in the name of 'progress,' this was an acceptable price to pay. The new inhabitants of Mayo eagerly looked forward to a new cultural age in which the rundale and conacre farmer, seasonal migrant, Cromwellian exile descendant, and accommodating peasant existed no longer. As the *Roscommon Journal* of July 1854 described this new harsh regime: "In the revolution of property changes, the new purchaser accelerates the

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 29

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 33

<sup>139</sup> As quoted in Donald Jordan, *Land and Popular Politics*, 112

<sup>140</sup> Donald Jordan, *Land and Popular Politics*, 113. Reference: Lucan's Rent Ledgers, Dun, *Landlords and Tenants in Ireland*, 238, *Richmond Commission, Minutes of Evidence*, I, PP 1881 [C 2778-U], xv, 89



departure of the aborigines of the country, by which he seems to imagine he has not only rid himself of their burden but enhanced the value of his property”<sup>142</sup>

The crucial point to be emphasised here is the lack of value that was placed on the Irish individual. All of the details so far discussed in relation to County Mayo point to immense cultural changes as a result of a naturally instigated phenomenon. This thesis argues that one of the principal reasons that individuals living in Ireland, and specifically Mayo to remain consistent with the present context, were not able to effectively make their needs known is because they did not have active citizenship rights in the United Kingdom. When referring to the inhabitants of Ireland, one may note that in this thesis they are almost without fail titled ‘Irish Individual’ as opposed to *subject* or member of the United Kingdom. Subjects of the United Kingdom in the nineteenth century who were treated as equals would not be described as ‘aborigines’ and have their removal regarded as an appropriate way in which to increase property value. Subjects may struggle to make their political voice heard, but a class of people lacking the barest minimum of civil rights had a virtually insurmountable task to make their voice heard and their needs met. Mitchel’s disgust and cynicism with the political reality of the mid-nineteenth century Irish individual is apparent in his *Jail Journal*, when he laments, “There are no citizens in Ireland, there is no citizenship - no law. I cannot lose what I never had, for no Irishman

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<sup>141</sup> Tom Yager, “Mass Eviction in the Mullet Peninsula,” *Irish Economic and Social History*, 24

<sup>142</sup> James S. Donnelly, Jr., “Landlords and Tenants,” *A New History of Ireland V*, ed. W. E. Vaughan, 342-343, as cited from P. G. Lane, “The General Impact of the Encumbered Estates Act of 1849 on Counties Galway and Mayo,” *Galway Arch Soc Jn*, xxxiii (1972-3) 50

has any rights at present”<sup>143</sup> So, if no citizens existed in Ireland, what was happening to the individuals? The individuals who survived were stripped of their cultural and social identity, without any adequate British substitute being put in its place

## SECTION 2.6 – CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

Those who engaged in any aspect of famine communication entered the arena with their own personal backgrounds, levels of education, and prejudices. The political and economic power did not, however, rest in the personal histories of the subjugated Irish peasantry. The enormous contrast between the feeble spectres and the commissioners, with whom their fate rested, resulted in a massive loss of human life after the catalyst of the potato blight occurred. Three of the five commissioners who were most active in famine communication were rewarded and publicly acknowledged for actions that did not save lives but did preserve an unregulated and thriving market economy. The two who attempted to speak and act out on behalf of the starving Irish were virtually excommunicated from the establishment of political power. The Relief Commission failed to relieve but succeeded in keeping the ‘business as usual’ reputation of the British administration.

Of tremendous impact on all levels of relief was the adoption of various perceptions of the Irish individuals. If the recipient truly believes that the subject in question is more animal than human, the response will reflect a lack of value placed on the life. Some members of the British administration sensed an ungrateful attitude of the Irish, particularly after the failed rising in 1848, and therefore no longer had any desire to assist a

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<sup>143</sup> John Mitchel, *Jail Journal*, ed. Thomas Flanagan (Dublin: University Press of Ireland, 1982) 15. Originally published in *The Citizen*, Mitchel’s first New York paper from 14

thankless lot. Additionally, it was believed that the Irish needed to be taught a lesson and the destruction of their staple food crop served as just response of nature.

For all of the thousands of individuals involved in the famine relief structure, sufficient relief was not given to completely ward off starvation, disease, and emigration. Within each level of the network, certain amounts of both positive and negative communicative noise occurred. The administration and the various charitable institutions left notable records of organisation and skill, but as famine eyewitness William Steuart Trench recorded, “still the people died”<sup>144</sup>

The priests acted as spokesmen for their many suffering parishioners, but were not able to successfully break through the communicative barriers with sufficient force to save the Irish lives. Instead, with their peaceful encouragements to the people, they gave untold assistance to the hegemonic control in place during the 1840's. Their actions and attitudes came from a position of morality, but the consequence was a prodigious amount of lost lives.

Finally, County Mayo is a ‘picture within a picture’. The periphery of this county was colonised in a similar fashion to the manner in which the Celtic periphery was colonised by Britain. Society began to be split into the rich and the poor, which of course caused the power to rest with the rich. Rundale, conacre, seasonal migration, and the scraps of the linen industry all gave Mayo's inhabitants a method of existence, but not a great deal more. The protection that had once been afforded under a society of paternalism had vanished by the 1840's, therefore, the peasantry had little recourse when their food

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January 1854 - 19 August 1854

disappeared. Evictions were more likely to occur in the climate of the mid-nineteenth century than was gratuitous relief or the dismissal of the need to pay rent. Indeed, despite the Act of Union, the Irish peasants were not treated as full and equal members of the United Kingdom and their removal was tacitly approved. This statement does not infer genocidal intent, but rather an attitude toward human life that coincided greatly with the economic principle of *laissez-faire* or 'hands off'. The Irish people, culture, language, and even religion took a severe blow as a result of the famine and the following chapter takes stock of the many differences between the Irish and the English.

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<sup>144</sup> William Steuart Trench, *Realities of Irish Life*, Reprinted in *Field Day Anthology*, Vol II, Seamus Deane, ed, 147-148. Trench repeated this statement four times. In contrast to all of the many relief efforts, 'still the people died.'

### Chapter 3 Fields of Experience

*Skeletoned in darkness, my dark fathers lay  
Unknown, and could not understand  
The giant grief that trampled night and day,  
The awful absence moping through the land.  
Upon the headland, the encroaching sea  
Left sand that hardened after tides of Spring,  
No dancing feet disturbed its symmetry  
And those who loved good music ceased to sing*

*My Dark Fathers*  
Brendan Kennelly

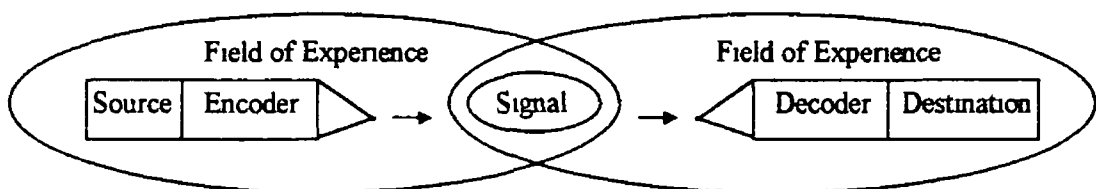
## Chapter 3

### Fields of Experience

The premise of this chapter is that the greater the overlap of fields of experience between two communicators, the more effective their communication becomes. A communicator's field of experience is produced by their familial status, gender, first language, additional languages, education, accent, culture, work history, travel, and any other life experiences that have occurred in their past. This thesis defines "effective communication" as that which travels from the sender to the receiver with as little modification to the intended meaning of the message as possible. The more that two communicators have in common, the more likely it is that they will be able to understand one another.

Every communicator is only able to code and decode messages within the limits of their own experience and knowledge. Differences between the fields of experience of the communicators can prove to be remarkable impediments to purity of transmission. The following model displays the blending of fields of experience as the message is transmitted.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 3 1**  
**Field of Experience Overlap**



<sup>1</sup> Wilbur Schramm, "How Communication Works," *Messages: A Reader in Human Communication*, ed. J. M. Civikly (New York: Random House, 1977) 6

### **SECTION 3.1 – CHAPTER OBJECTIVES**

Chapter three takes on the goal of comparing and contrasting the fields of experience of famine communicators on both the macro and micro levels. In the broadest sense, the fields of experience of the island of Ireland and the British Empire will be compared and contrasted. On a smaller, more individualised scale, several particular individuals will be discussed in relation to their fields of experience and its effect upon their interpersonal communication. To accomplish this goal, a review of the language, culture, and religions of the two islands will be a key to understanding how much or how little the fields of experience overlapped between the Irish and the English. The role of Daniel O’Connell in Irish history will bring the perspective of overlapping fields to a more specific level. Specific communicative examples will be used to bring clarity to the chapter premise, and finally, the history of the region of Gweedore in County Donegal provides supplementary evidence for this discussion.

### **SECTION 3.2 – THE IRISH AND ENGLISH “UNDERLAP”**

If the model in figure 3.1 is manipulated to symbolise the fields of experience of Ireland and Britain, this chapter will argue that the amount of overlap was virtually non-existent and the intended messages fell flat somewhere in the middle of the Irish Sea. The Irish and English people never became fully unified, despite the political bonds established through the Act of Union. The first difference in the fields of experience of the Irish people and the English people to be addressed here is the issue of language.

**SECTION 3.3 – THE POSITION OF THE IRISH LANGUAGE**

There are numerous approaches that can be adopted when addressing the issue of the Irish language. For example, a purely linguistic approach can be taken. An historical account of the language might also be attempted. A more controversial and ideological approach would involve a discourse on the political nature of the Irish language. The ancient language of the Irish has been drastically affected by political upheavals throughout the centuries and it could be argued that the political aspects of Irish still prevail in the present and will exist in the future.

Though there are many arguments regarding the political development of the Irish language from century to century, this thesis concentrates on the event of the famine itself and the nature of colonialism and how both affected the Irish language. The internal colonialism within Ireland did involve the confiscation of land and natural resources, but more importantly, those who were convinced of their ordained mandate to rule saw it as their duty to supplant the backward culture, language, and religion of Ireland with the civilisation of Britain. In *Colonization: A Global History*, Marc Ferro explains that colonies established in order to bring faith or other benefits to a land that was lacking can be thought of as following the example of the British situation in Ireland. He first distinguishes that within the English empire two principal motivations for colonisation existed.

... the West Indies, India, the North Atlantic, Russia ... were motivated by the lure of profit. They were henceforth buttressed by the idea of establishing English colonies, of “populating the pagan or barbarous countries which are not really possessed by any prince or Christian people”. That was the idea of Humphrey Gilbert, a gentleman educated at Eton and Oxford. He enunciated the doctrine, carried it into practice and helped in the settlement of the first colony in Newfoundland, to which England would send its unemployed citizens, sell its products and from which it would get its food supplies. (1583). As a result *as early as the end of the sixteenth*



*century the double identity of the English empire was already evident*  
Naval bases, or the settlement of the colonists That is, on one hand,  
mercantile colonies, on the other hand, lands of settlement for the faith, for  
the establishment of those who have nothing - a colonization which in its  
own way, resembled and perpetuated the English expansion into Ireland <sup>2</sup>

A primary motivation in the colonisation of Ireland was to supply a land that was  
perceived as having nothing in common with the benefits of civilised Great Britain This  
included displacing the native Irish language with the language of the colonising English  
Ania Loomba refers to Brian Friel's play *Translations* in her book  
*Colonialism/Postcolonialism* In his play, "the colonial struggle in Ireland is represented  
as a contest over words and language" She further asserts that "Gaelic was virtually  
wiped out as a language, and this play, even though it is imagined as taking place in  
Gaelic, was written and enacted in English This is a clever way of making the  
'postcolonial' audience critique its own lack of Irish, and reflect upon the legacy of  
colonisation" <sup>3</sup> Language was a barrier between the coloniser and the colonised, and this  
section addresses some of the communicative issues surrounding the Irish and English  
languages

The traveller and writer Spencer Hall provides an excellent example of how the  
colonial nature of the relationship between Ireland and England became a profound  
impediment to effective communication In his publication *Life and Death in Ireland, as  
Witnessed in 1849*, Hall described the kind of serious impasse that can occur In an  
attempt to discover the truth about the murder of a young Irishman, he realised the  
difficulty encountered by the Irish people when they were forced to speak in a language

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<sup>2</sup> Marc Ferro, *Colonization A Global History* (London & New York Routledge, 1997)  
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that they did not consider their own “The evidence was given with some vehemence and great irregularity I thought then, and I have often thought since, that much of the irregularity on such occasions arises from the Irishman feeling that he is not speaking in his natural language”<sup>4</sup> The Irish men and women were not speaking in their ‘natural language’ when they spoke English. Possibly one of the reasons the Irish could not embrace the English language as quickly as they could learn it was because it lacked the joy and fullness that is characteristic of Irish

It might be argued that the typical English view of language was as representational and reflectionist of the ‘real’, whereas the Irish sought in language a fullness not to be found in harsh Irish reality, and a realm of freedom and pleasure unjustified by existing Irish conditions. For the Irish, language did not merely obsequiously and oppressively reflect the real, it foreshadowed future plenitude. England, the possessors, needed only to understand the world, the Irish, dispossessed, needed urgently to change it. So the colonial relationship between the two countries had its linguistic correlative.<sup>5</sup>

The argument of this thesis is that the above mentioned correlation existed and had a distinct bearing on the process of famine communication. The next few sections will attempt to explain exactly what that bearing was by first supplying a brief history of Irish, then using the lexicon of ethnography to display how colonialism actually affected the Irish individuals by their speech patterns and language usage. The last section dealing with language takes a concentrated look at a few actual examples of language used by individuals living during the famine years and at one particular example to bridge the translation gap between Irish and English for the benefit of the small farmers. Additionally, this thesis again uses the application of human communication theory to

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<sup>3</sup> Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998) 99 and 101

<sup>4</sup> Spencer T. Hall, *Life and Death in Ireland*, 29

further understand the events that occurred during the famine. The practical discussion of the Irish language will lay the groundwork for a more theoretical study of such terms as code switching, *dinomua*, *diglossia*, metaphorical, situational, and style shifting. One purpose of this chapter as a whole is to develop aspects of the symbiotic relationship of language and culture. Language plays an intimate part in the formation of both culture and identity, therefore, it is a factor which is central to our discussion.

### SECTION 3.3.1 – THE IRISH LANGUAGE: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES FOR COMMUNICATION THEORY

Irish is often classed as a Celtic language. The “use of the term ‘Celtic’ derives from the name *Keltoi* used by Greek geographers of the mid-first millennium BC for a people inhabiting parts of Central Europe.”<sup>6</sup> The war-like, iron-working *Keltoi* led to the La Tene culture of the late fifth to early first century BC and during this time, “many of our greatest treasures of ‘Celtic’ art were produced.”<sup>7</sup> To the Romans, the members of the La Tene culture were known as *Galli*.<sup>8</sup> The language of this culture that found its way to Ireland is now classified as a “modern reflex of Goidelic.”<sup>9</sup> It has three main dialect groups known by the regional terms, Donegal, Connacht, and Munster.<sup>10</sup> And, to supply a time frame for the Irish language, Gearoid MacEoin classifies the periods of Irish in the following manner:

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Boylan and Timothy Foley, *Political Economy and Colonial Ireland*, 129

<sup>6</sup> James Fife, *The Celtic Languages* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993) 3

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Paul Russell, *An Introduction to the Celtic Languages* (London & New York: Longman, 1995) 69

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

Ogam Irish	The language of the inscriptions, fifth to seventh centuries
Archaic Irish	The language of the period following the Ogam inscriptions, essentially the seventh century
Old Irish	The language of the eighth and ninth centuries
Middle Irish	The language of the period 900-1200
Modern Irish	From the thirteenth century to the present day, a period within which Early Modern Irish, the language of 1200-1600, is often distinguished <sup>11</sup>

The only period of language development crucial to the material in this chapter is Modern Irish. Much can be said about the differences between the three Irish dialects within this period alone, but this chapter will focus instead on the unfortunate decrease in the use of the Irish language as a result of the famine. There is substantial controversy among scholars about how many Irish speakers there were before the famine and whether the famine was the catalyst for the demise of widespread usage or whether it was a combination of many factors. The arguments in this thesis are based on Sean de Freine's thesis that sees the famine as doing much more than taking two million individuals away from their land, but also helping to destroy the status of Irish as a working language.

One of the consequences of the national failure to cope with the Famine was that it hastened the abandonment of the Irish language. After physical disasters the survivors normally pick up the pieces and get on with the job of reconstruction. That did not happen in Ireland. Why? Because far more people than died in the Famine or emigrated in its immediate aftermath did something else which has no parallel in modern Europe. About five million people or so, in the course of the nineteenth century, turned from Irish to English. <sup>12</sup>

For this very reason, this thesis up to this point has confined its discussion of communication theory and the famine to areas of study involving only the English language. Although the majority of Irish individuals who were suffering during the famine

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<sup>11</sup> Gearoid MacEoin, "Irish," *The Celtic Languages*, eds. Martin J. Ball & James Fife (London & New York: Routledge, 1993) 102.

spoke Irish, their superiors and social elites generally had the only audible political voice and that communication was performed in English. As a result, the archival remains of famine history tend to be predominantly in the English language, but the truth of the matter is that when the blight struck in 1845, there was “a greater number of Irish speakers than ever before”<sup>13</sup>

Eoin MacNeill, in *Irish in the National University: A Plea for Irish Education*, informs his readers that “If a line be drawn on the map from Loch Foyle to Waterford harbour (the 7th degree of longitude west from Greenwich supplies the line), in all the country west of this line, until after the Great Famine, Irish was the common and all but universal language of the population, and was also widely spoken in many districts east of the line”<sup>14</sup>. But unfortunately,

in face of the disastrous famine – the Black ‘47 – That scourge fell mostly, almost entirely indeed, on the four millions of Irish speakers. It was not the million deaths so much as the continuing emigration of living millions of others during the next half-century which broke the spirit of the people. In 1847, the population was the highest ever – and the countryside in spite of the rackrents, was alive with dancing, with singing and humble fiddling. After ‘47, what struck the visitor was the unbroken silence. That silence overtook the language.<sup>15</sup>

The famine and resulting emigration came as close to succeeding in removing Ireland’s language and culture as any event or series of events in Ireland’s history

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<sup>12</sup> Sean de Freine, “The Cultural Consequences of the Great Famine,” *Douglas Hyde Conference Proceedings*, 82-83

<sup>13</sup> Gearoid Denvir, “The Irish Language,” written for Bord na Gaeilge. 5-6. Number of Irish speakers quoted as, “possibly some 3 million.”

<sup>14</sup> Eoin MacNeill, *Irish in the National University: A Plea for Irish Education* (Dublin: An Clo-Cumann, Ltd, no year listed) 28

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Corkery, *The Fortunes of the Irish Language* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1968) 116-117

“During the nightmare of the penal days the language survived almost miraculously,”<sup>16</sup> but the famine fell hard enough on a vulnerable people that their language suffered a cruel blow. It is not overstatement to contend that the attack on the Irish language was also an attack on Irish culture and tradition because, “the every day language spoken by a people is reckoned to be a most important part of culture”<sup>17</sup>

The author of the preceding statement, Sean de Freine, gives many humorous examples of Irish attempting to exist in a post-famine, predominantly English speaking culture. One of the stories is of Joseph O'Connor, a businessman in Killarney. Mr O'Connor described his attempt to recover his lost language in a predominantly English speaking Ireland and records the response of his neighbours:

I caught the Gaelic fever on the great surge of national feeling that boiled up in Ireland at the end of the last century, and I had my name printed in gold leaf Gaelic over the door of my shop. The unfamiliar script almost created a riot. The townspeople had never seen Gaelic before, though most of them had heard it spoken by wild men from the mountains. The County Inspector of police sent his Head Constable to order me to remove the impertinent inscription.<sup>18</sup>

Humorous stories such as this one reinforce the fact that when the Irish language declined, the population in general desired that the wider cultural matrix associated with it should be dismissed as well. Whether consciously or unconsciously, a nation that embraced the language of Britain also embraced elements of its culture as well. A contemporary commentator, the Rev. Martin Brennan proposes that “at the human level transmission and inheritance of cultural values are preponderantly, if not exclusively, by

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<sup>16</sup> Rev. Martin Brennan, “Language, Personality and the Nation,” *A View of the Irish Language*, ed. Brian O Cuiv (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1969) 75

<sup>17</sup> Sean de Freine, “The Cultural Consequences of the Great Famine,” *Douglas Hyde Conference Proceedings 1995* (Boyle: Roscommon Herald, 1996) 83

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 86

means of language”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, as English became the predominant language of Ireland, cultural consequences were likewise transmitted

Through the efforts of Conradh na Gaeilge (The Gaelic League) and today, Bord na Gaeilge, new life is being infused into the Irish language. School children are taught to speak and understand the language of their ancestors and entire communities are choosing to communicate with one another completely in Irish. It may well be that the added impetus of the activities of the Gaelic League at the beginning of this century aided the success of the Easter Rising.

The founders of the Gaelic League - Douglas Hyde, David Comyn, Eoin MacNeill, Fr. O’Growney and others - revolutionised the attitude of the Irish people to their own language. The two main planks in their platform were, first the revival of Irish as the vernacular of the whole Irish people and secondly the creation of a new literature in the Irish tongue. ‘The moment Ireland broke with her Gaelic past,’ said Hyde, ‘she fell away hopelessly from all intellectual and artistic effort. She lost her musical instruments, she lost her music, she lost her games, she lost her language and popular literature, and with her language she lost her intellectuality.’ Only with the restoration of her language could all these things be restored.<sup>20</sup>

What is important about Hyde’s statement is his clear recognition of the link between the restoration of Irish language, and the regeneration of music, games, literature, and intellectuality. Possibly the most succinct and enlightened summary regarding the use of the Irish language can be expressed as follows: “For the language is our organic connection with our cultural past, the living root through which the sap of that past can rise into, enrich and diversify the growing plant of the future.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Rev. Martin Brennan, “Language, Personality and the Nation,” *A View of the Irish Language*, 78

<sup>20</sup> Tomás O hAilín, “Irish Revival Movements,” *A View of the Irish Language*, 96

<sup>21</sup> Rev. Martin Brennan, “Language, Personality and the Nation,” *A View of the Irish Language*, 79

### **SECTION 3.2 - APPLICATION OF ETHNOGRAPHY TO PRE-FAMINE SPEECH COMMUNITIES**

Now that the importance of bringing the Irish language back into every day contemporary life has been discussed, it is also appropriate to investigate in more detail the speech communities in existence before the famine and aspects crucial to their demise. As the reader of this chapter may have noticed, the actual number of mid-nineteenth century Irish speakers is still open to debate. Sources estimate anywhere from three to five million individuals used Irish as their means of communication in 1845. The truth on which all historians agree is that the vast majority of individuals on whom the potato blight struck its hardest blows were speakers of Irish. This fact in itself limited the chances of survival in a time of crisis for these speech communities, because the governing bodies in power at the time spoke another language, and in fact, welcomed the demise of Irish.

It was not only the governing bodies that were satisfied to see the use of Irish abate. At the point of ideological compromise, Daniel O'Connell was satisfied that the Irish language be sacrificed in the name of progress for Ireland. He was quoted by William J O'Neill Daunt in *Personal Reflections of the Late Daniel O'Connell, M P* as responding to the question of 'whether the use of the Irish language was diminishing among our peasantry' in the following manner:

Yes, and I am sufficiently utilitarian not to regret its gradual abandonment. A diversity of tongues is no benefit, it was first imposed on mankind as a curse, at the building of Babel. It would be of vast advantage to mankind if all the inhabitants of the earth spoke the same language. Therefore, although the Irish language is connected with many recollections that twine around the hearts of Irishmen, yet the superior utility of the English tongue,



as the medium of all modern communication, is so great, that I can witness without a sigh the gradual disuse of the Irish <sup>22</sup>

O'Connell wanted the Irish people to enter into the speech community of the English world, but he did not encourage his English acquaintances to enter the community of the Irish. A speech community is defined as, "all people who speak a mutually intelligible language or dialect" <sup>23</sup> O'Connell is seen as giving little weight to the duality of speech and culture, but John Murphy asks, "Can we really speak at all of O'Connell having *attitudes* towards the Irish language?" He lived instinctively through Irish at one level of his being and he was not in any case given to analytical reflection on language and culture <sup>24</sup> Yet it is within the speech community that the functions of daily life occur, and O'Connell did not recognise this fact. Entrance into a speech community is contingent upon shared language. As the administrators of relief did not use the Irish language, they had no access to the heart of Irish speaking speech communities. To put it another way, speakers of English had no participation in the everyday lives of those suffering the most from the ravages of famine. It is not surprising, therefore, that for the most part, they did not have as much personal investment into the lives of the suffering.

There is much evidence on the other hand, to argue that the Irish speakers avidly sought to become members of the English speaking speech communities in an attempt to have their basic survival needs met. As a result of learning and using the English language, the Irish individuals entered into a state of diglossia and dinomua - multiple

<sup>22</sup> William J. O'Neill Daunt, *Personal Recollections of the Late Daniel O'Connell, M.P.* (London, 1848) 14-15. As quoted by John Murphy, "O'Connell and the Gaelic World," *Daniel O'Connell: Portrait of a Radical*, 39.

<sup>23</sup> *New Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus*, (Danbury: Lexicon Publications, Inc., 1992) 954.

languages and multiple cultures respectively. While many benefits can be derived from the enjoyment of multiple languages and/or cultures, Irish speakers fought a tremendous battle in the power struggle between the Irish and English languages and cultures. The results of the famine in the loss of at least two million individuals indicates the blow dealt to the Irish language in that particular battle.

### **SECTION 3.3.3 - ETHNOGRAPHY AND COMMUNICATION**

The study of ethnography is an excellent framework to employ in order to understand the battle of cultures. The types of data used in ethnographic research are background information, artefacts, social organisation, beliefs about language use, and the actual process of speaking. Background information provides the general setting of the culture, for example where and when. Cultural artefacts include tools, styles, and items involved in lifestyle. The social organisation is connected with the background information, but grows extremely complex when politics are an integral part of the organisation (as they were in the 1840's in Ireland and Britain). Beliefs about language use come from an outsider's perspective, while the actual process of speaking can be determined from within the speech community.

The preferred ethnographic collection of these types of data is as a participant observer. This involves acquiring information about a culture by participation within the culture. Informal interviews with members and non-members of the culture is the second method of data collection and it is followed by the collection of documents regarding the culture or social group. The final and least preferred method is analysis by introspection.

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<sup>24</sup> John Murphy, "O'Connell and the Gaelic World," *Daniel O'Connell: Portrait of a Radical*, 39

In other words, this process allows the analysis to come from thoughts and observations about the culture from a non-participatory perspective. Because the famine is an historical event and any survivors are no longer alive, it is by this third option that the analysis of the famine speech communities must be made.

Within any language, there are two types of speaking. They are labelled “high,” as the official standard of grammar, diction, etc. and “low,” as any language use that falls below the standard. It has been argued that the terms “high” and “low” should be abolished as they place one method of speaking at a greater level of power than the other, but the following excerpt from Niall O Ciosain supplies a positive understanding of the high and low forms.

One way of setting the phenomenon of popular print in a linguistic context is to use a model developed in American sociolinguistics to describe societies in which more than one language is used. The model was originally sketched by Charles Ferguson in his article on ‘Diglossia.’ Ferguson analysed four societies in which two forms of language are used, what he calls a high (H) form, and a low (L) form. (His examples are Arabic, Modern Greek, Swiss German, and Haitian Creole.) H is the official, standard, language and L is usually a regional vernacular or dialect. He described the two forms in terms of the situations or subjects to which their use would be appropriate. H would be appropriate for a political speech, a personal letter, or a church sermon, L for family conversations and domestic situations generally. The two forms co-exist in constant behaviour – for a newspaper to be read aloud in H, and then for its contents to be discussed in L.<sup>25</sup>

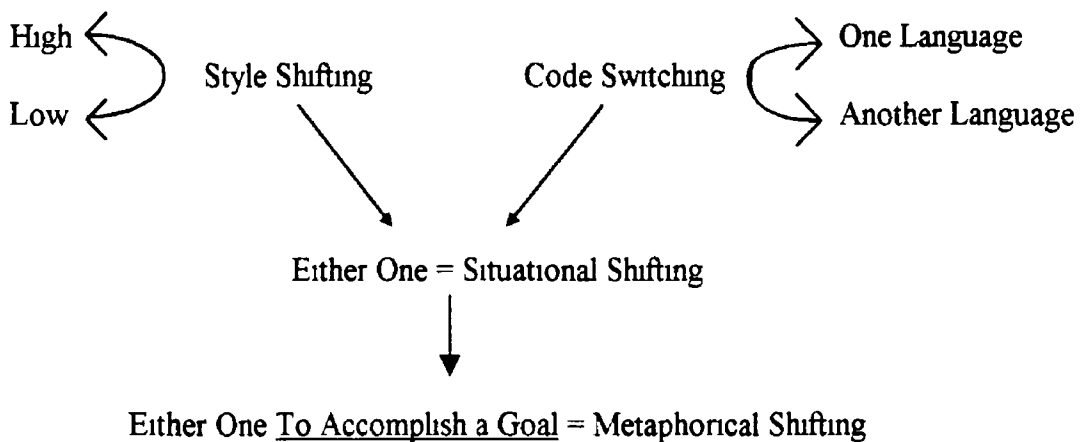
When a communicator changes from high to low or vice versa, this action is termed “style shifting.” If a communicator changes from one language to another in a diglossic situation, this action is termed “code switching.” Change in either style or code is

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<sup>25</sup> Niall O Ciosáin, “Printed Popular Literature in Irish 1750 - 1850: Presence and Absence,” *The Origins of Popular Literacy in Ireland*, eds. Mary Daly and David Dickson (Dublin: Tony Moreau, 1990) 45 - 46. O Ciosain’s endnote: C. Ferguson, ‘Diglossia,’ *Word*, xv (1959), 325 - 40.

described as “situational shifting,” and more specifically, deliberate change in style or code in order to accomplish a goal is described as “metaphorical switching.” Humans learn to change their verbal communication when the situations change around them, yet very few would be conscious that they are actively engaging in this shifting or switching process. Figure 3.2 clarifies this process of alteration by demonstrating the terms in diagram format.

**Figure 3.2**  
**Language Shifts and Switches**



As every one of these speech alterations occur, the individual engaging in the alteration has participated in two cultures. With every alteration of speech, a separate and distinct culture is entered. For example, a monolingual teenager engages in a subculture with his or her peers and uses words completely unintelligible to a speech community of his or her parents' peers. When that individual leaves the environment of his peers, he or she most probably style shifts into a more standard, or 'higher' form of language in order to be understood. He or she has shifted into a different subculture. The difference between cultures is even more visible when a communicator engages in code switching, but the

principle is the same in both situations. Whether conscious of it or not, humans exist in dinomic societies of multiple cultures and subcultures.<sup>26</sup>

A dinomic existence can be an excellent, fulfilling life, however, in the case of the Irish individuals fighting for the survival of their own culture in the speech community of another culture, there was no fulfilment. It is unfortunate that when applying the rhetoric of ethnography to an historical event, participant observation cannot be achieved. It is impossible to recapture pre-famine existence by first hand observation, but as has been suggested throughout this thesis, many accounts remain of their dinomic existence, and hence the asymmetry between English and Irish speakers which caused such a fatal obstacle to successful communications during the Famine.

#### SECTION 3.3.4 - ETHNOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

The famine struck an agrarian Ireland of over 8 million people. Farms of only one to five acres covered 44.9% of Irish land in 1831, compared to 15.5% in 1851.<sup>27</sup> Very few tools were owned by the suffering poor. In Cong, “the inspecting officer reported that seventy-five men were employed and had between them but two wheel barrows, two crowbars, and a wooden lever.”<sup>28</sup> Within the Irish home, a fire was kept burning with turf to supply heat to the one room dwelling. The household pig lived inside with the residents and as long as there were potatoes enough to feed the family, they were able to survive.

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<sup>26</sup> Roger Grimshaw, Dorothy Hobson, Paul Willis, “Introduction to Ethnography at the Centre,” *Culture, Media, Language*, eds. Hall, Hobson, Lowe, & Willis (London & New York: Routledge, 1980) 73. James Lull, *Media, Communication, Culture* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1995) 112.

<sup>27</sup> R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 334-335.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas P. O’Neil, “The Organisation and Administration of Relief, 1845 - 52,” *The Great Famine*, 228.

Such happiness as they were able to experience came from the vitality of pre-famine cultural and festive practices

British observers of this lifestyle found it to be primitive, uncivilised, and slovenly. Few were able to look beyond the outward display of poverty to more vital aspects of pre-famine culture. At the same time, few observers until James Fintan Lalor went so far as to denounce the social structure of landlord and peasant farmer - a centuries old class struggle that secured a child's fate only by the family into which the child was born. Genteel members of British society were faced with the decision of whether to yield to the compassion that the images of destitution evoked, or to hold firm to their training not to encourage the "bad habit" of begging in the lower classes. Sidney Osbourne was a correspondent for the *Times* in England. His record of the incident cited in the introductory chapter of this thesis perhaps best captures the disturbing societal morality existing between the Irish and the English in the late 1840's. Osbourne described the naked running legs of the twelve year old mendicant. He attempted to 'congeal' his companion from giving alms by reading "fresh lectures on the evil of being led from right principles, by appeals to our pity." Yet the girl eventually "won the day – she got very hot, coughed – but still ran with undiminished speed." Osbourne's companion gave the child a fourpenny and was reluctantly 'forgiven' by Osbourne because "it was hard earned, though by a bad sort of industry."<sup>29</sup> To 'forgive' a companion of giving a fourpenny to a child who has obvious need of it can hardly be called Christian charity. The social organisation that could create an incident such as this was clearly intent on destroying what it saw as lowly Irish culture, even at the cost of human lives. It can be seen that Osbourne

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<sup>29</sup> Sidney Osbourne, *Gleanings in the West of Ireland*, 91-92

was shocked that the young girl “never asked for anything,” but it was the cough that ‘did it’ - an audible, unintentional plea that carried more power than a million requests in her “low” dialect could ever have done Margaret Kelleher includes Osbourne’s description of the young girl in her chapter looking at the ‘Appalling Spectacles’ of the Irish Famine Kelleher observes that “the dramatic energy of this piece is unforgettable the girl’s ‘silent’ running outside the carriage and the growing tension within, the various reactions of the spectators - one astonished, the other irritated, inside, the conflict between ‘pity’ and ‘right principles’ ”<sup>30</sup> The conflict is further examined by Osbourne as he relates an incident when his companion “indulged himself in large investments in bread ” As a result of the pressure from the many bodies attempting to reach and devour the gift of bread, Osbourne and his companion were forced to retreat and they watched the “fleshless arms grasping one part of a loaf whilst the fingers - bone handled forks - dug into the other, to supply the mouth ” Osbourne remarked, “I cannot wonder at the perseverance he displayed, he was new to Ireland, less hardened than myself”<sup>31</sup> This is an admission from Osbourne that in order to stand by the principles of political economy, there had to be a certain amount of hardening, particularly when the ‘fleshless arms’ were within sight This will be central to my argument later on in the thesis

The ethnographic differences between the Irish and the English were vast The British administration learned to turn deaf ears to the marked language of the Irish lower classes, just as Osbourne admitted that he had become ‘hardened ’ Even though many bilingual Irish had the ability to shift metaphorically from Irish to English to try to have their needs met, the marked sound of their accent and other markers of ‘inferiority’

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<sup>30</sup> Margaret Kelleher, *The Feminization of Famine*, 28-29

hindered style shifting. Language sounds indicate culture and class. The beliefs about the Irish culture being lazy and slovenly were bound up with individuals using the language or sounds of that speech community. If an individual could not shed the evidence of his or her natural born speech community, they would reside within that class and receive the treatment of that class for their entire life. The Irish of the famine did not have the resources necessary to avoid this prejudice. For example, observations made in the *Nation* on 29 March 1847 give an indication of the marked linguistic differences of the classes. The author laments that “the most doleful of all sights and sounds is to hear and see starving women and children attempting to sing for alms.”<sup>32</sup> This attempt at a vocal plea for charity would sometimes evoke a sense of compassion and other times evoke a sense of disdain or prejudice.

#### SECTION 3.3.5 - SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF FAMINE COMMUNICATION

It has been shown then, that language not only provides a method of communication between humans, but also gives glimpses into the life-history of the communicator. One of the largest sources of evidence is found in the letters of emigrants, sent back to their families. These are not representative of the entire sample, because typically those who emigrated had slightly more money than their neighbours and possibly more education. Regardless, an unfettered longing for Ireland and all that was Irish is visible in the letters. Kerby Miller, the author of *Emigrants and Exiles*, studied over 5,000 letters and memoirs written by Irish emigrants. His central thesis revolved around Irish-American homesickness, and he captures well the sentiments expressed by one emigrant,

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<sup>31</sup> Sidney Osbourne, *Gleanings in the West of Ireland*, 79.



“I wish I ner came to new york it is a hell upon erth I cannot get no rest thinking of home”<sup>33</sup> Another theme emerges in the three letters that are reprinted in Peter Gray’s *The Irish Famine* The desire or thankfulness of ‘good health’ is expressed in each of the letters In a time when so many were dying, being in good health was of utmost importance<sup>34</sup>

Letters from emigrants, however, were scripted in informal language, directed towards family members There was no need to employ formal language when writing to members of one’s own family, however, style shifting from low to high is seen clearly in the records of the letters received by the Relief Commission Letters trying to attain aid from the administration metaphorically shift to achieve their purpose “To His Excellency William B Heytesbury, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland - May it please your Excellency,”<sup>35</sup> is an example of the greeting used by a doctor in Philipstown An anonymous citizen from Cork writes, “It is well to guard your Excellency from being induced to allow the decomposed bad potato into any species of manufacture for human sustenance, it would if allowed, bring disease and pestilence amongst the people, they are badly enough off without trying experiments on their stomachs which this farina biscuit or flour would not fail to destroy”<sup>36</sup> And, William Cockburn, “an extensive practical Farmer for over this twenty years” filled the entire first half-page of his letter with formalities and

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<sup>32</sup> The *Nation*, 29 March 1847, Cited by Brendan O Cathaoir, “Famine Diary,” *The Irish Times*, (29 March 1997) 4

<sup>33</sup> Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles* (New York & Oxford Oxford University Press, 1985) 4-5

<sup>34</sup> Peter Gray, *The Irish Famine*, 150-51 Letters by Bryan Clancy and sister, Catherine Hennagan, and One [Eoin] Boyle

<sup>35</sup> John W Cowell, MD, Letter to Heytesbury, 27 October 1845, RLFC 2/Z14520, NA

<sup>36</sup> Anonymous letter from “A Citizen of Cork” to Heytesbury, 30 October 1845, RLFC 2/Z14888, NA

embellishments, honouring the office of the Lord Lieutenant, before he got to his purpose in writing the letter. Cockburn was aware that by shifting his language choice, he would have a more likely chance of making his voice heard. It is interesting to note that in this letter, he writes, "I am glad to hear Her Majesty's Government have [decreed that] the exportation of Oats from this Country will be suspended for a time - and the distillation of whisky." He writes so matter-of-factly, as if this had become policy, when in truth neither were the case. He somewhat provides the explanation for his belief that exportation and distillation were to cease when he writes, "There are so many opinions going forth to the public by newspapers."<sup>37</sup> Although Cockburn's assumptions were incorrect, his decision to utilise as formal language as possible was wise.

The participants in famine communication who spoke Irish were required to code switch from their native tongue to English because Britain's administration was in power and it operated only in English. This was among the most prominent hindrances to effective communication throughout the course of famine events. One of the few examples of a code switch from English to Irish is found in the form of a small poster that was printed and distributed among Irish speaking farmers in County Cork in order to assist them in pitting their potatoes in the hope of saving them from complete destruction. It was discovered that the recommended method of sealing the pits was not proving successful in preserving the potatoes from the fungus, therefore, Reverend Robert Traill developed a method of pitting the potatoes that seemed to be more successful. Traill advocated ventilation in order that the potatoes could become dry, hard, and free from the blight. The Board of Guardians of the Bandon Union fully endorsed Traill's new pits and printed a

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<sup>37</sup> William Cockburn, Letter to Pennefather, 7 November 1845, RLFC 2/Z15316, NA

large poster to inform farmers about the new method. This poster was in English only. However, a smaller poster with a portion of the same text regarding the pit construction was printed side by side with its Irish translation and can be seen on the following page. Reverend Traill had earlier tried to convince the government to encourage the rest of the country to convert their pits to a ventilated system, but the draft response written by Richard Pennefather informed Reverend Traill that “however much His Excellency may appreciate his exertions to preserve the Potato Crop from decay in the neighbourhood in which he resides,” the approval would not be given “to the plan proposed by him of remaking the Potato Pits throughout the Country”<sup>38</sup>. Since the government chose not to follow the suggestions of Reverend Traill written by his own hand, the Earl of Bandon used what status he had to advocate the use of Traill’s pitting method. The Earl wrote in his letter to the government, “I take the liberty to enclose an Extract from a Letter of Rev Dr Traill which has been translated into Irish and has been found useful in this Neighborhood and in the West of the County. The Printer’s name is written on one of the Copies, in the event of the Scheme being thought useful”<sup>39</sup>. There is little, if any, evidence to indicate that the poster in Irish was used by the government. Regardless of whether or not the government favoured this scheme, the very lack of posters or bulletins printed in Irish indicates another failure of the government to produce effective cross cultural communication.

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<sup>38</sup> Richard Pennefather, Draft Response, Original letter from Reverend Traill written 22 November 1845, RLFC 2/Z16434, NA

<sup>39</sup> Earl of Bandon to the office of the Lord Lieutenant, 4 December 1845, RLFC 2/Z17206, NA

Figure 3 3  
Poster in the Irish and English Languages

RLC 2/2 17206

3.11.17206

Doimne don lreir fion Seagairle 'ran lreir

Cum cunghnam a tabairt don hujib a mbeiz ciorrac cum na llaam a cuir ari an obair, tairbeahead me fionm na bpoll mar d'ordheag a mbeiz deanta, 7 b-fionm 30 mbeiz an pice-tuirtre fionm uirbeaiz doib —

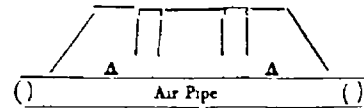


Tos ionad cuirim fceairmijl don bpoll An fion dean poll-gaoice leatam 30 leon, ari banna na talman, a bfoim cuirtre 30 fionm no abfoim linteire, le geard cuirtre naon noiluzge no cuirtre ari leatam 7 ar doimnead, 7 le cuir mion cloc ari a bceairna ari. Tairbeiz an cuirtre no an linteire ari fad an poill 7 fag 30 fionm 'na da ceann e, ionm 30 ngeadac an 30c cuirtre 30 cuirtre. Cum na 30c a 30c ari fionm fionm (an nio 17 fionm nioceadac), dean poill-gaoice a bceadac an poill a m-ballaiz 30 fionm a b-fad o ceile. An uirle an cuirtre fionm deant an poill, a3 tabairt ari ari poill 30c o fionm a3 an banna, cum an 30c a linteire amac 17 uirle e fo a deantam le fionm a cuirtre cuirtre fionm fionm

An aon focal 30c an 30c 30c fionm fionm an b poill, 7 bion fionm ealuzge ari ari a banna An a fionm fo cuirtre fionm an poill an b-fionm, cuirtre fionm 30 cuirtre o ceile e, 7 fionm fionm na potatad ari a fionm 30 fionm fionm fionm, 7 ari fionm. Du fionm fionm fionm e le mo pollaiz fionm. An meiz do cuirtre fionm poill ari fionm 7 bion fionm fionm ari fionm, 7 do cuirtre an cuirtre fionm fionm fionm fionm le fionm na cuirtre, a b-fionm na fionm na potatad ari fionm 7 fionm

Extract from the Letter of a "Western Rector"

To assist all who may be desirous to lay their hands to the work, I shall describe the pits as I have directed them to be formed, and perhaps the subjoined diagram may aid them —



Let a dry and airy site be chosen for the pit, then let an air pipe or funnel be made, of tolerable width, either on the surface of the ground, in form of a French drain, or in that of a lintern, by cutting a trench nine inches or a foot in depth and breadth, and laying stones loosely across it, and let this funnel be carried the whole intended length of the pit, and left open at both ends, freely to admit the air. To render the ventilation—and ventilation is the great desideratum—still more complete, let air-holes be made in the sides of the pit, at moderate distances

Over this frame-work let the pit be constructed, care being taken to leave valves or air holes at the top, which may be done by the simple process of a sod turned round the handle of a spade, to permit the escape of the heated air. In a word, *let the air pass freely underneath the pit, and allow it an easy escape above*. Thus will the pit be kept cool—the progress of fermentation effectually checked—and the Potato, even though diseased, preserved. I found it so with my own pits. The Potato, which was put in diseased and soft, came out dry and hard, and the affected part came off by a touch of the nail like a dry scab, leaving the Potato dry and healed beneath it.

Goodman son & Holbrook  
19 Bulwer Street  
Dublin

In Niall Ó Ciosain's recent study of Ireland's print and popular culture from 1750 to 1850, he notes the magnitude of the famine by explaining that "for the majority of the rural population in Ireland, the period from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century can be treated as a single, fairly coherent, unit. It ends with the Famine of the late 1840's, probably the great cultural break in modern Irish history."<sup>40</sup> He notes that this time period "was overwhelmingly an English-language print literature," yet in terms of the spoken word, Irish was more prevalent than English. "In 1750, Irish was the language of the majority of the population, and the absolute number of Irish speakers continued to increase until the 1840's."<sup>41</sup> Ó Ciosain reinforces the arguments made in this chapter and includes the divide of religion which will be discussed shortly by his observation that

Alongside the religious divide was the other great cultural divide, that of language. Ireland was at all points between 1750 and 1850, an intensely bilingual and diglossic society. English was the language of the elite, the state, law and print. Its economic and social benefits were clear, and by the late nineteenth century, Ireland had undergone one of the most rapid and total language shifts in modern European history.<sup>42</sup>

The linguistic situation in Ireland can be closely compared with the parallel situation that has occurred in Greece. Also a diglossic nation, Anna Frangoudaki reveals, "As has always been the case in the history of Greek diglossia, the language question has only a secondary relation to language itself. The conflict over language in the earlier part of this century has been the expression of various discontents, of conflicts among differing

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<sup>40</sup> Niall Ó Ciosain, *Print and Popular Culture in Ireland, 1750 - 1850* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press LTD and New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1997) 2

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 154

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 6

political, social, and ideological interests<sup>43</sup> This list appears to be identical to the list of the different cultural motivations for Ireland and England A further comparison between Ireland and Greece is found in the restoration of the traditional language

Identification of the Greek rebels with their ancient ancestors had been a powerful foreign policy instrument during the war of independence and it greatly assisted the construction of a Greek national identity once a state was established Revival of the 'ancestors' language' was thus conceived as the principal means for making the members of the community define themselves as Greeks<sup>44</sup>

The intuition of Douglas Hyde and other members of Conradh na Gaeilge was not specific only to Ireland It is apparent that the role that the Irish and Greek languages played was crucial to the energies that resulted in both successful wars of independence Language assists in the formation of identity There is more to language than letters or sounds that make up words

in all languages words have their overtones and undertones, shades of meaning, hints of hidden depths, rich associations, all of which are almost indefinitely variable from person to person while leaving the basic meaning essentially unchanged<sup>45</sup>

Thus, despite the havoc brought on the Irish language and culture by the famine, it is clear that the more energy expended in reclaiming the Irish language, the more validity and power will be given to the culture that was denigrated by British contemporaries and those who saw Britain as the exemplar of civilisation Ireland is now being encouraged to be a bilingual society by claiming their language as their own in everyday life and in the

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<sup>43</sup> Anna Frangoudaki, "Diglossia and the Present Language Situation in Greece A Sociological Approach to the Interpretation of Diglossia and some Hypotheses on Today's Linguistic Reality," *Language in Society*, Vol 21/Number 3/September 1992 (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1992)375

<sup>44</sup> Ibid , 367

<sup>45</sup> Rev Martin Brennan, "Language, Personality and the Nation," *A View of the Irish Language*, 71

business world, and it is now no longer the case that 'Irish' is seen as incompatible with cultural vitality or, indeed, economic efficiency. In this way, this country is permitted in a limited sense to time travel more than one hundred and fifty years back and bring forward the positive aspects of a heritage long past.

### SECTION 3.4 – THE BREACH BETWEEN CULTURES

Culture is used here as the single word that encompasses the many manifestations of individual identity, or communities' 'whole way of life'.<sup>46</sup> The individual identities and the ways of life in the communities of Ireland and Britain had many differences. In *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, Terry Eagleton contrasts Irish and English society by pointing to the ineradicable overlay of culture on even perceptions of nature and the material landscape.

Nature in Ireland is moralized and sexualized – it would appear on the whole less an object of aesthetic perception than in England, and one reason for this is not hard to find. It is that Nature in Ireland is too stubbornly social and material a category, too much a matter of rent, conacre, pigs and potatoes for it to be distanced, stylized and subjectivated in quite this way.<sup>47</sup>

The next three sub-sections confront several of the prominent cultural barriers between the Irish and English people.

#### SECTION 3.4.1 - PRE-FAMINE TENSION: 1815 TO 1845

Though the chasm between the colonised peasants and the colonising gentry has always been wide, there existed to some extent a kind of political detente or goodwill. The

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<sup>46</sup> For additional clarification, see Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Glasgow: William Collins Sons, 1997) 76-82.

<sup>47</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (London & New York: Verso, 1995) 7-8.

bridge has sometimes been referred to as the 'moral economy'<sup>48</sup> A moral economy has more protective mechanisms against hunger than does the more abstract system of political economy Within a moral economy, a sense of protection is given from the landlord to the tenant, and in turn, fondness, deference, and respect are given from the tenant to the landlord As was mentioned in chapter two, Desmond McCabe asserts that within Mayo, this exchange between the rich and the poor lasted for a longer period of time than in many other parts of Ireland This section concentrates on the first half of the nineteenth century, when the moral economy collapsed into a subsistence economy even within County Mayo

In the *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape*, we see an interesting and variegated picture of Ireland in the early nineteenth century In a brief sentence, Kevin Whelan captures the nature of the collapse of moral economy "The older mosaic of lordships with their protective canopy of kinship was shattered by the centralising state, to be reconstituted as a commercial system of landed estates"<sup>49</sup> Whelan deals with a much larger portion of history than will be dealt with here, but he describes well the year in which this section begins its study He prefaces the year 1815 by describing the years from 1760 to 1815 as a 'golden age' for both the potato and the Irish poor The age of abundance ended abruptly and the poor suffered immensely for decades Whelan explains

That golden age ended in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, when a sharp depression bit into the area Agricultural prices halved, the fickle herring deserted the west coast, the linen industry was dislocated by factory-based spinning and weaving - a succession of hammer blows, accentuated by a series of wet summers and bad harvests The combination of a distressed proto-industrial sector and a volatile agricultural situation

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<sup>48</sup> E P Thompson, *Customs in Common*, chapters four and five

<sup>49</sup> F H A Aalen, Kevin Whelan, Matthew Stout, eds *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997) 68



swelled a shifting underclass in Irish society in the immediate pre-famine years<sup>50</sup>

The 'shifting' Irish underclass was not only burdened during the decade of the Great Famine, they also were forced to endure the traumas of the three preceding decades. The late 1840's were not the only years in which the potato crop failed. The early 1830's brought fairly widespread calamity and other years could have generously been described as 'lean'. Yet for this section, the most crucial implication of these hardships is the effect they had on the relationship between the peasants and the landowners. The people were just barely subsisting, but not receiving any emotional or practical compensation from their landlords. Had they felt a measure of protection from those to whom they were relinquishing rent, they may have maintained the gentry/peasant interdependency described by McCabe for a longer period of time. Yet McCabe concedes that even though the payment of rent sometimes meant risking starvation, the landlords "never openly admitted that the rent demanded on an estate was unfair."<sup>51</sup> The nature of the subsistence economy that persisted from 1815 to 1845 was that the rent must be paid by the 'cash crop,' the sale of a pig, or by some other means, while the family existed on any potatoes that were successfully harvested. However, "the periodic coincidence of a plentiful oat crop with a blighted crop of potatoes made for a cruel paradox: though the rent was paid largely by the sale of oats for export to Liverpool, Glasgow or Ulster, the small tenant could do little but pray for charity to escape starvation. Naturally, the western peasantry, unconsolated by the

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 88-89. For additional information, see also Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty*, 359.

<sup>51</sup> Desmond McCabe, "Social Order and the Ghost of Moral Economy in Pre-Famine Mayo," *A Various Country*, 97.

dictums of the political economists of their day, looked upon this economic trap with bewildered horror ”<sup>52</sup>

There were many theories that attempted to explain this ‘economic trap,’ but two were widespread. Both theories have been mentioned already, but here they will be discussed in light of their use to explain the subsistence economy. The first theory laid the blame upon the moral character of the peasantry and the second theory laid the blame upon the landlords.<sup>53</sup>

Of the many different perceptions of the Irish people, one that carried considerable influence was the image of idleness. It was thought by many, particularly associated with the colonial administration, that the cause of Ireland’s squalor was the laziness of her people. In testimony given to a committee of the House of Lords in June of 1847, Reverend H. Montgomery described his observations in the counties of Roscommon, Galway, and Clare. He related the following statements:

there were tens of thousands of people who appeared to be entirely idle, their fields overgrown with weeds, their houses in a state of ruin, their persons foul and wretched, and altogether in a state of destitution which I did not believe existed in any portion of the world. The idleness appeared to be universal, I saw scarcely any man working. The fields were overgrown with weeds. You might know a potato-garden by seeing a green leaf occasionally appearing amidst luxuriant weeds.”<sup>54</sup>

In an attempt to answer the cause of Irish idleness, an anonymous pamphlet published in 1847 correlated the subsistence economy on the potato with the character of laziness that some associated with the Irish people. This pamphlet took the form of a

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid , 91

<sup>53</sup> Though some of the pieces of evidence that validate the two theories were written after 1845, they are still in reference to the social structure that preceded the first year of the blight.

catechism, in which one interlocutor asked the questions and the other answered them. An important question was, “By what infatuation then did the Irish people choose to subsist on a food which you say was always a precarious crop, which stinted them in some degree for a part of every year, and which was incapable of being stored against a time of famine?”<sup>55</sup> The answer provided was that “no other crop produces such an abundance of food on the same small extent of ground - requires so little skill and labour, either to rear it or prepare it for food - and leaves so large a portion of the labourer’s time unoccupied.” In the opinion of the respondent answering the questions, the potato crop “fosters from earliest childhood, habits of indolence, improvidence, and waste.”<sup>56</sup> This view that lays the blame of the subsistence economy at the feet of the indolent Irish, also tended to be incorporated with the belief that the blight would produce ultimate good. The writer encourages, “the Potato blight, though sore and heart-rending were the misery and desolation it occasioned, yet has been to Ireland a blessing in its result. It has compelled us to have recourse for our subsistence, to crops requiring labor[sic], energy, and forethought.”<sup>57</sup> Yet the anonymous authors who published the pamphlet did acknowledge that “in every part of the world except at home, Irishmen show they can both work with energy and lay by with forethought!” To this end, they credit the discrepancy in character to the fact that the subsistence of the Irish emigrants is no longer furnished by the potato crop which encourages such idleness.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Reverend H. Montgomery. Evidence taken by the Lord’s Committee on Colonisation from Ireland, 18 June 1847. As quoted in Nassau Senior, *Journals*, 216.

<sup>55</sup> *The Potato Blight Famine: Questions and Replies between Two Travellers, on its Causes and Results, Edited by One of Them* (Dublin: Thomas Webb, 1847) 3.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

Yet an examination of other nineteenth century writers reveals that the aforementioned explanation may not be so simple. For example, Spencer Hall, who travelled throughout Ireland, was convinced by the evidence he had seen that the widely held belief that the Irish were a lazy race was absolutely false. He described one young Irish woman who walked nine or ten miles each day to sell milk for a profit ranging from three-halfpence to threepence and a half-penny. He continued his argument by insisting, “I have known many instances in which as much labour as the above has been performed for as little pay, and that willingly. There is one question which all those who charge the Irish with idleness ought to solve or be silent, -viz - *how is it that they work so hard everywhere but at home?*”<sup>59</sup> The Irish people who have emigrated or who were going to emigrate are given a voice to answer this question themselves in a publication by James Tuke, another traveller throughout Ireland and America. Mr. Tuke wrote

I have asked of the emigrant Irish farmers in America, why he did not toil at home, from ‘sunrise to sun-down’ as he does there, and I have asked the emigrant about to leave his native shore for the unknown west, why he did not employ his little capital and labour in improving the land of Ireland? The answer invariable has been that they would do so, if they had land at a fair rent, and leases which would enable them to enjoy with certainty the fruits of their labour. The small farmers of Ireland are, too generally, rack-rented tenants at will, and have no confidence in the justice or mercy of those who have the land in charge.<sup>60</sup>

The discussion then logically turns to the second widespread explanation of the Irish subsistence economy that was at the root of Ireland’s pre-famine social structure. This was the belief that the landlords were at fault. Depending on the locality, some peasants were quick to place their allegiance in this belief. Yet as the collapse of the moral economy in

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<sup>59</sup> Spencer T. Hall, *Life and Death in Ireland, as Witnessed in 1849*, 24

Ireland spanned from the 1790's to the 1830's, the adoption of this belief greatly depended upon when the peasants experienced the change in economy. However, it was not, as might be thought, only the peasantry that subscribed to this idea.

On 7 June 1835, Nassau Senior and John Revans had a conversation regarding the relationship between landlord and peasant in Ireland. The economist Nassau Senior had been appointed in 1832 to the Royal Commission dealing with the English Poor Law. Mr Revans had been appointed as secretary to the same commission and was also assigned the task of investigating the condition of the poorer classes of Ireland. This employment meant that Mr Revans was 'one of the best informed men in England about the social conditions in Ireland'.<sup>61</sup> Mr Senior's question and the response given by Mr Revans provides an accurate formulation of the second theory behind Ireland's subsistence economy.

Q To what do you principally attribute the poverty of Ireland?

A To a landlord system that profits from the intense competition of laborers to exact from the farmers an excessive rent. From the moment a farmer begins to make a profit, the landlord raises the price of the lease. The result is that the farmer is afraid to make improvements, for fear of being taxed by his master for a much higher sum than his improvement would be worth to him, and he confines himself strictly to subsisting.<sup>62</sup>

What is perhaps even more telling is a note written by Alexis de Tocqueville at the end of Revans' response. He writes, "This difficulty arises everywhere when the landlord and the

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<sup>60</sup> James Tuke, *A Visit to Connaught in the Autumn of 1847* (London: Charles Gilpin and York: John L. Linney, 1847) 14.

<sup>61</sup> Emmet Larkin, ed. *Notes of the conversation between Senior and Revans*. Cited in *Alexis de Tocqueville's Journey in Ireland, July - August, 1835* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1990) 19-20.

<sup>62</sup> Nassau Senior and John Revans, 7 June 1835. Cited in *Alexis de Tocqueville's Journey in Ireland*, 19.

farmer treat each other as strangers ”<sup>63</sup> In the pre-existing social structure of a moral economy, the landlord gave protection and paternalism and the tenant responded with service and deference Though the social chasm was wide, the groups were far from being strangers Yet as this system passed away, the peasant was still required to pay his rent but received no protection in exchange Desmond McCabe’s detailed tracking of the fall of the moral economy in Mayo reveals that in the primary decades of change, the 1820’s and 1830’s, the “landowners never relinquished the phraseology of the ‘moral economy’, though their actions changed ” The price of rent was never publicly declared unfair and an insight to the growing callousness of landlords is evident in the attitude of Sir Samuel O’Malley

though telling the poor law commissioners in June 1835 that he was shocked at the idea of strangers ousting long-established tenants from any estate by offering more competitive rents - ‘as far as I am concerned I have never let except to the old tenant’ - declared at Westport petty sessions four months later that ‘a tenant has nothing to do but pay his rent’<sup>64</sup>

For indeed, although absenteeism was proclaimed an irreproachable evil in nineteenth century Ireland, Thomas Boylan and Timothy Foley propose that the real evil lay in the estranged relationship between landlord and tenant as evidenced in the previous example

absenteeism might not have been injurious to Ireland, but the real evil was that the landlord was encouraged to treat land as merchandise, and to regard the relation between himself and his tenantry as ‘little more than that between a buyer and a seller The old connection was of a more social nature, and brought with it a most beneficial influence on all parties ’ The old philanthropy and charity were gone<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, Notes handwritten into original manuscript Cited in *Alexis de Tocqueville’s Journey in Ireland*, 19

<sup>64</sup> Desmond McCabe, “Social Order and the Ghost of Moral Economy in Pre-Famine Mayo,” *A Various Country* 97

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Boylan and Timothy Foley, *Political Economy and Colonial Ireland*, 120 Additional reference J E Bicheno, *Ireland and its Economy* (London, 1830) 275, 289, 266, 300, 301

The ‘old philanthropy and charity’ or the ‘older mosaic of lordships with their protective canopy of kinship’ described by Whelan had disappeared from Ireland during the years that followed the cessation of the Napoleonic wars and preceded the famine. Regardless of whether the blame was truly with the peasants or truly with the landlords, the social structure lacked the previous sense of consensus it had practised. This state of social animosity was the setting in which the potato blight commenced.

### SECTION 3.4.2 – BREAKDOWN OF ‘CULTURAL DÉTENTE’

The survivors. Who were they? How did they manage? What is their story? This section will proceed to answer these questions and explore the realities that faced the Irish individual in the years during and after the famine. It can be argued that the poorer classes of Ireland had little chance of experiencing prosperity unless they emigrated. The lifestyle and ideas that characterised the Irish tenant, and the mass of the population dependent on the potato, was of contented subsistence. There was no incentive to become more ‘socially advanced’ or to become more like England. If there was sufficient food to be had, the people had learned to be content.

In *Letters from the Irish Highlands of Connemara* Henry Blake wrote

If they have turf enough and potatoes enough, they reckon themselves provided for, if a few herrings, a little oatmeal and above all, the milk of a cow can be added, they are rich, they can enjoy themselves and dance with a light heart.<sup>66</sup>

It may be too strong to term the people as ‘rich,’ but the point of Blake’s observation is that the people could still get fulfilment out of their frugal existence. The rural Irish knew

how to band together to look after one another in times of distress Seán O Domhnaill, born m 1873, recalls what he was told by his elders about pre-famine Ireland

The typical local farmer held no more than ten Irish acres Many held much smaller places However, owing to this poverty he found it difficult to till his wheat, oats or potato plot He often got help from his neighbours, a fact which gave rise to the now well-known word 'meitheal' [communal work party]<sup>67</sup>

This paints a more grim picture, but the key to Irish farming success was their ability to work together and support one another The main source of discontentment in the Irish poor emerged from their subjugation to the dominant multi-layered power structure This power structure was in the form of the British administration, the landlord, and the class inequalities that existed among the occupiers of Ireland itself Sean O Duinnshleibhe, another contributor to *Famine Echoes*, said,

The farmers<sup>68</sup> as a whole were contented Their only enemy was the landlord or his agent for, when the gale day came about, the rent was demanded and in some cases there was distress and afterwards evictions<sup>69</sup>

After generations of living and working on someone else's land, the Irish poor became resigned to their way of life, even if they didn't approve of the landlord or his methods In fact, the populace was so accustomed to the landlord system of agriculture that at a Land League meeting in Castlebar, a distressed farmer in the crowd was heard to ask who he

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<sup>66</sup> Henry Blake, *Letters from the Irish Highlands of Connemara*, 251 As quoted in Marie Bourke, "Rural Life in Pre-Famine Connacht A Visual Document," *Ireland Art into History*, eds Gillespie & Kennedy (Dublin Town House, 1994) 61

<sup>67</sup> Sean O Domhnaill, Recorded in *Famine Echoes*, ed Cathal Poirteir (Dublin Gill & Macmillan, 1995) 21

<sup>68</sup> Certainly the plight of cottiers and labourers may be considered more dire than that of the landed farmer, but Desmond McCabe contends, "While social differences did exist, partnership farming made for a unique bonding within the village " Desmond McCabe, "Social Order and the Ghost of Moral Economy," *A Various Country*, 95

<sup>69</sup> Sean O Duinnshleibhe, Recorded in *Famine Echoes*, ed Cathal Poirteir, 25



would pay his rents to if landlordism was abolished<sup>70</sup> The suppressed, dominated, potato-dependent farmers were in unconscious generational bondage to those in power over them Therefore, when the blight struck in 1845, it was consistent with the established ideology of the farmer to look to his landlord for relief, rather than taking a defiant stance against the dominant system This does not imply that everyone went along willingly on their road to starvation, but, as is continually demonstrated throughout this thesis, they did not have the tools of communication available to them to make their voices and needs heard

The atrocities that occurred in Ireland in the 1840 s caused a loss of the pre-famine communal spirit In one account derived from oral tradition, a woman from Donegal describes a post-famine people “who became preoccupied with the struggle to survive and lost their sympathy for each other”<sup>71</sup>

It didn't matter who was related to you, your friend was whoever would give you a bite to put in your mouth Sport and pastimes disappeared Poetry, music and dancing stopped They lost and forgot them all and when the times improved in other respects, these things never returned as they had been The famine killed everything<sup>72</sup>

Also when the Irish people became aware that by assisting one of their fellow countrymen or countrywomen, they could unknowingly be infected with a terminal disease, their response is not surprising “Through fear of ‘road-fever’ many of them abandoned their ancient custom of never denying to the poorest wayfarer whatever shelter and hospitality they had to offer”<sup>73</sup> Not only was it found dangerous to be in the presence of a living individual infected by disease, it was also discovered by the Irish people that it was

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<sup>70</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (London & New York: Verso 1995)  
<sup>31</sup> As noted from Michael Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland* (London & New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1904) 164

<sup>71</sup> Roger J. McHugh, “The Famine in Irish Oral Tradition,” *The Great Famine*, 434

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 434-435

dangerous to be in the presence of a deceased infected individual “Through fear of infection the ceremonies which traditionally preceded burial were stopped”<sup>74</sup> The traditional ‘wake’ in which the loved one was sent into the afterlife by a gathering of all his or her friends and neighbours was disrupted during the famine. Although the tradition was by no means abandoned completely in post-famine life, the influence of this custom lost its high level of significance in Irish culture.

In addition to these cultural effects, the relationship between farmers and paid labourers was to forever be changed by the famine. Also, the famine stripped from Ireland all manner of skilled labourers.

the traditional relationship between farmers and their bound labourers was thoroughly disrupted. Under the customary system such labourers had been willing to give work in exchange for a patch of potato ground, a cabin, and a few so-called privileges. But as soon as blight blasted their potato gardens, money wages (at higher rates than usual) became absolutely essential if they were to avoid starvation. The widespread refusal of farmers to make cash payments compelled the labourers to surrender their plots and to flee to the public works or, as a last resort, to the workhouses.<sup>75</sup>

This change in Irish economy had direct influence over the identity of the workers. With the necessity of abandoning the traditional farmer/labourer roles, individuals no longer had security in their perceived identities. This disrupted working relationship was joined by the destruction of many skilled labourers as well. As a first hand account of this destruction puts it:

There was no trade in the world then but some man of Beltany could try it - the best weavers in the country were there, there were masons, carpenters, coopers, thatchers and every kind of tradesman you could name in this townland, and after the famine years neither tale nor tidings of them was to

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<sup>73</sup> Sir William MacArthur, “Medical History of the Famine,” *The Great Famine*, 305

<sup>74</sup> Ibid

<sup>75</sup> James Donnelly, “Production, Prices, and Exports, 1846 - 51,” *A New History of Ireland, V*, 287

be found They all went into strange and distant lands and never returned since the ruins of their houses were there until the land was divided and they were cleared and fences made of stones, leaving no trace of them to be seen now<sup>76</sup>

This account was translated from the Irish language making the first phrase slightly oblique in English The witness was remembering that before the famine, there was no trade in the world that was not performed in Beltany After the famine, the skilled workers were no longer there

Within a discussion devoted to identity, it makes little difference whether the changes can be labelled as positive or negative Different individuals will label each change differently as a result of their perceived morality and worldview Many scholars today, however, would argue that the loss of skilled labour was a negative change in Ireland, but the loss of the cultural reliance on what is perceived as superstition is seen as positive R F Foster writes

Contemporaries noticed the abandonment of magical practices in rural life from the late 1840s It is possible that the trauma of the Famine helped destroy the psychological reliance on magical practices to 'control' patterns of crop yields, subsistence and disease, though it is impossible to arrive at a mechanical theory about it<sup>77</sup>

Regardless of these changes' positive or negative effects, they are yet another indication of the power that the famine of the 1840's had in changing the beliefs and practices of the Irish people

In summary, during the dark years of the famine, the people of Ireland were forced to turn their backs on poor wayfarers in order to have a chance at survival themselves Wakes were discontinued during the famine as people realised that they could become

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<sup>76</sup> Roger J McHugh, "The Famine in Irish Oral Tradition," *The Great Famine*, 434

<sup>77</sup> R F Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600 - 1972* (London Penguin Books, 1988) 340

infected by the deceased or by the others gathered around them. The communal spirit of the people was being abandoned for the sake of survival. After the relationship between labourers and farmers was disrupted, hundreds of skilled tradesmen had vanished, and the reliance on magical practices lessened. The situation in Ireland after the famine coincides with the definition of colonialism given by Jurgen Osterhammel in his book, *Colonialism*

#### *A Theoretical Overview*

*Colonialism* is a relationship of domination between an indigenous (or forcibly imported) majority and a minority of foreign invaders. The fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonized people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers in pursuit of interests that are often defined in a distant metropolis.<sup>78</sup>

The survivors of the famine were required to re-examine their identity, because the event of the famine had been used by their colonisers to bring about cultural change.

One specific example of a townland brought to cultural ruin by forced emigration is the townland of Ballykilcline. In the 1830's, Ballykilcline was recorded as one of twenty-seven townlands in "the Roscommon Estate of Lord Hartland, the master of Strokestown House."<sup>79</sup> In 1995, Robert Scally published a detailed account of this townland in his book, *The End of the Hidden Ireland*. Using Daniel Corkery's investigation of the 'hidden Ireland' as a launching pad, Scally records the end of that era and employs Ballykilcline as his case study. He writes that "Ballykilcline is emblematic of the history of the thousands of rural townlands whose transformation or, in many cases, disintegration entered the final stage in the famine years."<sup>80</sup> Lord Hartland was not a proactive landlord. Instead of providing assistance to his tenants when they faced hardship, Hartland opted to issue

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<sup>78</sup> Jurgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997) 16-17

<sup>79</sup> Robert Scally, *The End of the Hidden Ireland*, 21

eviction notices instead. Sometimes those that had been evicted would become subtenants of those that had not been evicted yet. The townlanders had very few rights, but Scally succinctly explains why so many of them were not eager for change or emigration. He writes, “However lowly their status, the townland was a realm in which their place and identity was clear and secure”<sup>81</sup>. Therefore, the people armed themselves with what means they had available in order to gain power against the regime intent on changing their way of life. By becoming a subtenant, the landlord no longer had a record of the lease. In this way, accurate population tabulations were made extremely difficult and gave the advantage to the people. “In effect, this subculture was a method of defiance, an effort to force the landlord to deal with the townland as a collective entity rather than as the pathetically vulnerable individuals each tenant or subtenant was by himself”<sup>82</sup>. Among the greatest weapons available to the people of Ballykilcline were “secrecy, subterfuge, and deception”<sup>83</sup>. These weapons of subtle rebellion against the establishment emerge in the peasant classes after the communication relied upon under a moral economy has failed. They were not limited only to the tenants on Lord Hartland’s estate, but are among the universal ‘weapons of the weak’ that are well documented by James Scott in his book that investigates ‘everyday forms of peasant resistance’.

In this study, Scott provides a detailed case study of *Sedaka*, a pseudonym for the Malaysian village in which he resided for two years. This was a seventy household rice farming community from which many parallels can be drawn to the Irish townland, or *clachan* existence. Scott lengthens the list of weapons used by peasant farmers. He

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid , 20

<sup>81</sup> Ibid , 159

<sup>82</sup> Ibid , 16

includes sabotage, slander, foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, and arson. All of these weapons of the weak “require little or no planning, they make use of implicit understandings and informal networks, they often represent a form of individual self help, [and] they typically avoid any direct, symbolic confrontation with authority”<sup>84</sup> The members of the Ballykilcline townland employed some of these attempts at resistance, but, the severity of the famine prevailed. By April of 1848, there remained only twelve to fifteen residents of the pre-famine Ballykilcline population of more than five hundred. By May of 1848, it was recorded that four hundred and nine of those residents had emigrated at the expense of the Crown.<sup>85</sup>

Though the Crown did share in the responsibility and the expense of the Irish individuals, it treated them more as colonial subjects than as citizens. Scally argues that the nature of the communal existence in the townlands was living proof that Ireland was a colony as opposed to a member of the United Kingdom. The townlands were taxable property, but they gave no benefit of legal protection.<sup>86</sup> If this argument rings true, then the colonial pressure for advancement grew all the greater in the aftermath of the Irish Famine. It is to this pressure that the focus now shifts.

### **SECTION 3 4 3 - COLONIAL PRESSURE FOR ADVANCEMENT**

In addition to the details of Ballykilcline, Robert Scally also describes the wider barony of Ballintobber North in which Ballykilcline was located. This was an area that

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid , 83

<sup>84</sup> James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985) xvi

<sup>85</sup> Robert Scally, *The End of the Hidden Ireland*, 121, 128

<sup>86</sup> Ibid , 14

held a population of 19,370 over approximately sixty square miles<sup>87</sup> He explained that even though the survey and census reports yield little about the thoughts of the common people, they do highlight the appalling differences between the rich and the poor The colonial presence in Ireland desired to rid the country of the poor, but only by the means that those in power saw fit Upon reading excerpts such as the following, it seems that English advancement was the best remedy for the Irish poor However, it will become clear that in most circumstances the only Irish that profited in their attainment of advancement were those that took advantage of their neighbours Those that clung to the old ethos of the moral economy were betrayed by *advancement* It is important to note also that the power of advancement was given mainly to those that adopted the use of the English language As Scally contends, the comparison between the rich and the poor of Strokestown in County Roscommon became increasingly stark

Market towns like Strokestown, with their provincial amenities, petty middle classes, police barracks, schools, and shops, were fairly numerous and not widely separated Commercial travellers magistrates, factors, and peddlers ate and drank their bread and beer and conversed in English with the local notables and farmers in the licensed houses on fair days Any European would have recognized it as at least an outlying part of Europe's own civilization, hierarchical, commercial, and geometrically laid out

At the same time, visible among the market crowds, in the back lanes of the main streets or within strolling distance of the town was a world at least half apart - ragged, shoeless, and uncombed, speaking an exotic tongue, believing in miracles and charms, and surviving on a diet most thought fit only for beasts<sup>88</sup>

The pronounced sentence on those of the back streets was death or forced emigration if they did not reject their language and their devotion to the Gaelic culture Those that betrayed their own people and took advantage of their suffering stood a chance at surviving

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid , 41

and financially thriving. Just such an example was John and Owen Cox. These Catholic middlemen profited enormously from levelling cabins, renting carts and escorting emigrants to Dublin. At one point, John even received £3 as compensation for injuries that he sustained while destroying the dwellings of his neighbours. During the winter of 1847 to 1848, he earned a minimum of £110. Scally concludes that “all in all, John Cox seems to be something of a prototype of the Catholic middlemen who found opportunity rather than starvation in the great famine and joined the propertied classes of the following decades”<sup>89</sup>

On the other hand, there were many Irish that would not sacrifice themselves or their neighbours for material gain. The intended colonial advancement for Ireland was not viewed by the Irish people as salvation, but rather as affliction. *The Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape* describes the post-famine landscape change as the “clean Irish slate on which the English values could be legibly inscribed, deleting the chaotic scrawl which the Irish had scribbled all over their dishevelled landscape”<sup>90</sup>. The erasure of the ‘chaotic scrawl’ is reproduced visually by charting one hundred and fifty years of rural landscape change from 1750 to 1900. A simplified reproduction of the changes between 1840 and 1900 is the most applicable to the present study. In one area in 1840, two nearby townlands existed as rundale settlements. Perhaps a more accurate title even than townland is *baile* or *clachan*, as they indicate the pre-famine communal lifestyle even more acutely than townland.<sup>91</sup> By 1870, one complete *baile* had been abandoned and nine of the

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 74

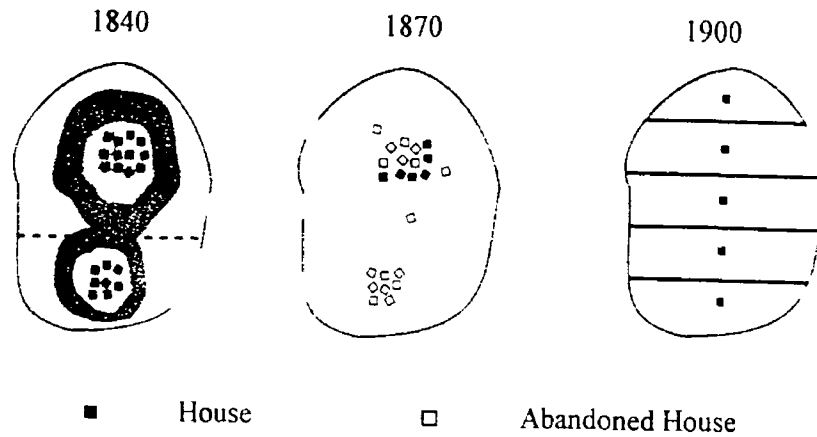
<sup>90</sup> F H A Aalen, Kevin Whelan, Matthew Stout, eds *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape*, 90

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 80



fifteen houses in the larger settlement had also been abandoned. The final frame of the figure represents the organised ‘ladder’ farms proving that to some degree, the ‘legibly inscribed’ English agricultural methods achieved dominance.

**Figure 3.4**  
**Changes in Rural Landscape<sup>92</sup>**



A key item in a study of human communication and culture is the response of the individuals who were faced with these changes in their landscape. In her book *Feminization of the Famine*, Margaret Kelleher highlights the underlying response of the Irish to the colonisation by the English, by analysing the novel *Castle Daly* and the response in the original reviews when the book was published. The novel “portrays late 1840’s Ireland as a time of conflict between new systems of reform and an older, more feudal order.”<sup>93</sup> One of the reviewers printed a revealing insight into the uphill battle that England faced in her attempt to bring ‘progress’ to her neighbouring island. The article in *Graphic* explains that English “justice and generosity miss their effect by being, half unconsciously, accompanied by a certain contempt and want of sympathy, which a

<sup>92</sup> A portion of Figure 33 of F. H. A. Aalen, Kevin Whelan, Matthew Stout, eds. *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape*, 80.

sensitive race like the Irish are quick to detect and resent”<sup>94</sup> The resentment was made all the more bitter because England attempted to bring advancement not only through economic and agricultural means, but through educational means as well

Irish culture had kept its traditions of the Irish language, history, religion, and customs alive through the use of hedge schools and roving school masters as well as wider communal and folk practices Yet this method of educating the young Irish students was not satisfactory in the minds of the Castle administration Instead the National Schools were introduced and funded in 1831 By means of education, the colonial pressure for advancement was perhaps more strongly felt than through any other factor

the ‘Irish Education Experiment,’ as the National School was called, might be seen as a renewed effort to bring the island out of its barbarism, now not through a spiritual conversion from the error of Rome as much through a conversion of mind and morals from the errors of the Gael <sup>95</sup>

Gaelic culture was to be eradicated if Ireland was to achieve progress Education was the channel through which the eradication was to be performed

Next to the church, the school was seen as the most powerful social institution for the dissemination of ‘correct’ ideas Education acted as a ‘preventive to intemperance,’ not only in the consumption of drink but in conduct in general and in language, a necessary prophylactic against Irish violence, lawlessness, indiscipline, imaginative extravagance, rhetoric, in brief, an imperial measure against Irish colonial ‘excess’<sup>96</sup>

The hedge schools were not capable of bringing about the desired social changes in Ireland because “by and large the official view was that, in contrast with ‘hedge schoolmasters,’ national teachers were moral, and politically loyal The books used in

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<sup>93</sup> Margaret Kelleher, *The Feminization of the Famine* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997) 67

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 68 As quoted from *Graphic*, 21 August 1875

<sup>95</sup> Robert Scally, *The End of the Hidden Ireland*, 154

<sup>96</sup> Thomas Boylan and Timothy Foley, *Political Economy and Colonial Ireland*, 122

hedge-schools were seen as inculcating disloyalty and irreverence for the law, consisting, according to various reports, of tales of rogues, robbers, rapparees, and loose romances ”<sup>97</sup>

By 1855, only one decade after the famine began, the inspectorate assessing the development of the schools were proud to declare that Gaelic culture was successfully being eradicated from Ireland as a result of the National School curriculum It is ironic that the following statements are actually a protest of National Education methods, because it is easy to see how this lament could be turned into a proclamation of victory P J Keenan wrote in the report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland, “We are quietly but certainly destroying the national legend, national music, and national language of the country,” and he declared that the history of Ireland was all but “entirely neglected ”<sup>98</sup> In this educational state of affairs, the Irish language was less an object of reverence than of shame and embarrassment Obviously, language was an enormous barrier to effective communication between the two cultures Unless the Irish people learned to converse in English, the breach between cultures was made insurmountable Irish children were taught in their geography lesson on the British Islands that, “The people of these islands have one and the same language (*all at least who are educated*) [italics added]”<sup>99</sup> In summary, in many instances the pressure for Ireland to become educated and advanced wiped out the small farmers and replaced them with those that found methods to profit during the years of suffering The pressure did not confine itself to economics but interfered with education as well Gaelic culture and the Irish language were both dealt a

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid , 123

<sup>98</sup> P J Keenan, *Twenty-Second Report of Commissioners of National Education in Ireland* (1855) 73, 76 As quoted in Thomas Boylan and Timothy Foley, *Political Economy and Colonial Ireland*, 124

<sup>99</sup> Robert Scally, *The End of the Hidden Ireland*, 151

very harsh blow in the post-famine years. The factor of religion in dealing with famine communication is also important, so it is to religion which the following section turns.

### SECTION 3.5 – DIVISION BETWEEN ORGANISED RELIGIONS

In his article, “Translating the Success of Irish Literature,” Laurence Cassidy rather poetically explains, “translation is the bridge across which we may pass from one culture into another culture.”<sup>100</sup> If translation is indeed the bridge that connects culture to culture, one wonders what might be employed to create a bridge from one religion to another. The island of Ireland has suffered tremendously from the divide that exists between the Catholic and the Protestant faiths. One manner in which many of the people of Ireland lost a sense of their identity as a result of organised religion was through the exchange of food, clothing, or shelter for spiritual allegiance. This has come to be referred to as ‘souponism’ and will be more fully diagnosed in chapter six, “Senders and Receivers.” Although those subscribing to the Catholic faith were quite numerous in the United Kingdom, the religion of the majority of the Irish people had the least political and economic power. Therefore, the Irish and the English fields of experience did not overlap in the arenas of language, culture, or religion. Every aspect of control belonged to the British, therefore none of the messages sent from the Irish individuals landed in a shared field of experience. The Catholic religion received its political emancipation through the efforts of Daniel O’Connell and by the repeal of the penal laws, yet it still played underdog to the Protestant religion. With the personal papers of Lord Monteagle are found observations on the three main religious parties in the United Kingdom and suggestions for

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<sup>100</sup> Laurence Cassidy, “Translating the Success of Irish Literature,” *The Arts Council*, December 1992. 1

equalising all of the parties. Whether the author of this report is Monteaule or not is uncertain, but the writer encourages, “it becomes the British legislature to endeavour to find some means of healing these animosities [between the three parties]”<sup>101</sup> The adherents of the established church are observed as the “most numerous and possess[ing] great power.” The Protestant dissenters have fewer numbers but “are formidable from their position.” Finally, the Roman Catholics are “numerically more powerful than the Protestant dissenters, but being chiefly connected in Ireland, and having but little connexion [sic] with the aristocracy of Britain, do not possess that power (or seem to possess) to which their numbers if more favorably situated would entitle them”<sup>102</sup>

After many more observations and discussions, the method of application of the proposed principles is outlined. For the established church, a few modifications would strengthen it. The duty of the clergymen should be to instruct the people. Parliament should sponsor ecclesiastical officers to monitor the proper teaching of Scripture. The tithe should be separated into maintenance for the clergy and funds to promote more religious instruction. And finally, more freedom should be given to the clergymen in their use of the liturgy. For the Protestant dissenters, public funds should be given to the ministers but certain criteria must be met. There should be a public service on Sunday of about two hours in which the Old and New Testaments would be read, prayers and singing could be incorporated, but no sacraments were to be celebrated. The principles proposed for the Roman Catholic church were virtually identical to those proposed for the Protestant

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<sup>101</sup> “Observations on the State of Religious Parties in Great Britain and Ireland and the Principles on Which the British Government Should Deal with Them,” Ms 13,359, Monteaule Papers, NLI 9

<sup>102</sup> Ibid , 1-3

dissenters<sup>103</sup> The proposals are summarised, “Such is a brief view of a system of policy, by steady perseverance in which, a vast and most beneficial change would gradually be effected in the social state of these islands, as it regards religion”<sup>104</sup>

These principles do not seem to have had a very large effect on the policies enacted by government, but they were of influence in the policy debates if nothing else. Although Lord Monteagle was not a member of the Relief Commission, he was involved in correspondence with many administrators both in Whitehall and in Dublin Castle. Therefore, the existence of these observations and principles in the papers of Lord Monteagle, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, gives some idea of the many concerns that the government was grappling with when faced with the sectarian conflicts as they existed during the famine years.

### **SECTION 3.6 – BRIDGING THE “UNDERLAP”· DANIEL O’CONNELL**

Daniel O’Connell was the major representative of what little middle ground was left in the deteriorating conditions of the 1840’s. There are many aspects of this leader that can be discussed, but for the purpose of this thesis, his political affiliation and views, and his phlegmatic attitude towards the Irish language and Gaelic culture which were mentioned briefly earlier will be focused upon. Daniel O’Connell had two principal political goals. One was to achieve Catholic Emancipation, which was achieved in 1829 by the final repeal of the Penal Laws, and the other was the repeal of the Union which did not come about in O’Connell’s lifetime. “O’Connell held as an article of faith that Ireland enjoyed unprecedented prosperity under Grattan’s Parliament, that the Union brought

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid , 44-54

economic disaster, and that only the restoration of an Irish parliament would revive prosperity”<sup>105</sup> Yet he recognised that in order to see his desires met for Ireland, he needed to operate within the British political structure and find a place of compromise. A.D. Macintyre explains in “O’Connell and British Politics” that O’Connell sought “self-government within the Empire”<sup>106</sup> He further summarises the political background of Daniel O’Connell

His early education, the influence of his family, and his position as a landlord strongly inclined him towards a paternalist and hierarchical conservatism. Yet he had become a liberal during his two years as a law student in London when he read Voltaire, Rousseau, Gibbon, Paine, Godwin and Adam Smith, and the later influence of Bentham’s utilitarianism merely gave edge and assurance to an orthodox liberalism which he maintained with passionate conviction all his life. His belief in civil and religious equality and in freedom of conscience and speech under the law naturally aligned him with the English Whigs, his faith in the laws of political economy as enunciated by Smith and refined by Ricardo was shared by Whigs, by most Radicals and by O’Connell’s chief Conservative opponent, Peel.<sup>107</sup>

Yet O’Connell’s Whig affiliation was somewhat complex. James McCord writes in “The Image in England: The Cartoons of HB” that “it has been argued that it was O’Connell who forfeited much of his power under the Whigs, choosing to collaborate with them and to defer to Whig leadership”<sup>108</sup> But at the same time, the cartoonist John Doyle who was known to his contemporaries as HB, contributed to the public image that O’Connell controlled his fellow Whig politicians

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid , 54-55

<sup>105</sup> Joseph Lee, “The Social and Economic Ideas of O’Connell,” *Daniel O’Connell Portrait of a Radical*, eds. Kevin Knowlan and Maurice O’Connell (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1984) 70

<sup>106</sup> A.D. Macintyre, “O’Connell and British Politics,” Ibid , 97

<sup>107</sup> Ibid , 90

Doyle had helped, by the mid-1830's to create a stereotype of O'Connell Through the clever and imaginative use of symbols, metaphors, and personifications, HB turned the Irish hero into a powerful, but cunning and deceptive creature whose methods gave him the upper hand over the English politicians, especially the Whigs <sup>109</sup>

Regardless, the ability of O'Connell to find necessary compromises is reflected in his decision to co-operate "with the Whig Government in the 1830's to the extent of not embarrassing them with demands for Repeal as long as they attempted the better government of Ireland" <sup>110</sup> At the beginning of the famine, O'Connell was pleased to vote his "old Tory enemy," <sup>111</sup> Sir Robert Peel, out of power and usher in the Whig representative Lord John Russell He did not, however, foresee that one million deaths and one million emigrants would be the Irish side of the compromise as a result of the famine O'Connell entered "frantic pleas for massive intervention to prevent starvation in 1846" but he still considered "large-scale government involvement as an emergency measure," <sup>112</sup> because he believed that "industrialisation offered the only long term solution to Irish poverty" and "hostile Irish opinion did not deter him from supporting free trade" <sup>113</sup> O'Connell was an advocate of market relations and modernisation He wanted to see *progress* in Ireland He was willing to make certain compromises and at a cultural level, allowing the English language to supersede the Irish language was one that he was willing to make

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<sup>108</sup> James McCord, "The Image in England The Cartoons of HB," *Daniel O'Connell Political Pioneer*, ed Maurice O'Connell (Dublin Institute of Public Administration, 1991) 66

<sup>109</sup> Ibid , 59-60

<sup>110</sup> Donal McCartney, "The Changing Image of O'Connell," *Daniel O'Connell Portrait of a Radical*, 25

<sup>111</sup> Kevin Nowlan, "O'Connell and Irish Nationalism," Ibid , 13

<sup>112</sup> Joseph Lee, "The Social and Economic Ideas of O'Connell," Ibid , 72

<sup>113</sup> Ibid , 78, 74



Daniel O'Connell was a native speaker by upbringing "This is key to much of his personality and behaviour Gaeltacht people were, and are, pragmatic, adaptable, non- or even anti-republican and entirely without sentimentality about their language and way of life"<sup>114</sup>

O'Connell's Gaelic background was Uibh Rathach (Iveragh), the mountainous and scenic peninsula that lies between Dingle Bay and Kenmare Bay What cannot be stressed too strongly is O'Connell's deep and life-long attachment to this district - not only to his native Carhen and his beloved Derryane but to the whole peninsula Throughout his life, he found relaxation and recreation there, away from the pressures of politics and the law<sup>115</sup>

Yet despite his love for the land and the people, he saw English as the language of *advance* He was accused by the leaders of the Gaelic Revival that "he had done more than any other man to kill the language, and the distinctive character of the nation"<sup>116</sup> They believed that his compromises to the English were too great Yet after the Civil War in Ireland had ended, the efforts of O'Connell were historically viewed in a more positive light He was glorified as 'O'Connell the Realist' and he was compared with Michael Collins as they were "the two grand opportunists of political action in Irish history"<sup>117</sup>

Due to the political exigencies of the day, Daniel O'Connell operated in a position of compromise between the contrasted ideologies of the Irish and the British By contrast, the members of the Young Ireland movement can be counted as exceptions, in that they typically were of a higher social class than the peasantry, but also defied the British intellectual ideologies being forced upon them On the one hand, they opposed the compromising efforts of Daniel O'Connell, and, men like John Mitchel and Charles Gavan

<sup>114</sup> John Murphy, "O'Connell and the Gaelic World," Ibid , 35

<sup>115</sup> Ibid , 33-34

<sup>116</sup> Donal McCartney, "The Changing Image of O'Connell," Ibid , 27

Duffy used the power of the pen to remove the 'hero' status that O'Connell the Liberator had acquired. After Duffy had finished writing about O'Connell, his "portrait could never be seen again without a search for serious blemishes in his character and politics"<sup>118</sup> Yet on the other hand, Duffy chose to make compromises himself and was "knighted for his services to the British Empire. O'Connell at least, had always remained plain Daniel, while his very skilful critic had meanwhile become Sir Charles"<sup>119</sup> Human interaction creates difficult motives and rationales to justify behaviour. Daniel O'Connell and the Young Irelanders provide such an example. The life of O'Connell yields many more items of discussion than have been presented here, but the existence of an ideological middle ground has been addressed. The next section logs one very telling series of communicative efforts into the field of experience model.

### **SECTION 3.7 – ACHILL ISLAND COMMUNICATION DELEGATION**

A specific and revealing communication dilemma occurred regarding Achill Island, County Mayo when Father Monahan led a delegation from Achill to request that food be sold at a lower price as the people could not afford the present prices. In the previous year, corn had been sold at a reduced rate to keep the market subdued, but Randolph Routh, the head of the Commissariat Department, replied that, "it had been a mistake for it gave bad habits to the people and that the government was now determined not to interfere with the merchants but to act in accordance with the principles of political economy"<sup>120</sup> This reply is not surprising from an administration determined to see the famine through with as little

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid , 29

<sup>118</sup> Ibid , 21-24, 24

<sup>119</sup> Ibid , 26

interference into the market as possible, but the method of production that Routh employed to code his message bears some investigation. A week before the delegation arrived to discuss the situation, Routh had expressed to Trevelyan that he had some anxieties about the exportation of the oat crop. Trevelyan speedily reinforced Routh's resolve by laying down the principles of Edmund Burke's political economy from his *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* (1795). So we find that "like a good civil servant, Routh in his turn explained that the present government was determined to act more in accordance with the enlightened principles of political economy, if the delegates would read and consider what had been written on the subject by Edmund Burke, their illustrious countryman, they would be compelled to agree."<sup>121</sup> Routh masked his own discomfort and hesitancy regarding food exports in the security of direction by his superior. Yet at the same time, it is disturbing that on 2 October 1846, in the same letter containing the extracts from *Thoughts and Details*, Trevelyan wrote to Routh that he did not want to implement any procedure that was "not obviously and immediately necessary for putting food into the mouths of starving people."<sup>122</sup> With the exception of disease and unspecified causes, 20,402 deaths were specifically attributed to STARVATION in the 1851 Census,<sup>123</sup> so one must ask when it was intended to actually begin implementing procedures that were obviously necessary to ward off actual starvation. Trevelyan's actions and loyalty to

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<sup>120</sup> Donal Kerr, "The Church and the Famine," *Douglas Hyde Conference Proceedings*, 75

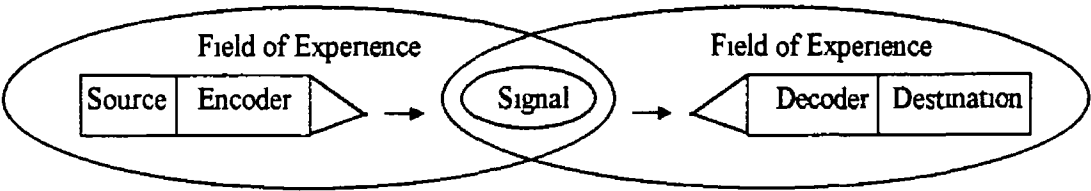
<sup>121</sup> Austin Bourke, 'The Visitation of God?' *The Potato and the Great Irish Famine*, (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993) 176. See also Luke Gibbons, "Did Edmund Burke cause the Great Famine? The Moral Economy and Colonial Ireland," *Douglas Hyde Conference Proceedings*, 24-25. Rev. J. O'Rourke, *The History of the Great Irish Famine* (Dublin: McGlashan & Gill, 1875) 222-3.

<sup>122</sup> As quoted from Trevelyan to Routh, October 2, 1846, in *Correspondence Explanatory*

political economy contradicted his words. He communicated an indifference to the suffering of the masses by keeping the market forces paramount to any other famine considerations.

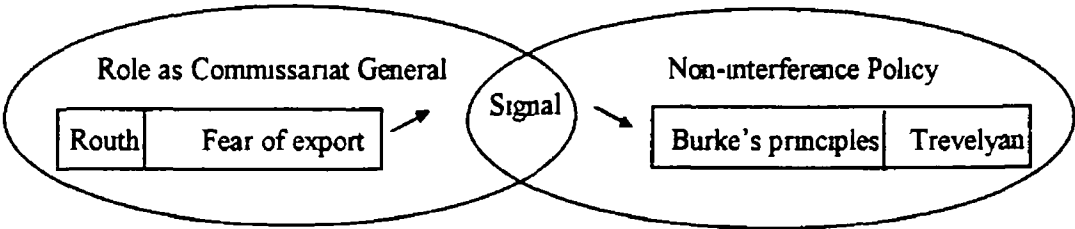
The results of the Achill Island delegation can be broken down into fundamental components by two applications using the field of experience communication model.

**Figure 3.5**  
**Field of Experience Model II**



The first application places Routh as the source. The primary influence upon Routh as he encoded his message to Trevelyan was his apprehension about exporting oats from Ireland. The field of experience aspect that came into play in this communication interchange was his desire to fulfil his role as the Commissariat General to the best of his abilities. He transmitted the signal to Trevelyan, the destination, who then decoded the message in light of the teachings of Edmund Burke. Trevelyan's field of experience led him to believe that the only true and lasting benefit for Ireland would be non-interference.

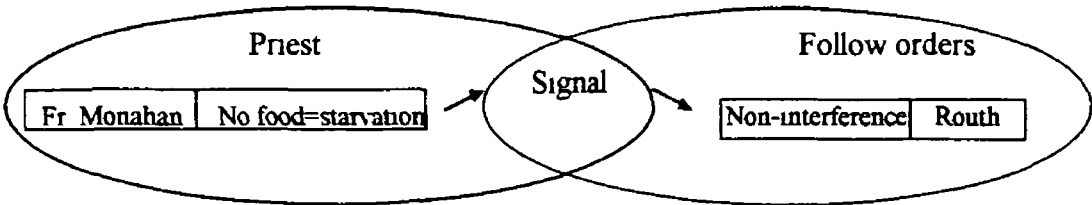
**Figure 3.6**  
**Routh to Trevelyan Application**



<sup>123</sup> William MacArthur, "Medical History of the Famine," *The Great Famine*, 308-309. This figure represents the national summary as recorded in the census.

This passage of communication was instrumental in the outcome of the next application when the source becomes Father Monahan, the leader of the delegation. As a reminder, encoding is the process of taking the information and/or feeling that needs to be expressed and putting it into a form that can be transmitted <sup>124</sup> So, Father Monahan expresses to Routh the fact that the people of Achill could not afford to purchase corn at the prices that the merchants were charging. He encoded the *information* that the people had insufficient food and money and the *emotion* that people were going to starve. His field of experience as a priest made sure that he looked after the spiritual well being of the people, but as the famine hit, he compassionately realised that he needed to look after their physical bodies as well. Unfortunately the message was decoded by Routh, the destination, by the means of his newly reinforced belief in non-interference passed on to him by Trevelyan in the form of the principles of Edmund Burke. Routh's field of experience taught him to follow the orders of his superior, Charles Trevelyan.

Figure 3.7  
Fr. Monahan to Routh Application



In the process of providing a visual representation of the Achill Island delegation communication, it is not being argued that Burke's principles were to blame or that in truth they actually stood for complete non-interference. Burke successfully worked towards

Catholic emancipation throughout his career and the destruction of the Penal Laws were largely a result of his work, so it is appropriate to ask “How then are we to entertain the proposition that Burke would have stood idly by in the face of a Famine that not only oppressed but threatened to extinguish a substantial proportion of the Catholic population whose cause he espoused so consistently - and courageously - in the eighteenth century?”<sup>125</sup> Had Edmund Burke been alive in the 1840’s, it is unlikely he would have supported Trevelyan and his crusade for political economy, but the extracts from *Thoughts and Details* were tailored to suit Trevelyan and Routh’s needs. This fact is seen by the communicative influence the extracts carried over the administrators, the delegation, and finally over the individuals of Achill.

### SECTION 3.8 – A FIELD OF CONTRADICTIONS. GWEEDORE

This chapter has been devoted to discussing the various aspects of Ireland and England’s vastly different fields of experience. There is perhaps a no more perplexing famine situation than the controversial Gweedore of County Donegal. Gweedore’s legacy begs the question, ‘which carries more value – the preservation of culture or the preservation of life?’ The purpose here is not to answer this, but to stimulate academic and moral enquiry.

Gweedore is a graphic example of the transformation from *clachan* life in rundale farms to the ordered lifestyle of ladder farming. Located on the north-west coast of Donegal, Gweedore has been compared to the farms of Mayo and Galway. Seven years

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<sup>124</sup> Wilbur Schramm, “How Communication Works,” *Messages: A Reader in Human Communication*, 4

<sup>125</sup> Luke Gibbons, “Did Edmund Burke Cause the Great Famine?” *Douglas Hyde Conference Proceedings*, 26

before the Great Irish Famine began, Lord George Hill bought 23,000 acres of land that housed 3,000 tenants, yet only 700 were paying rent <sup>126</sup> In his pamphlet, *Facts from Gweedore*, Hill cited the lengthy memorial of Patrick M’Kye, a National Schoolmaster M’Kye described the situation of the people of Gweedore as “the most needy, hungry, and naked condition of any people that ever came within the precincts of my knowledge, although I have travelled a part of nine Counties in Ireland, also a part of England and Scotland, together with a part of British America I have likewise perambulated 2,253 miles through seven of the United States, and never witnessed the tenth part of such hunger, hardships, and nakedness”<sup>127</sup> The letter goes on to record the lack of basic necessities and the abject poverty faced by the inhabitants of that region Lord George Hill was determined to change this squalid state of affairs

One of his primary goals was to abolish the rundale tenancy and to create orderly, striped, ladder farms He also built a hotel to increase tourism, and, Hill established a corn store, a shop with ‘every variety of the necessities of life,’ and a quay that could accommodate 150 ton ships in order to increase commerce and shipping Under his management of Gweedore, premiums were given ‘for clean houses, good cattle, crops, butter, cloth, and socks’ In the first fourteen years of Lord Hill’s ownership, all rents as well as other monies were invested into the land and during this time, there were no evictions <sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Asenath Nicholson, *Lights and Shades of Ireland*, 265

<sup>127</sup> Patrick M’Kye, cited in Lord George Hill, *Facts from Gweedore Compiled from Notes by Lord George Hill, with Additions up to the Present Time* (Dublin Hodges, Smuth, and Foster, 1868) 6

<sup>128</sup> Lord George Hill, *Facts from Gweedore*, 9-12

Through Hill's involvement, the financial state of affairs among the people of Gweedore improved between the years 1838 to 1868, *despite* the presence of the Great Famine during the midst of those changing years. On one hand, the preservation and improvement of life is applauded, yet on the other, the colonialist destruction of culture is questioned. Under the hegemonic control of the British colonisers, the best that the Irish people could hope for was an 'improving' landlord such as Lord George Hill. As Breandan MacSuibhne describes him: "A consummate self-publicist, Hill's success in obtaining donations from government and charitable bodies helped to bring the parish through the Great Famine comparatively unscathed."<sup>129</sup>

Of all of the viable possibilities presented in this thesis, the situation of Gweedore was the best chance that the Irish people were given – survival at the cost of freedom. In the poverty forced upon them by the colonisers, they were able to still cling to their own Gaelic fields of experience. If instead, they grasped the few economic 'carrots' placed in front of them by an improving landlord such as Hill, they were required to step into the field of British experience. This meant sterile, individualised existences of competition between neighbours instead of cooperation and community. Ironically, "Hill found that the poor material resource base of the area defeated his best efforts: indeed, the traditional farming methods were probably better adapted to environmental exigencies than his bureaucratic solution."<sup>130</sup> But this fact did not dissuade Hill from believing that the cultural and agricultural methods of the British were superior. He brought the type of

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<sup>129</sup> Breandan MacSuibhne, "Soggarth Aroon and Gombeen-Priest: Canon James MacFadden (1842-1917)," *Radical Irish Priests 1660 – 1970*, Gerard Moran, ed (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998) 152-153



progress that the British administrators of the famine associated with morality. Morash ties this progress into the famine and clarifies: “instead of being the end of history, the Famine could be written as a regrettable, but none the less necessary, step along the straight road of history as progress...”<sup>131</sup> John Coll records a less sanguine report of the progress of Gweedore in his article, “Continuity and Change in the Parish of Gaoth Dobhair 1850 – 1980.”

After the Famine, Gaoth Dobhair society, previously more autonomous, was forced to readjust in various painful ways. These adjustments were part of the ‘modernisation’ process in the area, a slow, continuous attrition of traditional mores and values and the progression to a more individualised, English-speaking, commercialised world, closely tied to urban centres.<sup>132</sup>

This was Lord George Hill and the British coloniser’s societal remedy for Gweedore and Ireland. Men such as Fr. James MacFadden fought against this type of continued domination. As a major proponent of the land league, MacFadden “performed a significant role in the area, not least as self-imposed leader of the people against Hill’s crusade.”<sup>133</sup> In Gweedore, he became known as ‘soggarth aroon,’ or ‘beloved priest, as he encouraged the Catholic population to unite against those in economic power over them.<sup>134</sup>

In spite of the existence of opposition to Hill’s policies, it cannot be denied that first hand accounts of the ravages of famine recorded that the people living under Lord

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<sup>130</sup> John Coll, “Continuity and Change in the Parish of Gaoth Dobhair 1850 – 1980,” *Common Ground: Essays on the Historical Geography of Ireland*, William Smyth and Kevin Whelan, eds. (Cork: Cork University Press, 1988) 279-281.

<sup>131</sup> Christopher Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine*, 185.

<sup>132</sup> John Coll, “Continuity and Change in the Parish of Gaoth Dobhair,” 279.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>134</sup> Breandán MacSuibhne, “Soggarth Aroon and Gombeen-Priest,” *Radical Irish Priests*, 149. MacFadden was perceived by his later parish of Inis Caoil as a villain. MacSuibhne argues that these opposed perceptions had to do with the differences between the parishes, not because MacFadden changed his tactics. We are primarily concerned here with the perception of his work in Gweedore.

George Hill's paternalistic protection physically fared much better than those outside of it. He was a 'hands on' proprietor and went into each of his tenants dwellings himself. According to the benevolent traveller Asenath Nicholson, he "soon gained access to their hearts"<sup>135</sup> Nicholson was not alone in her praise of the model English farms. James Tuke wrote, "The contrast which is presented to the traveller between Lord George Hill's estate and that of the adjoining one, belonging to the Marquis of Conyngham, is a most striking illustration of the working of two opposite systems. On the one estate there was the means of preserving life, on the other there was not."<sup>136</sup> In an extract of a piece of correspondence sent to the Society of Friends, an observer compared and contrasted the estate of Lord George Hill and his neighbour. The correspondent accounts the differences to the fact that Hill was a resident proprietor and his neighbour was not. On Hill's estate, the correspondent found "neat stone cottages, with two or three rooms" and the tenants engaged in cultivation and improvement of their lands because "premiums are awarded annually for the neatest cottages, the finest stock, or the best cultivated plot of land."<sup>137</sup> On the adjoining estate of an absentee landlord, "Hundreds of families were crying from hunger and distress." The landlord was doing nothing, the public works were a failure, and "there was neither a pound of oatmeal nor Indian meal to be bought!"<sup>138</sup> The correspondent concludes his observations by writing, "we pursued our way about twenty miles still the property of the same landlord. Everywhere the same features of poverty,

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<sup>135</sup> Asenath Nicholson, *Lights and Shades of Ireland*, 265

<sup>136</sup> James Tuke, *A Visit to Connaught*, 57

<sup>137</sup> *Distress in Ireland: Extracts from Correspondence Published by the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends* (Dublin: Webb and Chapman, 1847) 11

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 12

misery, and wretched cultivation of land, what a contrast in every way to the estate we left in the morning of Lord George Hill!’”<sup>139</sup>

F H A Aalen and Hugh Brody provide an appropriate summary of the dichotomy “Lord George Hill aimed at a workable compromise between progress and tradition but in the two following decades there was considerable local opposition to his policies of rural development”<sup>140</sup> The cooperative work of these men, *Gola The Life and Last Days of an Island Community*, deals primarily with the decline in the population of Gola, the remote island off the western coast of Donegal However, important links are noted that relate to the principles in this thesis The surviving agricultural patterns on Gola suggest the same type of colonial planning “The elongated pieces are reminiscent of the ‘stripes’ formed by the early nineteenth-century land reforms of Lord George Hill in Gweedore, and may well be the product of the same reform”<sup>141</sup> Organised ladder farms were a preferred method of agricultural renovation In Mayo’s Mullet peninsula, “the notation ‘To be striped next year’ appears on the Faulmore valuation records”<sup>142</sup> This reconstruction was another method of bringing the periphery into the system of the core Indeed

The profound spatial transformation of economic activity which follows on industrialization typically produces a few expanding urban-industrial centres while the bulk of the country assumes the role of declining rural peripheries The centre-periphery relationship has also developed within Ireland, where the west of the country forms a region of conspicuous and chronic economic stagnation and social decline<sup>143</sup>

<sup>139</sup> Ibid , 12

<sup>140</sup> F H A Aalen and Hugh Brody, *Gola The Life and Last Days of an Island Community* (Cork The Mercier Press LTD, 1969) 35

<sup>141</sup> Ibid , 39

<sup>142</sup> Tom Yager, “Mass Eviction in the Mullet Peninsula,” 41

<sup>143</sup> F H A Aalen, “Introduction,” *Gola*, xiii – xiv

Under the control of Britain as the centre, the only options provided to the peripheries was to adopt its culture, language, religion, and agriculture or else perish or emigrate. In the case of this section, Gweedore was the periphery and temporarily adopted Hill's reforms to secure survival. Later, under the guidance of their beloved priest, James MacFadden, the people stepped into the political ring to fight for rights to the land. There exist arguments on both sides of the question of which has the greatest level of morality – the preservation of life or the preservation of culture. Both are important to achieve a life of liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

### SECTION 3.9 - CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

It is probable that if the Irish people had been more readily willing to reject what was seen as their native culture and adopt the English language and customs earlier in the century, the Great Irish Famine may have never occurred. Certainly this is conjecture, however, Charles Trevelyan himself took pride in his Celtic roots from the region of Cornwall but believed that his heritage was perfected by his complete adoption of English culture. The geographical location of his ancestry makes the questions posed by Isaac Butt all the more ironic. In his attempt to express "A Voice for Ireland," he asked the following

What can be more absurd - what can be more wicked, than for men professing attachment to an imperial Constitution to answer claims now put forward for state assistance to the unprecedented necessities of Ireland, by talking of Ireland being a drain upon the *English* treasury? If the Union be not a mockery, there exists no such thing as an English treasury. If Cornwall had been visited with the scenes that have desolated Cork, would similar arguments have been used? Would men have stood up and denied

that Cornwall was entitled to have the whole country share the extraordinary loss?"<sup>144</sup>

Yet Ireland was not Cornwall, and neither were her people English. Instead, they were perceived as clinging to Gaelic superstition, insisting on housing their swine within the family dwelling, speaking a harsh sounding almost barbarous language, and not seeming to express any gratitude to England for her patronage. Indeed, the English felt that they had done all that was required for their hardly civilised neighbours and the rest must be left up to providence. These statements verge on satire, but they summarise well the breach between the two cultures. Open, profitable communication was virtually impossible with the communicative noise generated by these perceptions.

This chapter has presented several instances in which the fields of experience between the Irish and the English did not meet. Therefore the messages that were sent between the senders and the receivers fell flat and were not interpreted with their meaning intact. A principal argument has been that Ireland was a colonised society and the Relief Commission presided in a position of power and authority over a colonised people. From that vantage point, the British administrators viewed the Irish people through the lens of their individual beliefs and prejudices. Culturally, the British and the Irish were at odds and the colonisers desired to transplant the communal rundale settlements with tidy, segregated ladder farms. Therefore, though the men assigned to the Relief Commission were required to organise the structure of government relief schemes, their success or failure was not judged on how many lives were preserved, but on how much progress was

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<sup>144</sup> Isaac Butt, "A Voice for Ireland: The Famine in the Land," (1847). Reprinted in Seamus Deane, *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Vol II*, 164-165.

made toward a more civilised society. It is for this reason that the Census Commissioners of 1851 were able to conclude their report in the following manner

In conclusion, we feel it will be gratifying to your Excellency to find that although the population has been diminished in so remarkable a manner by famine, disease and emigration between 1841 and 1851, and has been since decreasing, the results of the Irish census of 1851 are, on the whole, satisfactory, demonstrating as they do the general advancement of the country<sup>145</sup>

The event of the potato blight was used by the British administration to expedite fundamental changes in the cultural and social structure of Ireland. The cultural identity of the pre-famine Irish no longer existed.

Ireland's loss of so many Irish speakers, through either death or emigration, was also linked to the loss of culture as the colonised people adopted the language of their colonisers. Some, such as Daniel O'Connell, saw the adoption of English as a step towards Irish advancement, but for others, it was the death of a way of life. Regardless, when the Irish people were required to code switch from Irish to English, translation was not always accurate. Even if the individual words were translated accurately, the *meaning* of the message might still be inaccurate because of cultural differences. Each of the responses of the Relief Commission that have been included in this thesis were written in the English language, and of the many thousands of letters that were reviewed in the primary documentation research, not a single one was written in Irish. Therefore, all subtleties and nuances of the Irish language were completely lost in the correspondence of the Relief Commission. The commissioners did not enter into the everyday lifestyle of the Irish speech communities and those that died or emigrated paid the price for this neglect.

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<sup>145</sup> *Census for Ireland, 1851, General Report*, p. lviii. As quoted by Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, 296.

It cannot be concluded that if the correspondence had been written in Irish that the Great Irish Famine would have turned out differently, however, the factor of the Irish language being supplanted by the English language supplies another possible answer to the fact that the Relief Commission failed to address adequately 'the great calamity' that befell Ireland

This chapter also briefly addressed the factor of religion. Certainly the political, social, and economic power was in the control of the Protestant sector of the population. The observations on the religious parties of Great Britain and Ireland made it very clear that those in the Catholic population, though numerous, were not connected with Britain's aristocracy and were therefore not as powerful as the Protestants. Though the governmentally funded relief was not withheld from individuals on account of their religion, it can be asserted that the government relief would have been more aggressive if the majority of those in need of relief were of the Protestant religion.

Daniel O'Connell was used as a representative of an individual who had experience in both the Irish and British fields of experience. He existed at a point of compromise. He desired to see Ireland and her people emerge from a place of poverty. He felt that if the loss of certain amounts of culture and language were part of the cost package for progress, he was willing to pay it. Of all communicators, Daniel O'Connell was most likely in the best position to be able to hear the signals sent by both the Irish individuals and the British administration and to be able to interpret them accurately. It is unknown whether the outcome of the famine would have been altered if O'Connell had lived to see its conclusion, but purely from a standard of interpersonal communication, it is unfortunate that he was not available to facilitate better communication during the worst stages of famine.

The communication delegation led by Father Monahan affords a specific example of the breakdown in communication which occurred during the famine. At each stage of interpersonal communication during the famine, every communicator had individual fields of experience which played into the interpretation of various messages. Even Trevelyan and Routh had differences, but their fields were far more similar than with that of Father Monaghan. They were able to come to communicative agreement, whereas the priests and the Irish individuals were usually at odds with the British administrators. The policy of non-interference was given sufficient momentum during the communicative efforts of the Irish Famine to supersede the importance of human life. Conversely, many human lives were saved by the active landlord, Lord George Hill of Gweedore. The fields of experience between Hill and his tenants were still at odds, but he chose to preserve lives at the expense of the culture of community. The people of Britain and Ireland had little in common and therefore, the communication between the two languages, cultures, and religions was made very difficult.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Circular Communication Gone Awry**

*Whether it be the fault of the Board of Works or their subordinates, many works which have been ordered to be commenced are yet to be put into operation and from the delay, the restrictions, and the sometimes total impossibility of complying with the requisitions of the officers employed to issue labor tickets it is almost apparent to this Committee that there exists in some quarter or other a want of inclination or competence to give the people employment*

Written by the Bohola Local Relief Committee, County Mayo  
Sent to the Relief Commission on 3 November 1846

## **Chapter 4**

### **Circular Communication Gone Awry**

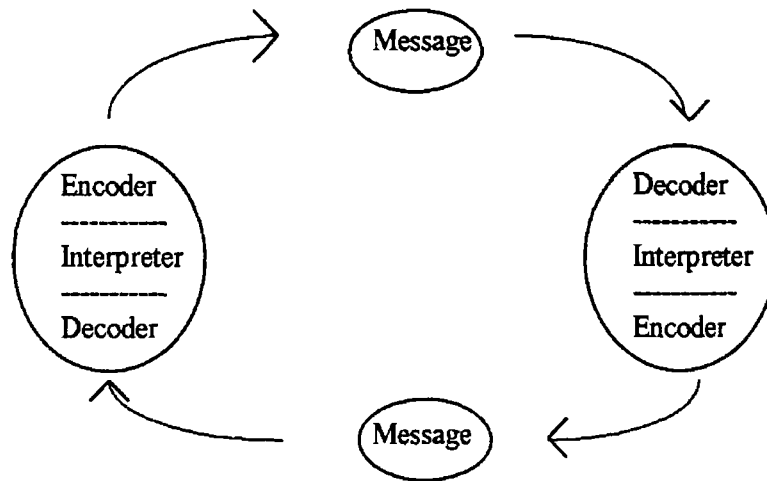
The communication between people is complex. As was seen in the previous chapter, the more that two communicators have in common, the more likely that their communication will be effective. The Irish and the English had vastly different fields of experience and their communication suffered as a result. Although the field of experience model can be applied several times to a series of communications and the sender and the receiver can be changed, the actual model itself does not fully encapsulate the circular nature of interpersonal communication.

Roughly then, communication occurs in the following manner: the sender encodes a message, transmits it to the receiver who then decodes the message with the use of an interpreter to yield meaning. Communication is circular, with the sender and receiver exchanging roles with lightning speed, giving one another feedback constantly in order to spur new messages to the encoding phase. The circular properties of communication can be visualised in figure 4.1.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wilbur Schramm, "How Communication Works," *Messages: A Reader in Human Communication*, 9

**Figure 4.1**  
**Circular Communication Model**



Each communicator, whether sender or receiver contains facilities for both encoding and decoding. The interpreter between the two functions assists in the deciphering of meaning. Interpretations can yield multiple meanings, depending on the relative field of experience of the receiver. This reality has no better example than the host of beliefs, ideologies, controversies, debates, arguments and multiple policies which constitute the discourse of the Irish Famine. Feedback and noise at all stages of famine communication took their toll. In the circuit of this cyclical communication, noise can come in a variety of forms. It may be as pragmatic as physical noise itself, causing the inability of the receiver to actually hear the message. Noise may also be as complex as the intricacies of cultural or subcultural differences of the sender and receiver. Even if the participants in communication may be using the same language, a word, phrase, or intonation may have different meanings for each communicator. This thesis as a whole is devoted to uncovering some of the 'noises' that hampered effective interpersonal communication during the famine years.

First hand accounts and citations of various letters are interspersed throughout chapters two through six as they relate to the various communicative principles being discussed. This chapter, however, contains the bulk of empirical evidence used in this particular famine study, drawing on Liam Swords very helpful compilation of approximately 1,500 letters and extracts of letters written from North Connacht between 1845 and 1849, titled *In Their Own Words*. Many of its selections will be used to reinforce the arguments of this chapter. The letters written to the British Administration (even more specifically to the Relief Commission) and the draft responses to those letters have been the main source of research of this dissertation. A discreet minimum of 2,500 pieces of correspondence were received by the British administration in the first winter of the blight with an additional minimum of 2,000 letters pouring in before the second failed harvest. In the winter of 1846 to 1847 just less than four hundred pieces of correspondence were received and dealt with by the Relief Commission from County Mayo alone. As has already been determined, the figures most at risk of starvation were largely incapable of this manner of correspondence, but those acting as their spokesmen succeeded in leaving a valuable record of their pleas even if they failed to save more human lives.

The manuscript sources of two of the spokesmen correspondents, Captain Thomas A. Larcom and Lord Monteaigle, have also been relied upon heavily to discover what was occurring during the famine. Their letters regarding the public works and other famine issues clarify what was taking place in the 1840's. The surviving documentation of the internal administration of the Relief Commission (such as meeting minutes, resolutions, form letters, reports, and the like) are also of great help in the process of reconstructing the communication patterns of the famine. Many contemporary newspapers have also been

reviewed for this study, but Brendan O Cathaoir's recently published *Famine Diary* brings a wealth of newspaper sources into a cohesive and organised whole. Other primary and secondary sources of evidence have been applied as necessary, but it is the aforementioned that have acted as the principal stores of information for this chapter.

#### SECTION 4.1 – CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

The object of effective circular communication is the meeting of human needs. Although many human needs were represented during the famine, the need that is placed at the level of highest value in this chapter is the saving of human life, perhaps followed, as we have seen, by the preservation of country and culture. It is not overly sanguine to place Irish lives at the pinnacle of value in the context of the mid-nineteenth century British Isles, because this was a contemporary ideal. On 3 May 1849, a meeting occurred in the Royal Exchange for, "those desirous of alleviating the distressing miseries of their poor fellow countrymen, for the purpose of appointing a committee, and devising such means as might be within their reach to stay the further progress of famine and death in the distressed localities."<sup>2</sup> Among the members appointed were the Lord Mayor, Lord Cloncurry, and Rev. Dr. Whately. In the meeting, Alderman Egan proposed to his colleagues the following resolution:

as the preservation of the lives of the people is the first law of nature, and should be the primary object of every good government, it is the duty of all humane persons to come forward at this most awful crisis with prompt and effectual means to prevent the further progress of famine and death in Ireland.<sup>3</sup>

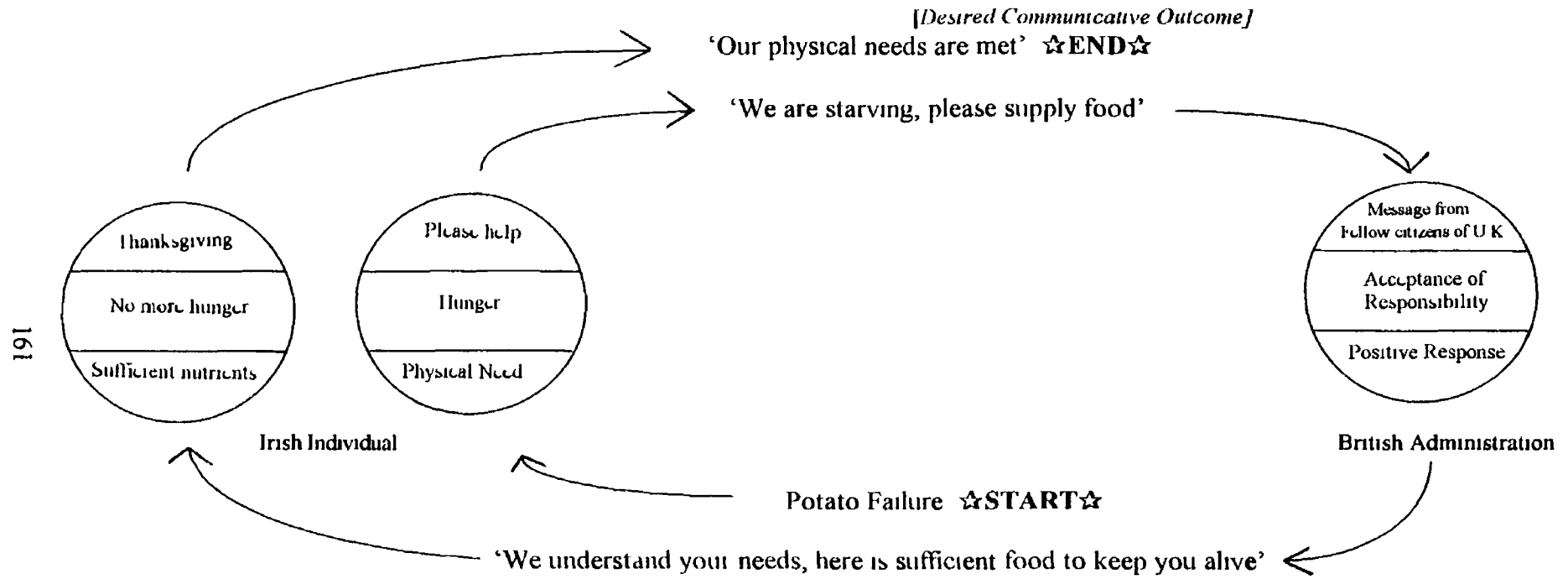
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<sup>2</sup> *Report and Proceedings of the General Relief Committee of the Royal Exchange, From 3<sup>rd</sup> May to 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 1849, With the Speeches, &c, At the General Meetings* (Dublin: G. Shea, 1849) 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, the desired communication for the Irish Famine is diagrammed in figure 4.2. This thesis argues that there is not a single instance in which the ideal model occurred. At some point along the chain of communication, noise intruded to change the desired outcome of 'Our physical needs are met'. The next sections proceed to pinpoint a few of those derailments. Additionally, this chapter brings to light a few details of the communicative processes of some of the famine organisations. It is hoped that at the conclusion of this chapter, the reader will have a better understanding of how failures in effective communication affected the Irish people.

**Figure 4 2**  
**Ideal Model for Famine Communication**



## SECTION 4.2 – FAILURE TO ENCODE THE RIGHT MESSAGE

The first point of communicative collapse to be dealt with occurred in the very first phase of encoding the message to be sent to the British administration. The potato crop did fail, but the true extent of the seriousness of the overall situation was not known at the time of the first partial crop failure. Some spokesmen for the Irish individuals attempted to do their best to make the government harden their hearts to the pleas that would be coming forth from the priests and the labouring classes. Fearing that the distress would be overrated, some communicators encoded messages that would negate the 'We are starving please supply food' report. Indeed, the High Sheriff of Limerick City, Henry Watson, was one of those communicators. Even the most liberal of Relief Commissioners, Sir James Dombrain, sent his first report into the administration saying that the situations along the coast were not as dire as they had been in the past.

It must be remembered that the British administrators were required to respond to the events of the famine *as they occurred*. They did not have the luxury of looking into the future to see what the next day, the next month, or the next year would bring. They made decisions on a day to day basis and were at all times reacting to the many factors that influenced them. Considerations such as *ideology* and *social behaviour*, real as they may be, are often at their most effective when they are not acted upon consciously. The incoming reports from Dombrain and thousands of other individuals had the greatest measure of *conscious* influence over the Relief Commissioners.

These numerous and varied pieces of communication were given much consideration by the men on the commission. However, as one might imagine, it was the POSITIVE reports that the commissioners most desired to receive. Although the number



of negative reports far outweighed the number of positive ones, there was a sufficient number to cause some degree of indecision amongst the commissioners. For example, Henry Watson was delighted to inform the government that except for about twenty stone's worth, the rest of the two hundred barrels of potatoes pitted in Cahervally were in 'capital condition'. He wrote that the alarm had subsided and he was critical of the Mansion House Committee for overreacting. He wrote, "the Mansion House Committee have most judiciously and in my opinion most wrongfully arraigned the ministry on the Potato Question, I am convinced the Lord Lieutenant will be pleased to receive information which may be depended on as to the real state of the case"<sup>4</sup> Most certainly the Lord Lieutenant was pleased to hear that the situation might not be as dire as was feared. Watson continued to send encouraging reports to the government. On 6 December 1845, he convinced the Lord Lieutenant that "the panic that prevailed in anticipation of a famine has completely vanished, and he [Mr Davenport, an extensive land agent of Ballinacourty] is perfectly satisfied there will be abundance for food and seed"<sup>5</sup> Approximately one week later, the government received a further encouraging report from Henry Watson when he wrote, "I have the pleasure to inform you little want is Expected. The vast quantity of Corn is very superior, particularly the Oat crop"<sup>6</sup> Though this report is positive, it should be remembered that the Irish poor most likely had to sell any successful crops that they might have harvested. Additionally, the 'real state of the case' to which Watson referred to in his first letter was yet to be realised.

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Watson, High Sheriff of Limerick City to the Lord Lieutenant, 22 November 1845, RLFC 2/Z16252, NA

<sup>5</sup> Henry Watson, High Sheriff of Limerick City to the Lord Lieutenant, 6 December 1845, RLFC 2/Z17220, NA

As more reports poured into the government offices and commissions, it became a difficult task for the administrators to form an overall picture of the situation. As a point of fact, Sir James Dombrain reported that as of 3 November 1845 when the blight was beginning to wreak its havoc, the situation along many sections of the coast was not actually as distressing as it had been in years past.<sup>7</sup> This situation was, unfortunately, soon to change, but, the presence of positive reports such as these made the work of the Relief Commission *more* difficult in some respects. Henry Watson and James Dombrain were not the only correspondents to send in reports that made the task a challenge. For example, the Reverend Patrick Harley wrote from the Aran Islands, reporting just how terrifying the progress of the blight was on the islands.<sup>8</sup> However, less than a week later, J B Kernan, the resident magistrate from Galway wrote to warn the government to treat the reports of the Aran Islands with caution because the collector of the poor rates on the island believed the crop to be relatively safe.<sup>9</sup> It is not difficult to imagine which reports the commissioners favoured. With the controllers of the national funds telling them to sort out the problems with as little expense as possible, it is no wonder that the reports of men such as J B Kernan were given as much weight as possible.

Another report that contradicted the message needed to supply gratuitous food supplies was sent by a sub-inspector well after the second harvest had failed. He tried to relieve the sense of panic over insufficient food quantities by writing, “There has been, and is, almost daily arrivals of Indian corn, flour, buck wheat, barley, peas etc, which at present

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<sup>6</sup> Henry Watson, High Sheriff of Limerick City to the Lord Lieutenant, 13 December 1845, RLFC 2/Z17626, NA

<sup>7</sup> Sir James Dombrain, 3 November 1845, RLFC 2/Z14978, NA

<sup>8</sup> Reverend Patrick Harley, 21 November 1845, RLFC 2/Z16400, NA

<sup>9</sup> J B Kernan, 27 November 1845, RLFC 2/Z16710, NA

is more than equal to the demand’<sup>10</sup> This report said nothing about whether or not the people had enough money to purchase the food, but it did countermand the accusations that all of the food was being exported

Sir Robert Peel, while still Prime Minister, wrote to Lord Monteagle and asked him to send a report about the potato crop in the first year of failure. It was his desire to confirm the message being sent regarding the plight of the Irish subsistence class one way or the other. Neither Heytesbury, the Lord Lieutenant, nor the Prime Minister knew what to believe in the early days of the famine. “I [request] from you any information which you would be enabled to send to me respecting the state of the Potato Crop in Ireland. Lord Heytesbury writes on the 26 Sept. ‘our official Reports on the State of the Crop have not yet reached us, but all our private Letters state that the evil has been greatly magnified, and the failure only partial.’ I also received today a favourable Report from Mayo”<sup>11</sup> The government officials needed more information before they put their faith in the initial reports of the potato failure.

The press attempted to encode properly the cry for necessary food supplies, but at the same time they were accused of exaggeration. O Cathaoir records the following assertion by the *Chronicle and Munster Advertiser*: “We and the press of Ireland must do our duty. We must give the alarm and, as it were, keep firing the signal guns of distress, and ringing the alarm bells continuously, until the dreadful danger is made known to those who may render assistance.” Yet, he then admits that “by crying ‘wolf, wolf’ the popular

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<sup>10</sup> J N T. Enfin to the Inspector General, 12 December 1846, Chief Secretary’s Office Registered Papers Z 326, cited in Liam Swords, *In Their Own Words*, 100.

<sup>11</sup> Sir R. Peel to Lord Monteagle, 30 September 1845, Monteagle Papers, 13,395 (5), NLI.

press may be perceived as indulging in the Irish propensity to exaggerate”<sup>12</sup> The *Famine Diary* further records the report of George Wyndham, a landowner of County Clare, who argued that there was no scarcity of provisions in Ireland. He encoded a contradictory message to the administration: “The cry is said to have been got up for political purposes”<sup>13</sup> The outspoken communicator, W. Herbert Saunders agreed with this message and encouraged the government to disregard the ‘We are starving, please supply food’ message of the Irish Individual. He wrote

I sincerely hope that the Government will not open the Ports, yielding to a false alarm of famine, and to the machinations of a destructive political party – such would aggravate our distress and place Ireland in serious difficulties. Your Excellency must be prepared for the most exaggerated demands and propositions upon the Legislature, which if refused, will be called English injustice, indifference, wrongs etc, etc.<sup>14</sup>

Even three decades after the conclusion of the famine, when the results were able to be observed by all, the message that Irish individuals were starving was still being attacked. Henry Arthur Blake, whose pseudonym was Terence McGrath, wrote *Pictures From Ireland*, in which he argued that although some potatoes decayed, the Irish made out that the situation was much worse than it really was and there were plenty of sound potatoes. He also proposed that money went pouring in to assist the starving people, but when the contributors of relief went to look for the suffering hordes, they “could find no famine”<sup>15</sup>

we find that the much-abused landlords have given towards the Irish ‘famine’ more than six times the entire amount of the subscriptions from all parts of the world. Knowing what we now know of this battle without slain, the expediency of the inauguration of a great subscription, in

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<sup>12</sup> Brendan O Cathaoir, *Famine Diary*, 18

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 46

<sup>14</sup> W. Herbert Saunders, 4 November 1845, RLFC 2/Z 15398, NA

<sup>15</sup> Terence McGrath, *Pictures from Ireland*, 196

accordance with the extravagant statements made from the anti-rent platforms, would appear to be questionable. If, without a death from starvation or a strain upon the poor rates, over three millions can be secured in hard cash by inexpensive agitation, there are few ventures in political warfare that offer results so substantial as the producing of a famine to order.<sup>16</sup>

It is obvious that this author never read an account of one of the volunteers of the Society of Friends or a medical report of the famine, but his inflammatory attempt to discredit the message of the Irish people is ample evidence to the power of this method of disrupting effective famine communication.

A second manner in which communication regarding the gravity of the famine was skewed was to declare that even though the Irish people were starving, there was nothing that the government could do to prohibit more deaths. Those subscribing to this belief argued that the government had done and was doing all that was within its means to avert the calamity. The chairman of the Foxford Relief Committee, G V Jackson wrote to the Lord Lieutenant:

No combination of local efforts can contend with this fearful visitation and if a foreign agency does not come to our assistance, be it governmental or the offspring of public benevolence, the poor of this house must perish of starvation. Nothing can save them. I assume no language of complaint. It is my own conviction that the government in each department has done and is doing all that any government can do to mitigate the horrors of the calamity we suffer under, but my own experience satisfies me that it is beyond the reach of human means to meet.<sup>17</sup>

Charles Trevelyan is an example of an individual who was aware that Irish individuals were dying, but believed that the government had done all that it could do and any more action on its part would be counterproductive. After the second failed harvest,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid , 206

<sup>17</sup> G V Jackson to the Lord Lieutenant, 7 February 1847, Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers O 1411, cited in Liam Swords, *In Their Own Words*, 131

Trevelyan wrote to Mr Stanley Thompson, “While you are waiting for the Government to establish an effective Poor Law in Ireland (which will of course be done in some shape or other) the people will starve by thousands, and I can assure you that the nature of government interference and of the Irish Character is such that we have gone to the utmost limit in our measures of relief to which it would be safe to go, and that if we were to go further it would inevitably lead even to greater evils than those which we are attempting to alleviate”<sup>18</sup> Communication was derailed in this manner by the acknowledgement that the Irish were dying and in need of food, but insisting that the government had done all that it could and deaths were inevitable

A third manner in which the desired circular communication went astray before the pattern even reached the decoding phase was to manipulate word usage and bicker over semantics This is referring to the tendency to downplay the word ‘famine,’ especially in the public record, and to encourage the use of the word ‘distress’ In a private meeting, such as a gathering of the Relief Commission, Randolph Routh felt comfortable proposing methods ‘to avert the fearful effects of famine and probable outrage’<sup>19</sup> Yet when reporting on the condition of County Clare in February 1847, he was willing only to commit to the word *distress* when he remarked that even tradesmen were required to turn to the public works for income “When the country tailors and shoemakers are obliged to go to road-work there must be great local distress”<sup>20</sup>

Economist Nassau Senior argued that what was occurring in Ireland was “not a period of famine There was distress, but it was the result of insecurity, or idleness, or

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<sup>18</sup> Trevelyan to Stanley Thompson, 24 December 1846, Monteagle Papers, 13,396, NLI

<sup>19</sup> Relief Commission Meeting Minutes, 19 January 1846, RLFC 1/1, NA

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Cormac O Grada, *Black '47 and Beyond*, 122

despondency – not of the seasons’’<sup>21</sup> The Reverend T O’Herlihy bridges well the attempt to convolute the true message of starvation and the secondary manner of discrediting the message by minimising the suffering by calling it distress as opposed to starvation. He records

There is a tendency today to minimize the ancient ills of Ireland. To establish that point of view, some would discredit history and tradition by suggesting that it is in the nature of the Celt to magnify his woes and sufferings and thus put himself on the pedestal at once of valorous endurance and of dedicated suffering. It is more than suggested too that he loves to have a grievance, to advertise it and to make it the focus of exhibitionism. Even when things were in a desperate condition in Ireland in famine days, the Government employees – mainly English and Scotch – nearly always minimized the condition of affairs and it was noticeable that the word ‘famine’ was studiously avoided.<sup>22</sup>

The use of specific words can make the implied morality of the situation that the word is in reference to, of greater or lesser impact. In addition to the use of ‘famine’ or ‘distress’ as it suited the various circumstances of the Irish Famine communicator, other historical situations have been altered by word usage. For example, during World War II, the attempted extermination of the Jewish race was called ‘special treatment,’ ‘final solution,’ and ‘evacuation.’ By the same token, the war in Indochina was called ‘protective reaction,’ ‘pacification,’ and ‘forced-draft urbanization and modernization.’<sup>23</sup> In Herbert Kelman and V. Lee Hamilton’s cooperative work, *Crimes of Obedience Toward A Social Psychology of Authority and Responsibility*, an enlightening explanation of the Watergate Affair is given. It has direct correlations to the use of language in the

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<sup>21</sup> Nassau Senior, *Journals*, 214

<sup>22</sup> Reverend T. O’Herlihy, *The Famine, 1845 – 1847: A Survey of its Ravages and Causes* (Drogheda: Drogheda Independent Co. Ltd., No date given) NLI #Ir 94107 O8, 5

<sup>23</sup> Herbert Kelman and V. Lee Hamilton, *Crimes of Obedience: Toward A Social Psychology of Authority and Responsibility* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989) 18

Irish Famine as well. We find that “ the use of language that assimilated the Watergate activities into such domains as law enforcement, intelligence gathering, and protection of national security made it easier to avoid confronting their criminal character and to see them, instead, as legitimate operations ”<sup>24</sup> In regard to the Iran-Contra hearings of the 1980’s, an assistant to Colonel Oliver North named Fawn Hall, utilised specific word usage as a method of assuaging her conscience

She saw herself as ‘part of the team,’ engaged in a vital mission that transcended legal constraints. She shredded and smuggled documents in order ‘to protect the initiative.’ The word *protect* was her euphemism for what would otherwise appear to be illegal actions. Asked if she was participating in a cover-up, she replied, ‘I don’t use the word cover-up. I was in a protective mode.’<sup>25</sup>

Although words do not change the reality for which they represent, their connotations go far in alleviating human responsibility. If the message of starvation was merely ‘distress,’ the responsibility warranted by the receiver of such a message was lessened.

#### **SECTION 4.3 – FAILURE TO DECODE THE MESSAGE PROPERLY**

The urgent message being sent to the British administration was ‘We are starving, please supply food.’ There were several methods by which this message was clouded, but can it be argued that even when the British administration received the reality of actual starvation occurring, they failed to respond in a manner that would save lives? The decoding processes of the receivers of this message failed in many respects as a result of the various types of noise that impeded the clarity of transmission. Woodham Smith cynically remarked that Trevelyan was quite hesitant to open the food supply depots in early winter of 1846 because once opened, the people would not allow them to be closed.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid , 30-31



He justified his actions by writing that the Chancellor of the Exchequer “had said that the longer the opening of the depots could be put off, the better, ‘provided there is no real danger of starvation’”<sup>26</sup> Trevelyan was writing on November 24, and so the deaths which had already occurred, and were occurring, were apparently not considered to indicate any ‘real danger’ of starvation”<sup>26</sup> The question again raises its head, ‘Why did the Irish people die?’

One answer is that unless the British administration decoded the ideal message in the ideal way, the ideal circuit would be broken and people would die as a result. A more accurate rendition of how the British decoded the message was, ‘The Irish people need to be disciplined in order to progress, and this is an appropriate method of discipline.’ John Mitchel argued that there was no chance of being considered or treated as complete citizens of the United Kingdom, no matter what the Act of Union professed. If it was true that “There are no citizens in Ireland,”<sup>27</sup> then the British perception of the Irish found no success in properly decoding the message. Instead, “The new Whig government believes the Irish people need to be taught a lesson in self-reliance. ‘There are times when something like harshness is the greatest humanity,’ echoes the *London Times*”<sup>28</sup>

Christopher Morash refines the argument

Ireland did not simply *have* a disease, it *was* disease – a condition for which there was only one ‘sharp but effectual’ final cure. At such moments in the humanist discourse of progress we glimpse the logic of depopulation”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid , 39

<sup>26</sup> Cecil Woodham Smith, *The Great Hunger*, 137

<sup>27</sup> John Mitchel, *Jail Journal*, ed Thomas Flanagan (Dublin: University Press of Ireland, 1982) 15. Originally published in *The Citizen*, Mitchel’s first New York paper from 14 January 1854 – 19 August 1854

<sup>28</sup> Brendan O Cathaoir, *Famine Diary*, 24 August 1846, 65

<sup>29</sup> Christopher Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine*, 25

Those individuals who depended for their subsistence upon the potato were seen as second-rate human beings, and the failure of this staple crop as justified retribution. With much influence over the instigators of policy, famine economists regarded “the potato as the root of all Irish evil – a ‘lazy root,’ grown in ‘lazy’ beds by a ‘lazy’ people. To push the feckless Irish up the ladder of civilisation, the degenerate potato should be replaced by a higher food source like grain.”<sup>30</sup>

Prime Minister Russell was swayed by perceptions such as these. Although he told Parliament he would use ‘the whole credit of the Treasury’ to maintain the people of Ireland,<sup>31</sup> only a week later, he countermanded that statement by arguing, “‘It must be thoroughly understood that we cannot feed the people. It was a cruel delusion to pretend to do so.’ Repeated state intervention would not only paralyse private enterprise, but increase Irish dependence on Britain.”<sup>32</sup> This contradiction links into the interpreters used by the British administration. In the ideal setting, Her Majesty’s government would have taken full responsibility for the lives of its citizens, however, in reality, responsibility was shuffled and few accepted it. This does not mean that the civil servants shirked their administrative responsibilities, indeed, they worked very diligently and faithfully at their assigned positions. However, very few receivers of the message from the Irish people took the responsibility of preserving life onto their own shoulders.

Outside of the administration, volunteers such as the Society of Friends and Asenath Nicholson heard the cries of the Irish people, decoded the message while keeping it intact, and responded with life-giving supplies. They could not maintain all of those who

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<sup>30</sup> Brendan O Cathaoir, *Famine Diary*, 24 August 1846, 66

<sup>31</sup> Lord John Russell, *Hansard*, LXXXVIII, 17 August 1846, 777-778

<sup>32</sup> Brendan O Cathaoir, *Famine Diary*, 24 August 1846, 66

were starving with their own resources so they met with a measure of failure. The British government also responded with numerous programs of relief to get either hard-earned money or gratuitous relief of food into the hands of the Irish people. Yet, if the administration had chosen to do so, sufficient funds existed to keep every pauper in Ireland alive. There was no desire to take responsibility for each of those lives because in the philosophy of the administration, those lives were a burden to society. The communicative code used by the majority of those in the British administration dictated that society would be better off in the long run to be rid of a portion of the lowest class of Irish individuals.

The Prime Minister during the first winter of the famine, Sir Robert Peel, has generally been credited with serving the interests of the pauperised Irish population well. Yet even in his seeming generosity, he did not decode Ireland's message and assume full responsibility for its meaning. For example, on 31 January 1846, James McKiernan informed the Prime Minister that he had read Peel's opening speech and knew that he received communications from both private and public individuals regarding the state of Ireland. McKiernan then takes it upon himself, "You did not however, (as I could perceive,) mention that any letter or report had been furnished, from this part of Ireland and impelled by the alarming prospects around me, I have taken on myself to afford you a slight intimation of things as they exist."<sup>33</sup> After a detailed description of the circumstances of his region of County Cavan, he appeals to the receiver of his message, Sir Robert Peel, "I will not lengthen this communication further than to entreat you to afford these matters, in your ministerial capacity, some early and efficient consideration. The desire to have some plan adopted to keep off, the famine that is beginning to stare us in the

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<sup>33</sup> James McKiernan to Sir R. Peel, 31 January 1846, RLFC 2/Z 2142, NA

face must be my apology for this trespassing on you”<sup>34</sup> There is no clear indication that the Prime Minister ever read this letter, much less took responsibility for it. Understandably, he had other items of business of higher priority than individual letters, but the letter written by G. Arbuthnot, working in Whitehall, alerts the Chief Secretary of the Lord Lieutenant’s office, “The writer of this letter has been informed that it has been forwarded to the Irish government”<sup>35</sup> A public leader such as the Prime Minister was required to address the issue of the state of Ireland, but he was able to successfully pass the responsibility of the people’s welfare to those in Dublin Castle. Those in Dublin Castle attempted to place responsibility onto the Relief Commissioners. The Relief Commissioners then passed on duties to the local relief committees and this system of shifting the ultimate responsibility onto someone else was a primary interpreter used by the British administration in the decoding process.

It was considered of much greater importance to ensure that abuse did not take place in any of the governmental relief programs than to save lives at any expense. O Cathaoir confirms that, “identifying and eradicating the ‘abuse’ of relief mechanisms acquired a higher priority than saving lives”<sup>36</sup> Charles Trevelyan expresses well the attitude of government officials in his report on the public works initiated during the first year of the famine. As well as to commend the efficiency of the officers of that scheme, the object of Trevelyan’s paper was “to give a summary of the results of the experience acquired during the operations now drawing to a close for the Relief of the people suffering from the failure of their accustomed food in Ireland, in order to furnish the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Brendan O Cathaoir, *Famine Diary*, xviii

necessary data for preparing a more perfect machinery, to be used in case it should again become necessary to have recourse to extraordinary measures of relief ” Regarding the works, he wrote the following

Their Lordships are deeply sensible that the series of measures by which employment and food have been of late been provided for large numbers of persons in Ireland, by the agency of public officers, and in a great degree at the public expense, are at variance with the principles by which the well-being of society is ordinarily regulated, that such measures are liable to abuses which require the utmost vigilance of the Government and the officers employed under it, to keep them in check, and that great and permanent evils would be the result of any portion of the people becoming habituated to depend upon the Government for support This highly objectionable mode of proceeding, was justified by the necessity of interposing for the purpose of averting the calamitous effects which would otherwise have arisen from the late extensive failure of the accustomed food of the people of Ireland, but the operations undertaken for this object are, as far as possible, limited to the exigency of the case, and that every practicable precaution is taken to bring them to an early termination as soon as the people of the distressed districts can properly be left to their usual resources ”<sup>37</sup>

The government set strict limits on its capability to assist those in need Laws and regulations are mandatory for maintaining an operating society, and famine officials were confident that sufficient provisions were in place to meet their responsibility If the Irish poor became truly destitute, they could enter a workhouse to have their physical needs met It was in this manner that the administration began to encode their response message Instead of, ‘We understand your needs, here is sufficient food to keep you alive,’ the official response was more akin to, ‘We recognise that there is a critical situation, here are condonable measures to fulfil governmental requirements ’ An illuminating draft response is found attached to a letter written by Arthur Lloyd Saunders, the secretary of the Killarney Relief Committee In this, the Under Secretary, Richard Pennefather, wrote

“Acknowledge and inform that I have laid the resolutions of the Killarney Poor Relief Committee forwarded by writer before His Excellency the Lord Lieutenant and am directed to inform that there are no funds at the disposal of ~~the Govt~~ His Exc applicable to the purpose sought by the Committee”<sup>38</sup> Not merely a case of semantics at this point, this draft response is a private acknowledgement that the *government did* have sufficient funds to relieve all Irish distress, but, the *Lord Lieutenant*, as a servant of the people, had no authority to spend that money. This example is an early instance of the government’s meticulous use of words as they encoded their responses. ‘The Govt’ would have been inappropriate, but ‘His Exc’ suited Pennefather’s need aptly. The government did not encode a return message of sufficient food to maintain life, culture, and country. Instead the impression was given that there were not sufficient nutrients, and the physical needs of the Irish people were not met. The next section shifts the focus from the ideal model and focuses upon the internal operations of the Relief Commission.

#### SECTION 4.4 – INTERNAL OPERATIONS OF THE RELIEF COMMISSION

Dublin Castle  
“Interoffice Memo”

To Edward Lucas  
From Sir T. Fremantle, Chief Secretary  
Date 18 November 1845

“I am directed by His Excellency the Lord Lieutenant to request that you will proceed at your earliest convenience to open the business of the Commission over which you have consented to preside, and which has been formed for the purpose of collecting from time to time information respecting the state of the potato crop and for carrying into effect such measures as it may be hereafter deemed advisable [sic] to adopt in reference thereto”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Charles Trevelyan, Treasury Minute, 21 July 1846 and 1 August 1846, Larcom Papers, Ms 7460, NLI

<sup>38</sup> Draft response of Richard Pennefather to letter from Arthur Lloyd Saunders, 3 November 1845, RLFC/Z 14994, NA.

<sup>39</sup> Sir T. Fremantle to Edward Lucas, 18 November 1845, RLFC 1/58, NA

This appears to be one of the first written references in the record of famine administration to the Relief Commission. It was written two days before the first meeting of the commissioners. It seems tragic in retrospect to read how informal and virtually inconsequential the commission was thought to be at its inception. Their purpose was to collect information from ‘time to time’ and to carry into effect the measures ‘deemed adviseable [sic] to adopt.’ Crop failures and food shortages were not a new phenomenon in Ireland by any means. It was not anticipated that the commission would be called upon more frequently than ‘time to time,’ nor was it anticipated that the commission would be the prominent player in the political game of balancing relief and *laissez faire*.

This “interoffice memo” is held in the National Archives in the first series of Relief Commission holdings. Described as the “Administrative Series,” it also includes meeting minutes, resolutions, various registers of papers received or dispatched, abstracts of relief cases presented primarily to the Mansion House Committee, records of instruction distribution, and other miscellaneous administrative records. In the index and description of the series, the archivists inform the readers, “In no sense is this series complete, but it can give some idea of how the Commission operated, how it collected and collated information and how its procedures developed in an *ad hoc* manner in response to external influences.” The collection of material is of considerable interest. It reveals a mass of contradictions. The organisation and attention to detail of the administration is enormously impressive in its complexity, but that efficiency did little to change the outcome of the famine. The policies adopted were not suited to long-term relief because few anticipated the length and severity of the successive crop failures. Despite the *ad hoc* nature that existed, this chapter seeks to underline the gigantic administrative burden that was placed

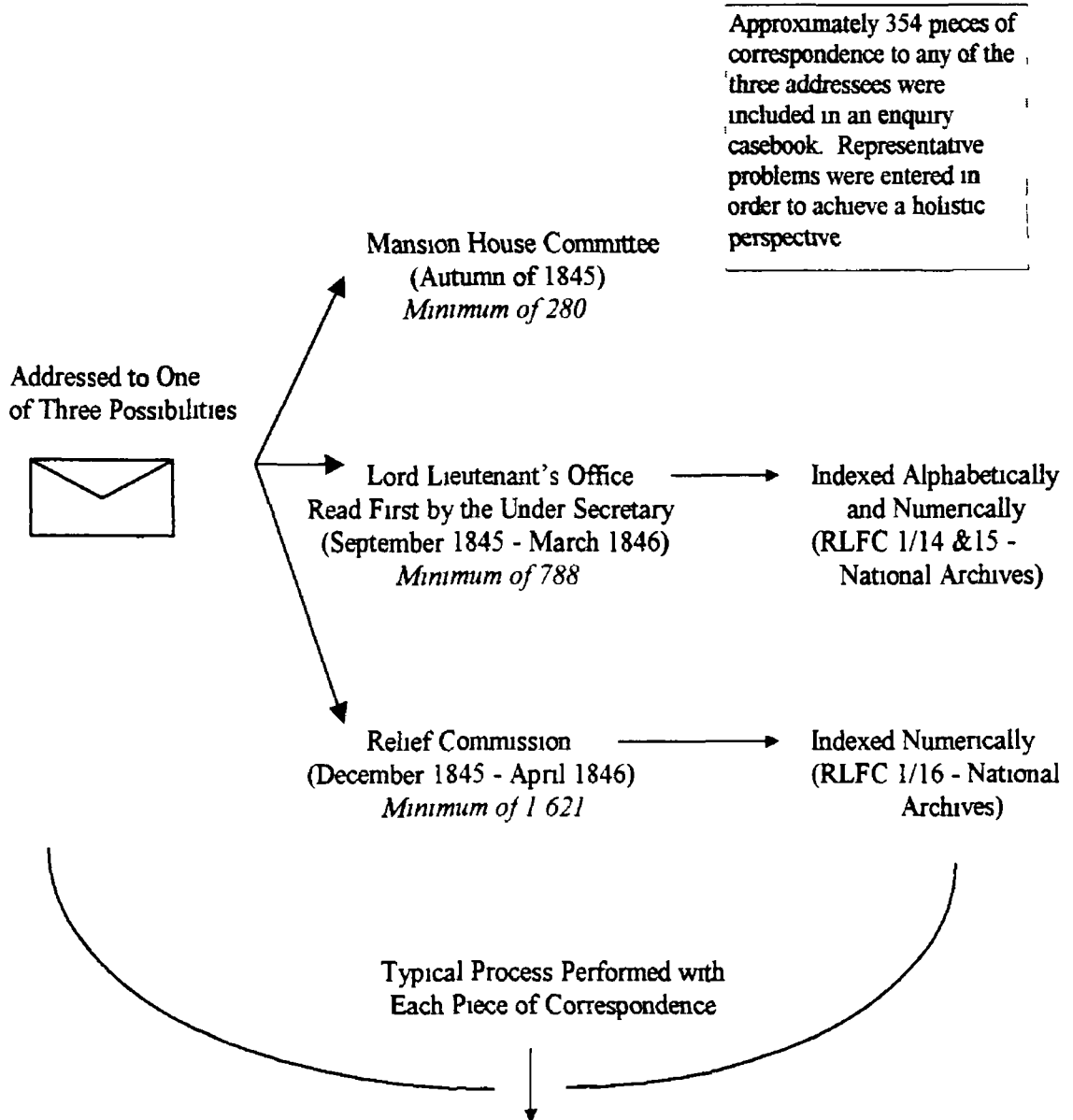
on Dublin Castle because of the blight and to present the technical efficiency with which it was handled. This lies at the basis of the biggest contradiction of the famine period: the calculated, hard working, diligent efficiency of an administration whose nominal purpose was to save life still resulted in massive death, disease, and forced emigration. This thesis in its sum total attempts to supply some answers to the question *why*. Here however, it focuses solely on the efficiency with which the correspondence was dealt.

#### **SECTION 4.4 1 - CORRESPONDENCE FROM AUTUMN OF 1845 TO SPRING OF 1846**

Figure 4.3 seeks to track visually the amount of correspondence handled in the first months of the famine. Letters were addressed to one of three possibilities. The first letters regarding the blight were addressed to the Mansion House Committee, but soon afterward it became apparent to correspondents that their needs should be addressed to either the Lord Lieutenant's office or to the commission itself. When the Relief Commission became operative, abstracts of cases presented to the Mansion House Committee were passed onto the Relief Commission and responsibility left the committee and rested on the commission.



**Figure 4.3**  
**Administration of Famine Correspondence from**  
**Autumn of 1845 to Spring of 1846**



Approximately 354 pieces of correspondence to any of the three addressees were included in an enquiry casebook. Representative problems were entered in order to achieve a holistic perspective

- 1 One or more abstracts and/or copies made
- 2 Short checklist made on the letter for specific duties to be carried out  
Duties varied depending on contents of the letter
- 3 Draft response often written on portion of the original letter
- 4 Depending on its contents, letter or abstract could be forwarded to Sir James Graham, passed on to the Lord Lieutenant, the Relief Commission, the Scientific Commission, the Board of Works, the commissariat, or other persons as deemed necessary
- 5 All abstracts then filed by subject The five subject headings were Suggestions, General, Board of Works, Poor Law Unions, Employment

As one can see, the three overlapping bodies received a minimum of 2,689 individual pieces of correspondence in a period of eight months. Each piece was indexed numerically or alphabetically or both, and often one or more abstracts or copies were immediately produced. If the letter had been addressed directly to the Relief Commission, it was stamped with the date of its receipt as well as being numerically catalogued.

Up to this stage in the correspondence process, the tasks performed had virtually nothing to do with the actual contents of the letter. These were simply details to be uniformly executed for organisational purposes. Depending upon the contents of the letter, the process became even more complex and detailed. Virtually every piece of correspondence received by the office of the Lord Lieutenant was assigned a list of duties to be performed. Listed as roman numerals, the lists were typically of three or four duties, occasionally more or less. The standard list for most letters was as follows:

- I Acknowledge
- II Chief Secretary
- III Transmit to His Excellency

The standard list for most confidential reports returned by the constabulary was as follows:

- I Send copy to Sir J. Graham
- II Chief Secretary
- III Transmit to His Excellency
- IV Annex (Meaning file the report)

In the early months of the blight, many copies or abstracts were sent to Sir James Graham who was the Principal Secretary of State.<sup>40</sup> The Home Department was operated from Whitehall and held many powers. The *Dublin Almanac, and General Register of Ireland* describes the office as the place “Where all Grants, Pardons, and regulations in

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<sup>40</sup> *Dublin Almanac*, 1845, 360

Civil matters of every kind, throughout the kingdom, are made out and regulated”<sup>41</sup> It is certain that the Home Office was made well aware of the situation occurring in Ireland, however, as the Relief Commission and the Scientific Commission began their duties, the frequency of transmission of information to the Home Office decreased

The individual to first read the letters sent to the Lord Lieutenant’s office and decide what must be done was the Under Secretary The Under Secretary serving Lord Heytesbury is recorded in the *Dublin Almanac, and General Register of Ireland* as Edward Pennefather, esq ,<sup>42</sup> yet it becomes apparent by reviewing the correspondence that the first name may have been incorrectly printed Throughout the entire series of correspondence read first by the Under Secretary, the only Pennefather that appears signs his name as Richard Pennefather The initials “R P” appear to indicate the authorship of each of the lists of duties to be performed Additionally, two printed letters requesting the distribution of suggestions from the commissioners are signed with his full name of Richard Pennefather<sup>43</sup> Numerous letters are also directed to Richard Pennefather, not to an Edward Pennefather Regardless of the discrepancy in the Almanac, the consistency with which the letters were handled was not affected

Many times the directive to “Acknowledge” was supplemented with additional information Sometimes it was to “Acknowledge with thanks for the information”<sup>44</sup> When it was important that a more thorough response be sent to the correspondent, Pennefather drafted a longer, more in-depth directive for acknowledgement When, for

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> *Dublin Almanac, 1846*, 86

<sup>43</sup> See appendix C for a copy of a letter with Richard Pennefather’s signature and verification of his position as Under Secretary

example, on 20 October 1845, the Justice of the Peace for the Borough of Galway, Thomas Edward Blake, wrote to the government with his strong opinions, Pennefather recognised the need be sure that a more personal and thorough response be sent to him. The following is a portion of Blake's letter and Pennefather's draft reply that was written on the 22 October 1845

from my own knowledge of the County of the Town of Galway, in the capacity of a local Magistrate, and Resident Proprietor, I feel confident that nothing short of a restriction on the exports, a suspension of the Distilleries, and an opening of the ports, will provide for this awful emergency

Although the measures I have with very great respect suggested, may be attended with some loss to the Revenue still when it is considered, the awful loss of life which must ensue by famine

Reply - "Acknowledge and express His Excellency's deep regret to hear that the Potato Crop has been seriously injured in the district referred to by him. The attention of the Govt (government) has been for some time directed to the state of this Crop and measures have been taken for procuring the fullest and most accurate information on this important subject"<sup>45</sup>

Some readers may not think this reply to be personal or detailed, yet in comparison to the brief and crisp acknowledgement replies given to the majority of letters, this reply is substantial. It includes the acknowledgement of emotion on the part of the Lord Lieutenant, which most other draft replies do not. Additionally, the correspondent, a Justice of the Peace, is given the information and pledge that the government is investing time and attention to the matter of the diseased potatoes. It would have been recognised that Blake had an influential voice in his community, therefore, the government wisely

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<sup>44</sup> Roman numeral I written by Richard Pennefather on 22 November 1845 at the top of RLFC 2/Z16198, NA. See appendix D for copy.

<sup>45</sup> Blake to the Lord Lieutenant's office, 20 October 1845 and Pennefather's draft reply, 22 October 1845, RLFC 2/Z14112, NA.

informed him that they were working on the problem in order that his own fears would be soothed and that he would then dispel the fears of others

If specified, the letters were indeed sent on to the chief secretary and the Lord Lieutenant. One of many examples is seen on a letter written on the 14 October 1845 by Reverend Samuel Roberts. He wrote to the government and suggested that the distress be alleviated by providing low interest loans to the local relief committees and by providing oatmeal at an affordable price. None of his suggestions were asking for free money or food. The Reverend reinforced his request for oatmeal because he believed that oatmeal wards off the inevitable fever that follows periods of famine. He wrote, “this fact I know by an experience of more than 20 years amongst the poor as a parochial minister”<sup>46</sup>. The responses written by Pennefather were the classic three steps for most letters: ‘Acknowledge’, ‘Chief Secretary’, and ‘Transmit to His Excellency’. It was most likely either the Chief Secretary or the Lord Lieutenant who then wrote upon the letter, “It may be proper to act on this suggestion hereafter”.

The Lord Lieutenant responded to a letter written by John Glasson on 25 October 1845 by writing, “I think the suggestion of supplying a machine for the conversion of Potatoes into farina to each Union Workhouse a very good one.” He signed the comment with his initial “H”<sup>47</sup>. The letter was then passed on to Professor Kane to be considered by the Scientific Commission. The chief secretary, Sir Thomas Fremantle, also wrote that certain letters should be forwarded to the Scientific Commission via Professor Kane<sup>48</sup>. Once the Scientific Commission had been initiated, Pennefather begins to include a

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<sup>46</sup> Reverend Samuel Roberts to the Lord Lieutenant’s office, 14 October 1845 and response notes written on the letter, RLFC 2/Z13776, NA

<sup>47</sup> John Glasson to the Lord Lieutenant’s office, 25 October 1845, RLFC 2/Z14434, NA

reassurance in the draft replies that followed the basic format of ‘ eminent scientific persons are employed in investigating the causes of the disease and devising the best means of checking the disease and mitigating its evils ’ These types of responses are seen towards the end of October 1845 and through the beginning of November By this time, almost every correspondent was sending in suggestions for the government to follow, so as soon as the report by the Scientific Commissioners was completed, Pennefather responded to some correspondents by sending them one or more copies of the report

When it became known that the Relief Commission was to be appointed, Pennefather made the transition in his draft responses from referring to the Scientific Commissioners to referring to the Relief Commissioners Professor Robert Kane was the only individual to serve on both commissions The first reference appears to be on a letter written by Denis H Kelly, a Deputy Lieutenant residing in Castle Kelly, Mount Talbot, Roscommon Mr Kelly was warning the government in his letter that in his district alone, 4,000 people will be starving by the next year Pennefather expresses the deepest of regrets and writes, “ a Commission will be appointed immediately to enquire still more fully into the subject, and devise the best means of mitigating the failure of the Potato Crop ”<sup>49</sup> Another early reference to the Relief Commission is seen on a letter from D R. Ross, dated 14 November 1845, when Pennefather scripted, “This letter to be kept for the Commission of which Mr Lucas is to be Chairman ”<sup>50</sup> Although the office of the Lord Lieutenant continued to receive correspondence throughout the winter, by December most letters were addressed to the Relief Commission itself

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<sup>48</sup> Example of response from Fremantle, letter dated 18 October 1845, RLFC 2/Z14054

<sup>49</sup> Draft response by Pennefather, letter dated 13 November 1845, RLFC 2/Z15694, NA

<sup>50</sup> Draft response by Pennefather, letter dated 14 November 1845, RLFC 2/Z15748, NA

In the box at the top and to the right of figure 4.3, the casebook is mentioned. This casebook was compiled by the members of the Relief Commission in the early days of their existence.<sup>51</sup> In order for them to achieve a holistic perspective to the distress, representative problems were included from letters addressed to any one of the three addressees listed in figure 4.3. The book was 59 pages long with approximately 6 cases on each page. It originally consisted of loose-leaf pages that were later bound in three sections with a few pages remaining unbound. This allowed many sets of abstracts to be written individually and then compiled in one location. Except for minor variations, the format was identical throughout to maintain order and consistency. In the left hand column, the date of the letter and the location from which the letter came was listed. In the larger, right hand column, the name of the correspondent was written and a brief summary of the letter was made.

There is no written indication why certain abstracts were included and not others, however, two possible reasons for selection were location or information. For example, the first twenty-three entries are all different locations. The twenty-fourth entry repeats the location of Coleraine, yet it does not appear again in the first bound section of 29 pages. Therefore, one purpose of the casebook appears to be to include many reports from different locations and record them in one place for purposes of comparison. Another possible criteria for selection appears to be the actual information conveyed. The commissioners wanted to gather an accurate, over-all picture of the true state of the potato crop. As a result, location and information became linked because the commissioners required information about the crop from every district in the island. Page after page of the

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<sup>51</sup> Casebook held in the National Archives as holding RLFC 1/10

book reveal statements such as, ‘Crop most abundant - half lost’, ‘Third of crop lost - disease gaining ground’, ‘Crop fully an average - three quarters lost’ Keeping in mind that these reports were entered alongside the date and the location, a quick perusal through the case book would give any reader an idea of the condition of the country Therefore, it can be determined that the abstracts for the casebook were selected to identify exactly how serious or how exaggerated the situation actually was and the criteria for selection was most likely location and information

Perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects of the casebook is the additional markings that appear to have been added after the original abstract was listed To the left of some entries, the words *enquire*, *enter*, *entered* and *immediate* appear in various combinations and frequency Typically these words were written in red ink and they are present only in the first twelve pages of the abstract Further on, the words disappear and only red highlight lines can be seen The command to *enquire* indicates that someone was required to investigate into that particular case *Enter* and *entered* seem to be the command form and the past tense of a directive to put that case into some other index or file, but it is not apparent which file the command was referring to *Immediate* obviously gave urgency to some cases over others Three examples from Tuam, Galway, and Tralee are reproduced in figure 4.4

The first entry to have *enter*, *enquire*, and *immediate* written beside it was from the Reverend P. Henry from Killoran, Sligo on the 15 November 1845 The abstract reads, “Potato crop all lost in some places - in others one half - disease increasing” Another entry bearing the same additional words was from Daniel Mullarky from Kilmacteaugue, Sligo It was also dated 15 November 1845 and the abstract reads, “Potato crop, above an



average Not more than 1/10th of crop at present safe - disease daily increasing - will not be a sound potato in Parish on 24th December” The third and what appears to be the final entry bearing *enter, enquire, and immediate* is from Reverend Walsh of Conna, Waterford. This report is even more dire “Potato crop ‘hardly half an average’ - In Mountain district of Parish not 1/12 of crop sound at present and labouring classes cannot have food for more than a few weeks - farmers not much better off, having keepers placed on their corn ‘by an un pitying and merciless landlord’ ” It is not clear exactly who entered these additional comments, but in the same ink, Sir James Dombrain’s name appears at least twice. It is not clear if he was signing his own name or if the writer was assigning him to these cases. The two cases were from Antrim and Down which are both counties on the north-eastern seafront, so it is most likely that he was assigned to investigate the condition of the cases and report back to the commission.

Figure 4.4  
Three Examples from Casebook

6 <sup>th</sup> Galway	W. French Esq. (Inam)
Inam	Potato crop - loss from disease
22/10/45	from one third to one half
Enter enquire	
6 <sup>th</sup> Galway	J. Douglas Esq. (Grey)
Galway	Potato crop in a very bad state
10/11/45	Population miserable and will
13/11/45	scarcely have a sound potato
Enter enquire	by Christmas
6 <sup>th</sup> Kerry	Thomas Bailey Esq. (Tralee)
Tralee	Potato disease spread to a
23/10/45	frightful extent
Enter enquire	

## SECTION 4 4 2 - DAY TO DAY OPERATIONS OF THE COMMISSION

The further the researcher looks into the operations of the Relief Commission, the more that Sir James Dombrain, Controller General of the Coast Guard, emerges as the unsung hero. All of the men of the commission were very busy, but Dombrain appears to have been the commissioner which put his 'busy-ness' to the best use. He seems to have been the most efficient member of the team, using his commitments to satisfy his job requirements but assist the people as much as possible. For example, on the third of November, 1845, two different letters from two different locations, both written by Dombrain, supply evidence to his efficiency. One letter was written from the Coast Guard Office to accompany a few reports regarding the crop. Also included with the letter was a sample of bread that had been prepared with a portion of potatoes that were infected by the disease. This bread was to be inspected by the Lord Lieutenant and the other gentlemen in his service. It is unfortunate that there is no record of the response that the government officials had to the bread. However, the letter and the bread sample prove his organisation and his creative methods to insure that the Irish poor received the best attention possible.<sup>52</sup> The other letter that Dombrain sent to Dublin Castle on 3 November 1845 was written from the Customs House. He obviously spent some of that particular workday in both locations and the purpose of this letter (it is not apparent which letter was written first) was to send a positive report that things were not desperate yet along the coast.<sup>53</sup>

Though the reports that famine was not going to be a threat were carefully heeded, it did not mean that the other reports were not given proper inspection. In fact, the minutes

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<sup>52</sup> Sir James Dombrain, 3 November 1845, RLFC 2/Z15024, NA.

<sup>53</sup> Sir James Dombrain, 3 November 1845, RLFC 2/Z14978, NA.

of the Relief Commission reveal how very diligently the commissioners worked and how every aspect of the famine was discussed among them. The meeting minutes that have survived date consecutively from 2 January 1846 to 25 April 1846. There are also incomplete minutes from three meetings held during the summer months of the same year. The commission had already been in operation for almost a month and a half before the meeting that took place on the second of January. In their first meeting of the new year, all nine of the men associated with the commission were present. Lucas, Routh, Jones, McGregor, Twisleton, Kane, Dombrain, and McKenna were present and Kennedy performed his duties as secretary. The men met from 11 00am to 2 00pm. The minutes were received by the office of the Lord Lieutenant the following day and a copy was first produced and sent to Sir James Graham. Then the minutes were passed on to the Chief Secretary and the Lord Lieutenant and finally, they were filed. From the latter half of January, the minutes were not copied and sent to Graham in Whitehall. It is supposed that during those two months, he was receiving sufficient information by way of other correspondence, so it was believed that there was no need for him to review the minutes. By March 20, he was in receipt of the *commission meeting minutes* again. The Lord Lieutenant, on the other hand, appears to have reviewed each one of the minutes except one. The minutes from the meeting on 6 February 1846 were not received by the office of the Lord Lieutenant until 9 March, so by the authorisation of Richard Pennefather, the minutes were merely filed in their proper chronological order. Taking into consideration that of the seventy-nine meetings held between 2 January and 25 April, only one was misplaced or held back for some reason, this makes for a very low human failure rate.

The number and length of meetings held by the commissioners can be used to argue two opposing points of view. The frequency and length of time that the commissioners spent meeting together can point to their diligence and their commitment to relieving the suffering of the Irish individuals. On the other hand, the numerous meetings and long hours may indicate how much time was wasted on fruitless efforts that did nothing for Ireland or her people. This thesis draws from both arguments. The commissioners certainly were tireless in their endeavours, but much time was used inefficiently because the purpose of the commission was unclear. The Chief Secretary directed the commissioners to collect information ‘from time to time’ and to bring about measures that would be ‘adviseable [sic] to adopt’. Advisable for whom? For the British government, the Irish people, the landlords, the treasury? The list of possibilities does not end there. Again, it is clear that the Relief Commissioners were assigned a task in which they were predestined to fail. It was impossible to please all of the conflicting interests involved in the Irish Famine no matter how often they met or how efficient they were when they met. This is due to the many factors intervening in the communication process. Yet their failure to please everyone does not mean that no purpose is served in documenting the frequency and efficiency of the Relief Commission meetings. The next few paragraphs discuss both of these elements.

In the month of January 1846, the commission met eighteen out of the thirty-one days. They began by meeting each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, but soon had to meet more frequently. In the last week of January, the commissioners met every day excluding Sunday. They began each of their meetings at 11 00am and adjourned between 1 00pm and 3 30pm. Out of the twenty-eight days of February, the commissioners met sixteen

times. However, on the twenty third of that month, it was decided that only three of the commissioners would meet every day except Sunday and all of the commissioners would meet together each Tuesday. This suggestion was made by Sir James Graham and the decision was made that Routh, Kane, and Twisleton would meet each day. With fewer opinions to be voiced, it can be hypothesised that the meetings would grow shorter, yet this was not the case. As March and April wore on, meetings often began to stretch until 4, 5, and even 5 30pm. The three commissioners met twenty-five of the thirty-one days in March, missing only Sundays and one Thursday during the entire month. Each Tuesday, the other commissioners joined the meeting. In April, the surviving minutes stretch from the first to the twenty-fifth. There is no indication that the meetings were stopped, but the minutes are no longer available. Of those days, there were meetings on twenty of the twenty five all of the commissioners still meeting only on Tuesdays. The last three remaining minutes are dated 8 and 12 of June and 12 of August.

During these meetings, the men performed four principal actions. They listened, read, discussed, and made decisions. The decisions were not made by individuals but by a majority rule, and every decision that was made in the commission had to coincide with the most up to date legislation being produced by Parliament. Much live testimony was presented before the commissioners. The Lieutenant of County Clare, Sir Lucius O'Brien, was a frequent visitor to the commission. He provided first hand accounts of his observations. The commissioners also read a prodigious amount of abstracts, reports, letters, and memorials requesting financial aid. They then discussed and debated the issues that were raised and attempted to reach a consensus on the proper actions to be taken.

Votes were taken and resolutions passed. These were the basic steps that the commission took to reach decisions.

Yet even when decisions were agreed upon, the commissioners were severely limited as to what actions they were permitted to take. They were authorised to disseminate information and assist the formation of smaller, local relief committees without additional approval. However, any decisions that revolved around funding or policy had to be submitted to the Lord Lieutenant. For example, on 7 March 1846, the commissioners were required to bring to the attention of Lord Heytesbury the need to alter “the law for the purpose of providing extra medical relief during the present emergency”<sup>54</sup>. Similarly, they were required to “frame a communication” to the Lord Lieutenant regarding the inadequacy of funds allocated to the public works.<sup>55</sup> A further example of the impotence of the commission is supplied by the minutes of 1 April 1846 when it was written that the commissioners “feel bound to express their opinion that this fund [the £5,000 Charitable Loan Fund] is by far too limited in its amount.”<sup>56</sup> The commissioners were appealing for more money if they were to be successful in saving lives from starvation or disease. Yet according to those in a place of higher authority than the commission, relief was to be a *local* charge. Property was to pay for poverty. Therefore, the commission did attempt to use what power it possessed to mobilise local relief.

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<sup>54</sup> Minutes of the Relief Commission, 7 March 1846. RLFC 1/1, NA.

<sup>55</sup> Minutes of the Relief Commission, 12 March 1846, RLFC 1/1, NA.

<sup>56</sup> Minutes of the Relief Commission, 1 April 1846. RLFC 1/1, NA.

On 29 January 1846, the proposed structure of the local committees was passed by a majority of five to two. The committees were to consist of the following persons <sup>57</sup>

Lieutenant of County or Deputy appointed by him  
Magistrates of Petty Session District  
Officers of Board of Works  
Clergy of all persuasions  
Commissariat Officers  
Assistant Poor Law Commissioners  
Chairman Deputy and Vice Chairman of Poor Law Unions  
Poor Law Guardians of actual district  
Coast Guard Officer  
Resident Magistrate

The Relief Commission systematically assisted in the setting up of the local committees. They printed instructions for the establishment of local relief organisations and then sent copies of the instructions to Mayors, Chairmen of Town Commissioners, and various Lords. A copy of instructions and two examples of cover letters for their distribution can be seen in the appendices.

The last mailing of these instructions appears to have taken place on 8 April 1846. After the local committees were operational, the Relief Commission was still functional, but it no longer carried all of the responsibility for the welfare of the people. It is unfortunate that later day-to-day records have not survived, but it is indicative that once the groundwork was in place, the Central Relief Commission stepped back from its prominent public front and allowed the local committees to function at a higher profile within their own districts. Despite this adjustment in profile, the commission did remain in a central position to receive and disseminate information. They continued to receive many letters,

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<sup>57</sup> Minutes of the Relief Commission, 29 January 1846, RLFC 1/1, NA. Additionally, a member was designated as *custos rotulorum*. Yet as the minutes were handwritten, this was difficult to decipher and interpret, so it is not included in the text.

so the following section moves from the day to day operations of the commission to the final bulk of Relief Commission correspondence held in the National Archives

#### **SECTION 4.4.3 - CORRESPONDENCE FROM SUMMER OF 1846 TO SPRING OF 1847**

The numerical index that concluded on 20 April 1846 did not cease because the book ran out of pages. Instead, it appears that on that date it was concluded that the volume of correspondence had become too great to continue without some kind of restructuring. On the final day alone, there were 46 entries. As letters continued to pour in from the 21 April on through the summer, the numerical registration was retained yet the organisation of filing the correspondence made a distinct transition. The letters were no longer filed chronologically (based on the numerical system) but instead they were sorted on a baronial basis<sup>58</sup>. The new system was completely in place by September 1846.

In the National Archive database, there are 4,880 entries covering November 1845 to August 1846. Therefore, disregarding the 2,689 letters numerically indexed until April 1846, there were over 2,000 documents registered in the summer months alone. Three hundred and seventy of these were sent from County Mayo. After the summer months ended, 396 pieces of correspondence were sent to the *Relief Commission* from County Mayo during the winter of 1846-1847. With some exceptions, the letters were sorted into nine different baronies. Within each barony, correspondence was further organised by individual local relief committees. The barony of Erris had the fewest local committees with three, and the barony of Tirawley had the most local committees with ten. This new method of organising the correspondence is yet another indication of the importance of the



local relief committees Each committee was its own operating administrative structure, but it could only function under the ultimate authority of the Relief Commission If the committee did not follow each directive, it was not awarded any government subsidy Though many issues arise while examining the correspondence from Mayo's local relief committees, the focus here will be upon the importance of each local committee using the proper books and registers as ordered by the Relief Commission, and the process that the local relief committees underwent in order to acquire government subsidisation

Lists of individuals requiring relief were considered of utmost importance If an individual or a family's name was not on the appropriate list, they had little chance of receiving any assistance Therefore, when the ticket system of offering public works was abolished, it was vital to have the proper forms on which to record the names in order that the needy would continue to receive employment The secretary of the Swinford Local Relief Committee wrote the following to the commission on 18 September 1846

In reference to the Treasury Minute dated 31st August last recommending that instead of issuing Tickets as heretofore entitlemg [sic] persons to employment on Public Works, lists of persons requiring relief should be supplied to the officers in charge of the Works I am directed by the Swineford [sic] Relief Committee to request you will be good enough to furnish them with the necessary Forms and instructions for preparing those lists<sup>59</sup>

The reply given to the Swinford Committee was to use the lists which were already compiled in their Registry of Applicants for Relief and transfer the names onto the specific forms supplied to them by the Officers of the Board of Works It is unclear whether or not

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<sup>58</sup> Summarised from the descriptions of RLFC Series 3/1 and 3/2 in the National Archive indexes

<sup>59</sup> Rich Kyle, secretary of Swinford Local Relief Committee to the Relief Commission, 18 September 1846, RLFC 3/2/21/42 (Mayo), NA

additional names would be permitted if they were not already in the Registry, but it is very clear that if the new forms were not completed as specified, no relief would be supplied.

For this reason, local relief committees were eager to receive the proper books and forms as soon as possible and to go about following the instructions in order to meet the needs of the people. The local relief committee for Balla and Mayo in the barony of Kilmaine wrote on 26 October 1846, “Not having received the books or forms for the Parishes of Mayo and Balla I will feel obliged if you have these forwarded with as little delay as possible ...”<sup>60</sup> The Ballinrobe Local Relief Committee wanted to insure that they completed everything properly in order that they would not incur delays in receiving relief by not following instructions. Therefore, they requested the Relief Commission to forward “for our guidance such acts of Parliament - Instructions and other Papers as may be necessary for us to discharge our duty effectually - also some printed forms for making lists of Persons seeking employment on Public Works.”<sup>61</sup> The Earl of Lucan, a County Lieutenant, requested the necessary books and papers for the Aglish, Breaffy, Ballyhean, and Islandeady Parishes on 10 October 1846. Eight days later, Robert Bowen, Chairman of the Hollymount Local Relief Committee did the same and on 24 October 1846, the Chairman of the Shrute Local Relief Committee, Charles L. Maitland Kirwan, followed suit. In less than a fortnight, the Kilkelly Local Relief Committee Chairman, Francis O’Grady also requested the necessary paperwork.<sup>62</sup> These are just a few examples of the

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<sup>60</sup> Balla and Mayo Local Relief Committee to the Relief Commission, 26 October 1846, RLFC 3/2/21/45 (Mayo), NA.

<sup>61</sup> Ballinrobe Local Relief Committee to the Relief Commission, 27 October 1846, RLFC 3/2/21/46 (Mayo), NA.

<sup>62</sup> Local Relief Committees to Relief Commission, 10, 18, 24 October and 6(?) November 1846, RLFC 3/2/21/9, 3/2/21/27, 3/2/21/49, and 3/2/21/54 (Mayo), NA.

many local rehref committees attempting to adhere to the rules and regulations in order to receive relief for their local populations

After the books, lists, and registers were in order, the local relief committees were free to appeal for private subscriptions and then to apply for Grants-in-Aid from government funds. Again, there were regulations that needed to be followed in order to receive the subsidisation. On the list of private subscription, the following words were required to be written

We certify that all the subscriptions set forth in this list have been collected and paid to the Treasurer of the \_\_\_\_\_ Rehref Committee, and that there is not included in it, any sum contributed from Funds applicable to Charitable purposes<sup>63</sup>

The page was then signed by the committee and sent to the Relief Commission. In general, the amount of private subscriptions was doubled, but this was not always the case. Samuel Stork, the secretary and treasurer of the Belmullet Local Relief Committee wrote, "I understand that the Govt have come to the determination of doubling all private subscriptions in support of feeding the poor."<sup>64</sup> In review of the government allocations to Mayo committees, the majority were 'doubled' as indicated above. To clarify however, this meant that if £50 was raised, then the government might grant an equal sum, thereby 'doubling' the amount. In a few cases, the grant was supplied for only half of the sum that was raised, and, in other few cases, the grant equalled more than the subscription amount. For example, the Swinford Committee received £31 10 for £63 private donations in

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<sup>63</sup> Without these words, no money was awarded. Draft reply on RLFC 3/2/21/42 reads, "Form of Receipt required by Instructions not given."

<sup>64</sup> Samuel Stork to the Relief Commission, 20(?) January 1847, RLFC 3/2/21/35, NA

November 1846, but this amount was among the earliest government grants<sup>65</sup> At least within County Mayo, the grants became more generous as time went on, but it also became crucial to have the certification on the list or no money would be sent at all In February, one committee was given £80 for £56 subscriptions and another was given £100 for £77 10 subscriptions<sup>66</sup> The most substantial subscription list in the Mayo committee correspondence was six pages long and recorded £721 14 7 donations with a government award of £721 This was submitted by the Westport Local Relief Committee They also documented £24 18 that had been subscribed but not collected, but no government subsidy was awarded for this amount<sup>67</sup>

There appear on the subscription list three crucial notations after the total amount of subscriptions and government award First, the amount recommended was signified by an 'R' which stood for Randolph Routh, the head of the commissariat Second, the words 'Done' and 'Noted' with accompanying initials indicate that the moneys were sent to the committees and noted in a book recording the finances (See the reproduction of a successful list of subscriptions on the following page ) Notice the indication that £44 was correct and none of the moneys had been donated by charities such as the Society of Friends, the General Central Committee for all Ireland, the Irish Relief Association, the National Club - London, or the Belfast General Relief Fund All of these charities had been included on various other lists and were disqualified<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Swinford Committee to the Relief Commission, 2 & 11 November 1846, RLFC 3/2/21/42, NA

<sup>66</sup> Ballinrobe Committee, 3 February 1847, RLFC 3/2/21/46 (Mayo) and a different committee, 5 February 1847, RLFC 3/2/21/58 (Mayo), NA

<sup>67</sup> Westport Committee, 16 December 1846, RLFC 3/2/21/63 (Mayo), NA The £24 18 was still eligible to be matched at a later date once it was actually collected

<sup>68</sup> See RLFC 3/2/21/42, 3/2/21/73, and 3/2/21/74 (Mayo), NA

Figure 4 5  
Successful List of Subscriptions

*Co Mayo, - Keshbegade Relief Fund*  
*Subscription List for the Parish of*  
*16.449 Keshbegade and Ballymahughish*  
*under the Ballymahughish Committee*

*Colonel Knox Gore - Chairman*

<i>Mrs. Waiter</i>	<i>£15-0-0</i>
<i>Mr. Steward</i>	<i>5-0-0</i>
<i>Mrs. Le Mesurier</i>	<i>4-0-0</i>
<i>Rev. J. C. Connolly</i>	<i>5-0-0</i>
<i>Mrs. Sharpe</i>	<i>5-0-0</i>
<i>Rev. J. Edgar</i>	<i>5-0-0</i>
<i>Rev. G. D. Johnstone</i>	<i>5-0-0</i>

*£44-0-0*

*We certify that all the subscriptions set forth in the*  
*List have been collected & paid to the Treasurer of the*  
*Ballymahughish Relief Committee, and that there is not included*  
*in it, any sum contributed from Funds applicable*  
*to Charitable purposes*

*Thos. Gore, Chairman*  
*J. Vaughan, Treasurer*  
*Wm. C. O'Connell, Secretary*

The certification of monies received was not difficult to produce, but did require organisation and efficiency from the local committees. The following detailed account of the appeals of the Swinford Local Relief Committee will be helpful in understanding the process of appealing for government subsidy. It was already mentioned that in November of 1846, the committee received £31 10 from the government to match £63 in private donations. On 25 December, they were matched £17 for £17 subscriptions. On 21 January 1847, they received their largest single grant of £100 which matched only £72 subscriptions. Up to this point, the grants were fairly straightforward but on 19 February 1847, the committee sent a list of subscriptions for £175 but only £55 was approved to be matched because £120 came from charitable funds. Initially, the £55 recommendation was approved, but it was later cancelled after the government discovered that the committee had reapplied for funds to match the same subscriptions. The Relief Commission was not sending the funds as quickly as they had been so the committee grew impatient when they had not received any funds by the 4 March. They sent another list with the same subscriptions and an additional £5 donation, but this list was rejected entirely by the government because "Form of Receipt required by Instructions not given".<sup>69</sup> No money was to be supplied to local relief commissions unless the rules that had been laid down regarding the format of the subscription lists were followed explicitly. Therefore, the Swinford Committee rescripted their list in the format reflected on the previous page and the grant of £60 was ultimately awarded. See the following chart for clarification.

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<sup>69</sup> Government response to Swinford Local Relief Committee, RLFC 3/2/21/42 (Mayo), NA

**Figure 4.6**  
**Swinford Local Relief Committee Appeals for Government Subsidy<sup>70</sup>**

Date	Amount on Subscription List Exclusive of Charitable Funds	Amount Recommended
2 Nov 46	£48	£24
11 Nov 46	£15	£7 10
25 Dec 46	£17	£17
21 Jan 47	£72	£100
19 Feb 47	£55	£55 (Cancelled)
4 Mar 47	£60	Rejected
10 Mar 47	£60	£60

A possible reason that the Swinford committee persevered from mid February to mid April without giving up in their appeal for subsidy was that the chairman of the committee was the Rev B Durcan, a parish priest who had subscribed £15 himself and was anxious to see it matched by the government funds

The reaction to the regulations imposed on the process of appealing for funds varied Captain George Wellesley of the Royal Navy and a Government Inspector felt that the regulations governing the funds were far too lenient and committees could too easily squander the money awarded to them Wellesley expressed to the commission his apprehension as he wrote, “to guard against the possibility of a committee squandering the money or not complying with the Rules, it seems to me absolutely necessary that a Regulation should be made and the committees be instructed that the subscriptions must be ” and he continues on in this manner for some time describing many additional receipts and safeguards that he desired to be set into place <sup>71</sup> On the other hand, the Rev Giles Eyre, the rector of Kilmeena asked if it would be at all possible to use the privately

<sup>70</sup> Letters and responses dated from 2 November 1846 to 13 April 1847 RLFC 3/2/21/42 (Mayo), NA

donated funds as his committee saw fit and to use the government funds according to the regulations. He wrote, "I beg to ask ... if a sub-committee has power to allocate the private subscriptions ... in any way they please, for the good of the poor."<sup>72</sup> Yet regardless of whether the correspondents felt that the regulations were too weak or too strong, a sense of urgency pervaded the appeals of nearly all.

... I humbly but earnestly entreat of you to lay the same [the subscription list] before the Commissary General with a view to the usual aid from the Government.... It is of vital importance to my poor sufferers at this awful moment that any relief awarded should be sent down if possible without one day's delay - as numbers are now struck off the works - and no substitute as yet in operation for the relief of those who are now starving.... And unless immediate relief be sent to us - I have no hesitation in saying that the entire of the people of this Relief district are left to perish from starvation.<sup>73</sup>

This earnest appeal accompanied a subscription list of only £15 to which £15 was recommended. Without money, the local relief committees were made ineffective. One committee voiced this reality to the Relief Commission when asking for a depot for the sale of meal to be set up in Kilkelly. "If you do not do so, at once," the committee explained, "the name of a relief committee in Kilkelly will be a mockery, as no food can be provided for the people nearer than Sligo or Ballina - a distance of nearly 30 miles."<sup>74</sup>

It has been shown that the Relief Commission and the smaller local relief committees operated with the appearance of great efficiency, but the Kilkelly Committee made an excellent point that without sufficient assistance, the title of *Relief Committee* or

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<sup>71</sup> Captain George Wellesley to the Relief Commission, 8 April 1847, RLFC 3/2/21/38 (Mayo), NA.

<sup>72</sup> Rev. Giles Eyre to the Relief Commission, 11 February 1847, RLFC 3/2/21/7 (Mayo), NA.

<sup>73</sup> James Browne, parish priest and acting chairman of the Ballintobber Local Relief Committee, to the Relief Commission, 28 March 1847, RLFC 3/2/21/10 (Mayo), NA.

<sup>74</sup> Kilkelly Local Relief Committee to the Relief Commission, 8 February 1847, RLFC 3/2/21/27 (Mayo), NA.



even *Relief Commission* was in essence a mockery. Another organisation within the relief administration that left a record of efficiency without success was the Board of Works, and it is to the correspondence of this board that this thesis now turns.

#### **SECTION 4.4.4 - CORRESPONDENCE OF THE BOARD OF WORKS**

By the poor, the Board of Works was looked to as the organisation that could save them from destitution without losing one's sense of pride. By the rich, it was looked to as the organisation that could assist them in improving their property. In reality, it was permitted to do neither. It turned out that the relief works became so poorly paid and so seemingly meaningless, that the worker's pride was not usually kept intact. And, as most works could meet approval only if they were not of benefit to one particular landlord, the proprietors had to struggle to see that they did not *lose* money as a result of the works. Yet despite these drawbacks, the men of the board efficiently handled an enormous amount of correspondence and did the best that they could do under the circumstances. Colonel Harry Jones was the Chairman of the Board of Works and as he was also a Relief Commissioner, he became the liaison between the two bodies. For each approved public works project, the Treasury was to "provide the requisite grant, half of which was to be repaid by the local barony, the other half being a free grant."<sup>75</sup> Though Colonel Jones was wary of people trying to take advantage of this generous offer, he still informed the commissioners of "the insufficiency of the Provision of £50,000 contemplated by the Bill now before Parliament to meet the cases that are daily coming in under the act of 1st Vic

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<sup>75</sup> Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, 55

C 21 <sup>76</sup> The official placed in charge of organising the daily proposals was Captain Thomas Larcom

On 27 March 1846, the Commissioners of Public Works wrote to Larcom, informing him,

the Board consider that the manner in which you can best assist them will be to refer to you all the memorials for works under provisions of the Acts 1 and 9 Vic , chapters 21 and 1, after they have been received and registered in this office, and they request that you will make such arrangements as may appear to you best calculated to ensure a prompt examination being made as to the several works applied for under those Acts <sup>77</sup>

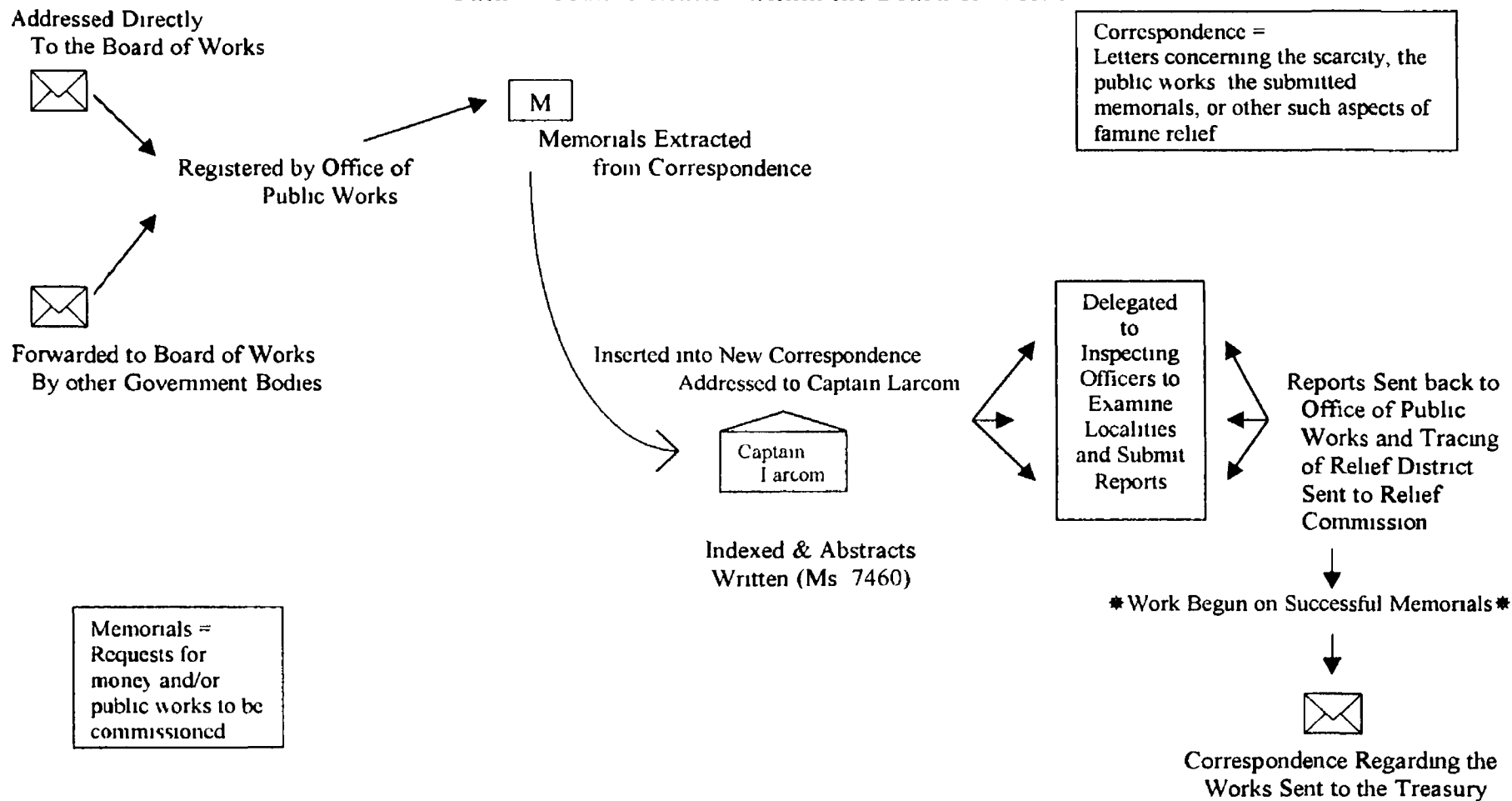
Correspondence poured into the Office of Public Works, so the services of Captain Larcom were vital. The correspondence path of the Board of Works is displayed visually in Figure 4.7. The communications were sometimes addressed directly to the Board or they were forwarded to them by other government bodies. For example, on 20 March 1846, the Relief Commission directed that five different memorials be sent on to the Board of Works and it ordered that nine more be sent on 28 March 1846. On many other days, smaller numbers of memorials were sent. The difference between correspondence and a memorial is that within one item of correspondence, there may have been multiple memorials. A memorial was a specific request for money or for a public work to be commissioned. It is important to differentiate between the two because they were indexed and tracked differently. For example, on 26 March 1846, six different memorials were included within one piece of correspondence. The Office of Public Works registered the single letter, but

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<sup>76</sup> Minutes of the Relief Commission, 3 March 1846, RLFC 1/1, NA

<sup>77</sup> The Commissioners of Public Works to Captain Larcom, 27 March 1846, Ms 7460, Larcom Papers, NLI

**Figure 4 7**  
**Path of Communication within the Board of Works**



extracted the six memorials and forwarded them to Captain Larcom to be dealt with expediently. Larcom indexed and abstracted the memorials and correspondence that he received and then delegated responsibilities. He used his assistants to investigate and report on the areas referred to within the memorials. As each report was completed, it was reviewed by Richard Griffith and Captain Larcom and then sent with a cover letter to J C Walker of the Board of Works. The letter allowed space for the name of the Inspecting Officer and the locality to be inserted.

Larcom preserved an entire report as an example of what the other reports resembled. The report for the Barony of Kilmaine in County Mayo was completed by Captain Gordon of the 59th Regiment. It is twenty-five pages long. Throughout the report, there are twenty six small notes made and most of them are initialled with the letters 'H D J' - most likely Colonel Harry Jones. The notes indicate that eleven projects were to be recommended, nine projects were not to be recommended, more information was required for four projects and two notes were indiscernible. The memoranda that followed the report from Mayo reads, "It appears from Captain Gordon's report that there is considerable distress in this barony, and it may be desirable to provide additional employment, in case the works already granted should prove insufficient. It is only with this view that the following works are recommended."<sup>78</sup> In each case, a tracing of the Relief District was included in the report to be forwarded to the Relief Commission. Although the two different bodies had separate duties, they were required to keep the other well aware of their activities. On those proposed works that received approval, work was begun. For the four weeks prior to 27 June 1846, 478,138 had been employed on the roads.

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<sup>78</sup> Report for the Barony of Kilmaine, Ms 7460, Larcom Papers, NLI

and 31,226 had been employed in drainage<sup>79</sup> When the funds necessary to pay for the works arrived from the treasury, correspondence regarding the work was written and sent in response Therefore, the final destination of correspondence dealing with the public works rested with the treasury<sup>80</sup>

The finances of the public works performed in 1846 were audited and closed in 1849 On 23 June 1849, Captain Larcom signed a statement that described his role in the relief of distress He summarised that his duty “was that of examining and reporting on all the projects brought forward for the employment of the poor under the Act 9 Vic C 1 in the spring and summer of 1846, with the assistance of numerous Officers, Surveyors and others”<sup>81</sup> Despite the seeming efficiency of Larcom and his assistants, the public works were not successful All of the internal administration that has been explained in this chapter bears this common characteristic The complexity and efficiency is impressive, but the attention to detail still did not save lives

#### **SECTION 4.5 – SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF CIRCULAR FAILURE**

On 24 March 1846, the Secretary of the Relief Commission, Captain Kennedy, sent the following letter to the Lord Lieutenant

I am directed by the Commissioners to lay before you the accompanying application from Mr Monsell in which he expresses a desire to receive the assistance of the police stations in his neighborhood in distributing meal for the relief of persons in distress in that locality

Mr Monsell states that the assistance he requires would not interfere with the ordinary duties of the men

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<sup>79</sup> Abstract Return of Labourers, Four weeks ending 27 June 1846, Ms 7460, Larcom Papers, NLI

<sup>80</sup> Commissioners of Public Works to the Lords of the Treasury, 7 July 1846, Ms 7460, Larcom Papers, NLI

<sup>81</sup> Captain Thomas A Larcom, 23 June 1849, Ms 7460, Larcom Papers, NLI

The Commissioners beg to recommend to His Excellency's favourable consideration the request of Mr Monsell, as the object he has in view is a most desirable one and much called for <sup>82</sup>

The draft response stated, "Refer to the Inspector General requesting that he will state whether in his opinion there is any objection to Mr Monsell's application being complied with." The communication circuit thus far involved Mr Monsell writing to the commission, the commissioners agreeing with the suggestion, the Relief Commission secretary presenting it to the office of the Lord Lieutenant, and the under secretary sending the proposal to Duncan McGregor, the Inspector General of the constabulary. Because the communication between the commission, the under secretary, and the constabulary can be considered 'in-house' administration, the letter made it to the constabulary office and was date stamped 24 March 1846, the same day it left the secretary of the Relief Commission. Though efficient, the communication remained ineffective. It was ineffective because even though McGregor did not object, the Lord Lieutenant ultimately derailed the 'ideal' circuit. McGregor wrote

I can see no objection if the services required of the Constabulary will not interfere with police duties. But it would I think be desirable, in the present state of the Country to establish a general rule as to the extent of the assistance that it may expect for the Force to exude in such cases <sup>83</sup>

After this qualified acceptance on the part of the constabulary was presented to the Lord Lieutenant, he made the decision that Mr Monsell's proposal was not feasible. On 27 March 1846, Richard Pennefather noted the response of the Lord Lieutenant in the following draft reply: "Acknowledge receipt and state that His Excellency does not consider that the police can, consistently with the duties which they may have to perform

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<sup>82</sup> Captain Kennedy to Lord Lieutenant, 24 March 1846, RLFC 2/Z5730, NA

<sup>83</sup> Duncan McGregor, Response to Kennedy, 24 March 1846, RLFC 2/Z5730, NA

be employed to sell or distribute meal for the relief of persons in distress in the neighbourhood in which they may be stationed”<sup>84</sup> The conclusion to this derailed circuit came in the form of a letter written by John Waller O’Grady on behalf of Mr Monsell to discover the government’s response to the request to utilise members of the constabulary for active relief efforts Pennefather’s draft reply to O’Grady’s letter again relayed the Lord Lieutenant’s rejection of the proposal The Relief Commission approved of it, Duncan McGregor of the constabulary did not have an objection to it if his men could continue to carry out their duties, but the Lord Lieutenant made the decision that it was an unworkable suggestion The communication failed

Another specific example of communication gone awry occurred between a medical doctor in Tubbercurry and the Relief Commission Interesting shifts of culpability transpired in John Meekings’ first letter, the commission’s draft reply, and in Meekings’ second letter in reply John F Meekings, MD wrote to the Relief Commission

Destitution and starvation are now increasing so rapidly in this district that I consider it the duty of everyone, even in the individual capacity, to urge upon the Relief Commissioners the necessity for extraordinary exertions to ward off a calamity so awful and truly heart-rending to those obliged to witness it As physician of the dispensary of this locality, independently of being one of the Relief Committee, I have opportunities of correctly ascertaining the wants of the poor and I know instances in which whole families have been a day without food, ashamed to beg, yet suffering serious privation<sup>85</sup>

He therefore established his credibility as an eyewitness, a member of the local relief committee, and most importantly as a medical doctor In relation to the issue of responsibility, Meekings made a telling statement He wrote, “I feel I would be culpable if

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<sup>84</sup> Richard Pennefather, Record of response of Lord Lieutenant, 27 March 1846, RLFC 2/Z5730, NA

I failed to lay before the Commission this statement and to earnestly entreat their immediate attention to it”<sup>86</sup> In one sense, he accepts that he has a responsibility to the people, but he believes that by informing the commission established by the government to deal with the famine situation, his duty is, at least, partly discharged. The philosophy of Meekings seems to be that if the government placed its faith and confidence in the Relief Commission, then so could he. Yet the doctor received a blow to his trust when the commission responded to him, “The true cause of not having works in progress is to be found in the absence of the requisite local exertions for providing the means of relief in due time”<sup>87</sup> The commission informed Meekings that their own administrative diligence had exonerated them for the responsibility that now lay with the local committees. Meekings then fired an accusatory volley back at the Relief Commission revealing the root of most famine issues – the lack of funds. His statement, “I do not think the Committee should be confined in regard to the numbers they employ,”<sup>88</sup> meant that if the government, through the auspice of the Relief Commission, would only supply the local committees with sufficient money, then everything would be resolved. The Relief Commission tried to pin the blame on the local committees, and in turn the committees tried to pin it back on the Relief Commission.

Other specific examples of communicative failure have to deal with culpability and money as well. The *Freeman's Journal* of 19 May 1848 stated that the direct cause of many deaths was the fault of the relieving officers, but the prosecution of those officers

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<sup>85</sup> John Meekings to the Relief Commission, 12 July 1846, RLFC 3/1/4223, cited in Liam Swords, *In Their Own Words*, 45

<sup>86</sup> Ibid

<sup>87</sup> Draft Response, Ibid



was very difficult “Steadily but fearfully is hunger performing its work of human destruction With a cheap loaf and markets glutted to overflowing with provisions, our fellow beings are permitted to drop, one by one, into untimely graves The deaths of thousands may be laid very justly at the doors of relieving officers, and yet there are not legislative enactments by which to punish them, for if there be found persons sufficiently humane to charge them with neglect, there are either charges preferred against the exposé of villainy, or the relieving officer snuggles out of the affair because the dead victims can tell no tales”<sup>89</sup> However, the article goes on to cite the specific death of Patrick Gallagher of Templemore in which “the police were so satisfied of the culpability of the relieving officers that they charged them as accessories to the poor man’s death in their requisition to the coroner”<sup>90</sup> In this case, the culpability was publicly placed on the relieving officers, yet no doubt they were following the orders of their superiors Indeed, some correlations do exist between the Irish Famine and the more recent Holocaust against the Jewish people and other victims of Nazi genocide

The Nazi extermination program was carried out by a vast bureaucracy in which many functionaries - from Adolf Eichmann down to junior clerks - sat at desks, shuffled papers, arranged train schedules, and carried out a variety of other tasks without having to consider the final product of their efforts The perception of personal causation was reduced not only by the dissociation of each of the functionary’s contributory acts from the human consequences of those acts but also by the diffusion of responsibility within the bureaucracy The more people are involved in an action, the less likelihood that any one of them will see herself or himself as a causal agent with moral responsibility<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> John Meekings to the Relief Commission, 25 July 1846, RLFC 3/1/4737, cited in Liam Swords, *In Their Own Words*, 45

<sup>89</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 19 May 1848, cited in Liam Swords, *In Their Own Words*, 318

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 319

<sup>91</sup> Herbert Kelman and V Lee Hamilton, *Crimes of Obedience*, 165

The Holocaust is one of the most horrific events of history. In the middle of the twentieth century “millions of innocent persons were systematically slaughtered on command. These inhumane policies may have originated in the mind of a single person, but they could only be carried out on a massive scale if a very large number of persons obeyed orders.”<sup>92</sup> And this is what occurred. It is with this administrative aspect of the Holocaust that this thesis is most concerned, not the more unsubstantiated efforts to equate the famine directly with the Holocaust.

In the cases of crimes of obedience, it appears that the individuals committing the crime can certainly experience discomfort and trauma, but continue to engage in “actions that they and others would usually regard as illegal, immoral, and even unthinkable.”<sup>93</sup> Additionally, as these individuals are committing these crimes, they believe that their actions are justified. They are no longer engaging in an activity of their choice, but are doing it because they were told to do so. The Nazi war criminals were made to face their deeds during the Nuremberg trial. During these proceedings “one phrase was heard so often that it has come to be associated with the German underlings even by people who are not old enough to remember World War II. The phrase is, ‘I was just following orders.’”<sup>94</sup>

Paid famine relief workers wanted to leave it on the record that they were ‘just following orders’ as well. For example, Captain Larcom made it clear in the Public Works audit that he was operating under the appointment “of the Irish Government at the Treasury,” and he was joined by Mr. Griffith in the duty “which was that of examining and

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<sup>92</sup> Stanley Milgram, “Behavioral Study of Obedience,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* (Vol. 67, No. 4, 1963) 371.

<sup>93</sup> Herbert Kelman and V. Lee Hamilton, *Crimes of Obedience*, 23.

<sup>94</sup> John Dworkin, *Psychology* (St. Paul, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco: West Publishing Company, 1988) 556.

reporting on all the projects brought forward for the employment of the poor under the Act 8 Vict C 1 in the spring and summer of 1846, with the assistance of numerous Officers, Surveyors and others”<sup>95</sup> He clearly stated for the record what his duties were and under whose authority they were performed so that he could not be held accountable for anything outside of the parameters that he set in the audit. One of the ethical consequences of acting uncritically under the authority of someone else is the anaesthetising effect it has on the actor’s moral conscience.

When it does come to looking at the money spent by the British administration, it can be recognised that a considerable figure was spent, but in comparison to the budget for other expenditures the figure seems paltry. Peter Gray summarises the famine costs:

From 1845 to 1850 the Treasury spent £8,100,000 on relief, of which just over half was in loans to be repaid by Ireland. When the remaining debts were cancelled in 1853, the net amount spent was some £7,000,000, representing less than half of one per cent of British GNP over five years. Contemporaries noted the sharp contrast with the £20,000,000 compensation given to West Indian slave-owners in the 1830s. Historians have pointed to the even more marked discrepancy with the nearly £70,000,000 subsequently spent on the Crimean War of 1854-6. In the event, more money was raised in Ireland than in Britain to meet the cost of the Famine.<sup>96</sup>

Contemporary confirmation of the availability of agricultural resources and funds came from the pen of Charles Trevelyan. In a letter to Labouchere, Trevelyan was encouraging landowners to take a more active role towards progress for Ireland. A statement seemingly uncharacteristic of Trevelyan was in regard to Ireland’s population: “If the land of Ireland were tolerably cultivated, there would be abundance of employment, according to a higher

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<sup>95</sup> Audit of the Public Works, Ms 7460, Larcom Papers, NLI

<sup>96</sup> Peter Gray, *The Irish Famine*, 94 – 95

standard of living for even a larger Population than the present”<sup>97</sup> A statement in a letter to Lord Monteagle revealed Trevelyan’s acknowledgement that money was not the main issue

The deficiency, therefore, is not of money, but of food, and no possible measures which Parliament could adopt could increase the stock of food, or cause a better distribution of it <sup>98</sup>

Additionally, Sir Randolph Routh was given complete authority by the Lord Lieutenant to “place at their disposal such sums as may be requisite for the following workhouses Swinford, Castlebar, Ballina, Tralee, Glenties, Carrick on Shannon, Cavan, Dunmanway and Bantry”<sup>99</sup> And yet, people continued to perish

Many perished outside of the workhouse because they were unwilling to part with their land in order to obtain relief The reasoning behind the Gregory Clause was also circular in nature The peasant is starving, the British will help only if the peasant is truly destitute, so the peasant must forfeit his property to receive relief Named after William Gregory, MP, future husband of Lady Gregory, this amendment excluded anyone who held more than one quarter of an acre of land and any of their dependants from receiving relief Gregory argued that when “a man held a large piece of land – half an acre, one two or three acres – he was no longer an object of pity He did not come before the public in *forma pauperis* – he has not given up his holding When he did so he would be entitled to relief the same as any other destitute person, but not until then”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Trevelyan to Labouchere, 5 September 1846, Monteagle Papers, Ms 13,400, NLI

<sup>98</sup> Trevelyan to Lord Monteagle, 9 October 1846, Monteagle Papers, Ms 13,397 (1), NLI

<sup>99</sup> Lord Lieutenant to Sir Randolph Routh, 17 February 1847, Chief Secretary’s Office Registered Papers 0 1667, summarised in Liam Swords, *In Their Own Words*, 139

<sup>100</sup> William Gregory, *Hansard*, XC, 1273-7, 12 March 1847 and XCI, 585-7, 29 March 1847, cited in Peter Gray, *Famine, Land and Politics*, 278

Practically applied in Ireland, this clause meant more death and forced emigration. The magistrates, cesspayers, clergymen, and ratepayers of the barony of Gallen appealed to the Lord Lieutenant against the clause. They wrote

Hundreds will perish through hunger, it not being in the power of the Board of Guardians to afford them any assistance, they holding above a quarter acre of land. We greatly fear they will be obliged to part (with) the holdings they expended their all in endeavouring to till and thus become burdens to the county when, were some small assistance promptly given, will enable them to become useful members of society. The poor and industrious should not be allowed to perish thro' want, when by the law of the land we are compelled to support the indolent.<sup>101</sup>

A specific example of death as a result of the Gregory Clause was written after the wife and son of Pat Thornton died. He held an acre of land in Aughagower, but "Though in deep distress he had never applied for relief, being unwilling to part with his land."<sup>102</sup> The statement continued, "This is by no means a solitary instance of death from starvation proceeding from the disinclination to part with land."<sup>103</sup> Another tragic account of the effect of the Gregory Clause was reported in the investigation of the death of Charles Durkan. "He applied for relief but was refused until he showed a certificate that he had given up his land. On 28 February he gave up the land, was given 14lbs of meal and died the following day."<sup>104</sup> The relieving officer explained the death of Michael Roche. "Roche applied for relief three weeks before he died. I told him to surrender his land. I did not see him again until the day before he died, when I was told to go and see him as he

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<sup>101</sup> Memorial to the Lord Lieutenant, 18 May 1848, Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers Z 4977, cited in Liam Swords, *In Their Own Words*, 317 – 318

<sup>102</sup> Statement of Mr. Bourke regarding the death of Mary Thornton and her son, 8 May 1848, Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers O 4800, cited in Liam Swords, *In Their Own Words*, 315

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>104</sup> Investigation of the death of Charles Durkan, 17 March 1849, Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers O 2937, cited in Liam Swords, *In Their Own Words*, 371

was in a dying state. It was the priest and others who informed me of this. I went to his house and found him not able to move. I said I could give him some tea and bread but they told me he could not use it. In the course of the day I caused some warm milk to be sent to him. He died shortly after.”<sup>105</sup> Yet even if the land was surrendered, the workhouse was a dangerous place to turn to for help. These reports came into the under secretary before the Gregory Clause, but give an idea of how desperate the workhouse circumstances were.

The master and clerk of the workhouse lie dead. The lives of the doctor and matron are in the balance. For God’s sake, dispatch from Dublin proper persons to take charge, by tomorrow’s night mail. Things are in an awful state and we are all overwhelmed. For myself, I am quite prostrated as to strength.

The doctor of the workhouse died. There are upwards of 700 inmates, all more or less ill with dysentery, themselves under no control and 5 cwt of meal in the house. For God’s sake, send proper persons to take charge, medical men etc, and give us means for the support of the house.”<sup>106</sup>

Within the circle of communication interchanges, the government sometimes seems to be caught between a desire to show compassion and the need to stay within the poor law and workhouse regulations. The draft reply to one request for aid reads, “Forward a list of subscriptions however small and a grant in aid will be recommended.”<sup>107</sup> But to another request just over a week later, the workhouse option is their best response. “There are vacancies in Boyle workhouse and also in Sligo workhouse.”<sup>108</sup> The response message here is yet another example of failure of the ideal communication circuit.

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<sup>105</sup> Captain Farren’s report on death of Michael Roche, 28 April 1849, Chief Secretary’s Office Registered Papers 0 3845, cited in *Ibid*, 378.

<sup>106</sup> Reverend James Anderson to the Under Secretary, 17 and 18 March 1847, Chief Secretary’s Office Papers 0 3895, cited in *Ibid*, 158.

<sup>107</sup> Draft reply of Relief Commission to James Henry, PP, 14 June 1846, RLFC 3/1/3271, cited in *Ibid*, 38.

<sup>108</sup> Draft reply of Relief Commission to John Armstrong, JP, 26 June 1846, RLFC 3/1/3634, cited in *Ibid*, 40.

The final specific example to be brought to light in this section is of a parish priest's response to the government's attempt to deal with the potato blight. Richard Walsh received copies of the report written by the Scientific Commission and he placed no trust in them whatsoever. He therefore sent them back to the government and said that once they got their act together, then he would cooperate.

Placing little or no confidence in the reports issued by the Commissioners appointed to examine into the state of the Potato Crop and also horrified at the indifference manifested by the Government to the want and distress of the Irish nation I beg leave to return you the Copies of the report you have been directed to send me. When the Government will take some effectual steps to provide against the famine which is now inevitable then it may command any influence I possess.<sup>109</sup>

For many reasons, this is an example of circular communication gone awry. The Scientific Commission attempted to come up with a plan and to distribute it, but their findings were wrong. Walsh placed none of his trust in the inaccurate reports so he made a stand by sending them back. Yet none of the messages in this circuit were effective in saving lives or culture, so it can therefore be labelled as a critical failure in a circular communicative exchange.

#### **SECTION 4.6 – CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter placed the saving of human lives at the level of highest value. If the model of 'Ideal Famine Communication' would have been adhered to by famine communicators, human lives and Irish culture would have had a more likely chance of being preserved. However, at some point in the circle, effective communication was derailed. The first point of failure was the frequent inability to encode the necessary message. 'Famine' and 'starvation' were viewed as extreme exaggerations for the first

years of *distress*. The second major point of attrition fell in the decoding stage of the cycle. The perception of the senders held by the receivers has a bearing on the manner in which the message is interpreted. In the case of the famine, popular perception of the Irish called not for equality but for discipline.

Internally, the Relief Commission had many infrastructures in place to ensure efficiency. Correspondence was handled in an organised and detailed fashion, yet despite their organisational competence, the commission became impotent to relieve acute distress. The fact that the commission was not established to preserve all Irish lives or Gaelic culture created a major communication flaw. It was assembled to collect information from 'time to time' and to carry 'into effect such measures as it may be hereafter adviseable [sic] to adopt'. The measures that were adopted suited the British needs more than the Irish needs. If the role of a commission is to provide an open forum for all points of view to be given equal status, the Relief Commission became skewed as the voices such as Twisleton and Dombrain's were silenced.

Many specific examples of both efficiency and circular failure have been presented. Of far more importance than saving lives was the concerted effort to avoid abuse to the relief system. Britain desired to create an economically viable island of Ireland with a subdued British culture. Understanding this goal helps to reconcile the opposite realities of efficiency and failure.

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<sup>109</sup> Richard Walsh, PP, to the Under Secretary, 15 November 1845, RLFC 2/Z15866, NA



## Chapter 5

### Verbal and Observational Universes in Conflict

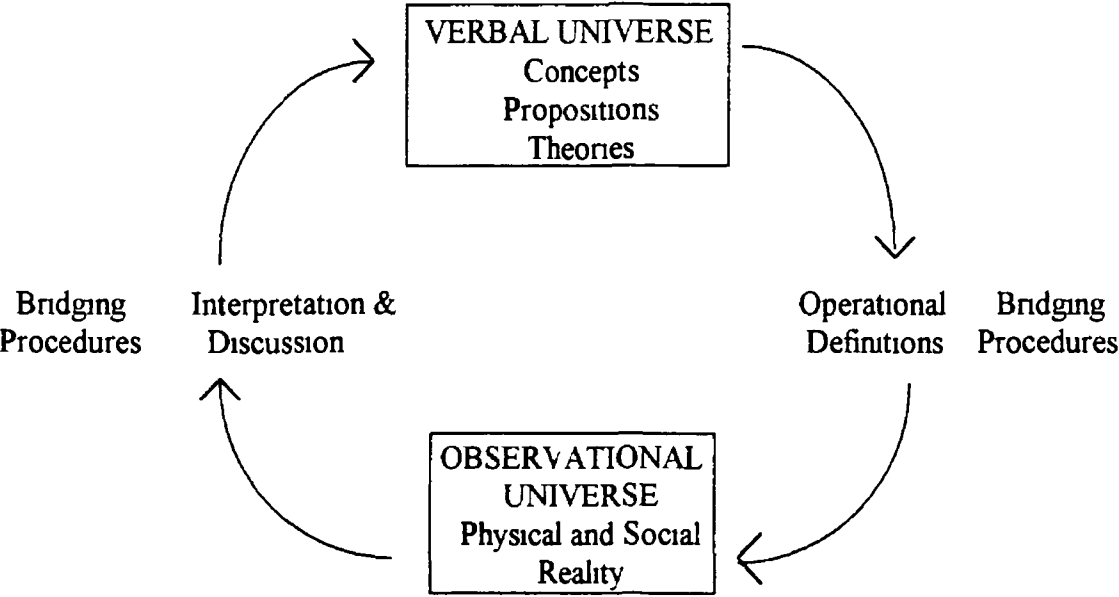
*I shall write in the strongest manner both to Trevelyan and to his masters in the spirit you suggest. It is childish not to be prepared to act with vigor and resolution in the exigency in which we are placed. I am both an Economist and Treasury man but after what I have seen and know, the Government must be prepared to face much responsibility if they wish to keep society together."*

Lord Monteagle in response to the  
Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Lord Bessborough  
1 October 1846

**Chapter 5**  
**Verbal and Observational Universes in Conflict**

A specific key to unlocking one of the reasons why so many communication failures occurred during the Irish Famine is the recognition that the ‘verbal and observational universes’ of the Irish and English people were in conflict. This somewhat obtuse statement can be visually interpreted in the following circular model.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 5.1**  
**Verbal and Observational Universes**



The facts, events, individuals, groups, statements, and any other actualities of the Great Irish Famine exist within what is termed here as the ‘observational universe’. All historical events are able to be researched, studied, analysed, and written about from a purely factual point of view. They are able to be observed. Observable events are able to become learning tools for mankind when they are studied in the context of the verbal universe in

which they occurred or in which they are being studied. For example, the slave trade itself exists in the observational universe. The verbal universe that existed when it was in full swing condoned and encouraged it. The current verbal universe in regard to the slave trade attempts to grant all human beings equal civil rights. The same observational universe yields two contrasting results when examined in different verbal universes. This principle holds true for all observational and verbal universes, and, when the two universes are bridged, tools to avoid future mistakes can be produced.

The observational universe rarely becomes controversial until it is brought into conflict with the verbal. Scholars seldom argue over specific dates in history, but often engage in heated rhetoric over the conceptual implications which those dates produced. Debate, controversy, differing opinions, and varied attitudes abound when the two universes encounter one another. As a bridging procedure from the verbal universe to the observational, important operational definitions must be established. The process of constructing operational definitions involves more than simply quoting a definition for a term or meaning. It also requires listing the steps that were taken to arrive at that definition.<sup>2</sup> Following this, the bridge back from the observational to the verbal occurs by engaging in interpretation and discussion. The pattern of study is circular; therefore, much room is left for other scholars to continue the expansion of both the observational and the verbal universes. This growth in academic study has certainly been reflected in the nature of the recent explosion of academic research into the Irish Famine and other famines.

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<sup>1</sup> Figure 2.1 from Miller and Boster, "Data Analysis in Communication Research," *Measurement of Communication Behaviour* (New York: Longman, 1989) 19

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24

### **SECTION 5.1 – CHAPTER OBJECTIVES**

The proposal here is to continue the in-depth study of the famine by exposing two specific concepts that existed in the verbal universe of the late 1840's British Isles. The two concepts which will be defined operationally and discussed here are the issues of providentialism and political economy. These ideologies had tremendous bearing on the outcome of the potato failure and this chapter seeks to give some explanation.

Although the concepts are able to be separate and definitive, they became inextricably intertwined during the event of the Irish Famine. One aim of this chapter is to bring some clarity to the development of both of these concepts and to discuss the results of the conflict between the two separate universes during the Great Famine.

### **SECTION 5.2 – LIVING IN AN 'AGE OF ATONEMENT'**

As a participant in today's global culture, I would describe it as multi-cultural, multi-media, multi-national, multi-lingual, and, in general, open to diversity and change. It is *en-vogue* to be tolerant, at least at a civic level, of all beliefs, religions, attitudes, races, genders, sexual preferences, and personal choices. In this post-modern era, the biggest cultural taboo is to place one type of lifestyle in a position of greater value than another. Not so in the British Isles of the 1840's.

The communicators of the Irish Famine existed in the 'Age of Atonement', an apt phrase brought to prominence by author Boyd Hilton. Society of the first half of the nineteenth century was attempting to earn salvation through improvement.

The first half of the nineteenth century has been called 'The Age of Improvement.' But it was also an 'Age of Atonement,' because

improvement, like virtue, was not then thought of as its own reward, merely as terrestrial fumbling towards public and private salvation<sup>3</sup>

Christopher Morash, in chapter one of *Writing the Irish Famine*, emphasizes the relationship between humans and improvement or ‘progress’ As technology advanced, so did the human race He asserts that “the fruits of scientific knowledge such as the railway and the steamship could be recruited as metaphorical representations of that progress”<sup>4</sup> Even more important for our study here is Morash’s assertion that progress and morality are linked

If humanity had more information at its disposal, the argument went, people were better able to reason, and were thus better equipped to act morally (the implicit equation being the Enlightenment ‘rationality = morality’)<sup>5</sup>

“Technological progress and moral progress are mutually reinforcing,” and therefore, by the 1840’s with which we are most concerned here, “progress was sacred”<sup>6</sup>

Understanding the Victorian relationship between progress and morality allows today’s student to better contemplate the actions of 1840’s famine participants The purpose of this academic exercise is not to excuse or rationalise those actions but to place them in the context of the verbal universe in which they occurred

### SECTION 5.2 1 – PROVIDENTIALISM

Providentialism, as it relates to the Irish Famine, is the title given to the theory that the Famine was sent by God Its roots are in the evangelical ideology that permeated British policies and claimed that morality and progress were forever interlinked Boyd

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<sup>3</sup> Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1988) 3

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1995) 14

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid* , 14

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* , 14,15

Hilton prefaced his study of the evangelical influence on social and economic thought by writing

I do not claim that evangelical ideology is a key to unlock all the secrets of policy formation in the first half of the nineteenth century – merely that it contributed more than ‘classical economics’ or utilitarianism to the formation of that public morality (or doctrine) in the context of which the new economic policy emerged and by which it was sanctioned<sup>7</sup>

The term ‘evangelical’ does refer to those in the third and fourth generations of the revival started by Wesley, but mostly encapsulates the “gamut of attitudes and beliefs” that “affected the established clergy in the first half of the nineteenth century”<sup>8</sup> The evangelical mindset sought social progress as a means to spiritual fulfilment. If temporal suffering was a means to ultimate improvement, then so be it. Joy could be found in the process of atonement if it was sought. It was in this setting that the providentialist nature of the famine was set. Morash concludes

This allows De Vere to develop in his Famine poetry what he calls ‘the idea of a Providence punishing at once and exalting’. If suffering and its reward exist simultaneously, then suffering itself has a real, absolute value. It is not simply the price to be paid for future happiness, it is, in a powerful strategic reversal, happiness itself<sup>9</sup>

Evangelicals believed in a “hidden hand” that held a rod of correction in response to human behaviour. Within this realm of thought existed the doctrines of self-help, *laissez faire*, and Free Trade<sup>10</sup> “Governments should interfere with men’s lives as little as

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<sup>7</sup> Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, viii

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 7

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine*, 137-138. The reference is to A. De Vere, *Irish Odes*, 149.

<sup>10</sup> Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, 114 and 16.

possible, so that men can exercise ‘self-help’ – the only means to salvation, both spiritually and economically – in a world beset with temptation, and meant for trial and judgement”<sup>11</sup>

Four men, who were very influential in the Whig party, were among those who actively supported the notion of providentialism. They were Charles Wood, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Earl Gray, Sir Charles Trevelyan, the Secretary of the Treasury, and Sir George Grey.<sup>12</sup> This ideology exerted a strong influence on the Whig administration during the famine. Peter Gray contributes much to the public understanding of the ideological tenor of the late 1840’s, explaining that “the Famine was welcomed as a God-given opportunity to enforce a policy that would transform Irish behaviour.”<sup>13</sup> In his most recent work, *Famine, Land and Politics: British Government and Irish Society, 1843 – 50*, Gray weaves the adoption of this belief through each phase of the famine. For example, after the first potato failure in 1845, it was believed that the plan for Ireland’s social regeneration had commenced. “Perhaps most important for the ministerial plan, the transformation of agrarian society envisaged as the natural consequence of the catastrophe appeared to have begun.”<sup>14</sup> When the potato failed again the following harvest, the Home Secretary Sir James Graham interpreted the failure as confirmation that the British policies were correct. Although the return of the Whigs to political power in 1846 brought some changes, the anxious desire to bring progress and reform to Ireland was consistent.<sup>15</sup> Through all the years of the famine, the majority of famine communicators believed that “the providential visitation of the potato failure now compelled the re-ordering of society

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 16

<sup>12</sup> Peter Gray, “Ideology and the Famine,” *The Great Irish Famine*, ed. Cathal Poirteir, 93

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 92-93

<sup>14</sup> Peter Gray, *Famine, Land and Politics: British Government and Irish Society, 1843 – 50* (Dublin, Portland: Irish Academic Press, 1999) 123

without delay”<sup>16</sup> No matter what relief policies were instituted and whether they failed or succeeded was ultimately not the government’s responsibility, because of their belief that the blight was sent by the Almighty to bring about social change in Ireland

However, the original Latin meanings of providence do not fully coincide with the understanding of the word as it would have been interpreted by individuals living in the mid 1800’s “The term ‘providence’ is derived from the Latin *providentia*, meaning ‘foreknowledge’, and the related verb *provideo*, meaning ‘to see to beforehand’, or ‘to make provision for’ The emphasis in these Latin words is not on active participation in the present, but on foreseeing All this suggests that providence is concerned with God’s ordering of things in the past, rather than with his involvement in the present”<sup>17</sup> Instead, the providence of God as understood by the British administration, was “a God who provides for, and is actively involved in, the workings of nature, man, and history Providence is God in control, the ‘Disposer Supreme’”<sup>18</sup> For this reason, when the potato crop was struck by a hideous, black, stench-ridden disease in the autumn of 1845, it was proclaimed to be a ‘visitation of God’ Both good and evil were thought to emerge from the same God A grim example of contemporary thought on this subject is supplied by Austin Bourke in his work, *‘The Visitation of God’? The Potato and the Great Irish Famine* He records, from a report in the *Limerick Chronicle* of 3 September 1845, the following passage

Michael Brennan, aged about 14 years, apprentice to James Reilly, a sweep, was sent up a chimney by his master at Mr Egan’s brush factory but not returning in due time, or making answer when called to, another lad was

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid , 124, 143

<sup>16</sup> Ibid , 199

<sup>17</sup> Michael Langford, *Providence* (London SCM Press Ltd, 1981) 3

<sup>18</sup> Ibid , 4



sent up after him, and found Brennan stuck fast in the mason work, and unable to speak or move The body was conveyed to Barrington's hospital, where James Bennett, Esqr , coroner, held an inquest, and the verdict was - 'Died by the visitation of God ' ”<sup>19</sup>

A further understanding of providence as embraced by mid-nineteenth century ideology is provided in the work *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* In this study of the tension between sovereignty and responsibility, D A Carson does not aim to define these terms and then contrast them Instead, he tracks the presence of this tension throughout the Hebrew Canon, the Intertestamental Jewish Literature, and the Gospel of John A full account of the presence of this tension is not required here, however, the reliance of the British administrators on the notion of providentialism is not surprising because of the presence of it throughout all biblical history and teaching Yet the difference between Trevelyan and Carson's understanding of it lies in their differing applications Carson writes, "Men in the fourth Gospel [John] are held accountable for their sin in general, but more particularly they are held responsible to believe in Jesus and obey his words ”<sup>20</sup> Charles Trevelyan and the other Whig leaders were quick to rely on the argument that the famine was part of God's judgement, but actively chose to ignore important passages of Scripture, such as the command quoted in the book of James that Isaac Butt in fact cited on the cover page of his pamphlet regarding the Irish Poor Law Butt quotes the verse as follows

If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, "Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled," notwithstanding ye

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<sup>19</sup> Austin Bourke, *'The Visitation of God?'* , 52

<sup>20</sup> D A Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (Grand Rapids Baker Books, 1994) 203

give then not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit?<sup>21</sup>

The government chose not to take responsibility for a situation that they professed was a result of God's hand

In his discussion of the specifics of the Irish Famine, Hilton Boyd explains that there was a movement among certain evangelicals to proclaim the famine of 1847 as an incident of 'special providence' as opposed to 'natural providence' and it therefore warranted government interference. He included the writing of Thomas Chalmers in this instance. Chalmers was a 'magnificent preacher' who 'became obsessed with the evil effects of the poor laws' and who had tremendous influence over the social elite of the early nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup> Chalmers did not relinquish the idea of free trade, but he did call for an interventionist response. "The method of relief for the present should have been made as peculiar as the emergency itself is peculiar."<sup>23</sup> Yet countermending Chalmers, "Most Englishmen would have agreed that the Famine was not a case of peculiar providence but a mechanical application of cause and effect. They would have located the cause in the Irish themselves, in their sloth and fecklessness. Many saw it also as a punishment for Catholicism, and here a 'special' element might be acknowledged in respect of the Maynooth Grant of the year before."<sup>24</sup>

On the exact opposite side of reasoning, some Irish peasants saw the cause of the famine not to punish Catholicism, but instead to spread the blessing of the Catholic

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<sup>21</sup> James 2:15-16. Quoted by Isaac Butt, *The Poor-Law Bill for Ireland Examined, its Provisions and the Report of Mr Nicholls Contrasted with the Facts Proved by the Poor Inquiry Commission, in a Letter to Lord Viscount Morpeth, M.P.* (London: B. Fellowes, 1837) cover page.

<sup>22</sup> Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, 56, 58, 62-65.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Chalmers, "Political Economy of a Famine," 280, 284. Cited in *Ibid.*, 111.

religion to people outside of Ireland. This was the belief that “God visited Ireland with famine to scatter the Irish people all over the world that they might spread the seed of the Catholic religion in foreign countries.”<sup>25</sup> Lord Monteagle exulted to Charles Trevelyan in the autumn of 1846

It is wonderful to see the fortitude with which the peasantry contemplate this awful calamity. They consider it as the will of God.<sup>26</sup>

It is in fact true that many of the peasantry did attribute the blight to the will of God, but they chose different reasons for adopting this belief. Some did believe that the famine was sent to spread the Catholic faith, but others believed the famine was sent as a punishment on their own people. The punishment could have been for a variety of different transgressions, such as the wastefulness of surplus potatoes from previous abundant harvests or, in specific areas, the unlawful tilling of the lands by the Molly Maguires that had occurred in the year preceding the famine.

Regardless of whether or not the peasantry subscribed to a different ideology of providentialism, they had few options for their own survival. The government agencies gave as much food and relief as they felt it their responsibility to give, and then they attempted to shift all responsibility of the starving masses either back onto God, or onto groups directly affected by the fate of the hungry population. Because it was difficult to attribute the responsibility of the suffering people directly to God, the government laid the responsibility of relief on the Irish landlords. As a result of this decision, Russell insisted on holding off the reconvention of Parliament until January of 1847 after its cessation on

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<sup>24</sup> Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, 111

<sup>25</sup> Cathal Poirteir, “Seanchas faoin Drochshaol i dtimpeallacht Cho Ros Comain,” *Douglas Hyde Conference Proceedings*, 54

28 August 1846 The thinking behind this delay was to allow the MP's who were Irish landlords to sort out the needs of their tenants <sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, the majority of landlords failed to match Russell's high hopes for them and it would have been far more fortunate for Ireland if the session of Parliament had begun early, in order to agree on a relief policy and implement it immediately As it was, winter hunger was well upon the people before Parliament came together

Perhaps the best critique of the ideology of providentialism was written by Michael Davitt approximately fifty years after the famine He writes that the administration

agrees in fathering upon the Almighty the cause of the famine It was the visitation of God! Hundreds of thousands of women, children, and men were, on this hideous theory, murdered by starvation because of some inscrutable decree of the God of the poor, who, two thousand years before, had died to rescue them No more horrible creed of atheistic blasphemy was ever preached to a Christian people than this <sup>28</sup>

No matter what protests were raised, the administration effectively used the ideology of providentialism to relieve themselves of responsibility for famine deaths If the verbal universe of providentialism and the verbal universe of today's emphasis on universal human rights are overlapped with the observational universe of hundreds of thousands of deaths by starvation, two 'moral' results are produced According to an analysis done with today's multi-cultural context, one can find that the adoption of the ideology of providentialism by those in political power resulted in a method of anaesthetising their moral response to those in need Yet those who operated under policy formation using

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<sup>26</sup> Lord Monteagle to Charles Trevelyan, September 1846 (No specific date), Ms 13,396, Monteagle Papers, NLI

<sup>27</sup> Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, 72

<sup>28</sup> Michael Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland*, 50

evangelical doctrine believed that the ultimate morality of progress was being served when Free Trade was held at the level of highest value

Christopher Morash admits that “It is, perhaps, all too easy to dismiss these allusions to the Famine as an ‘act of God’ as hypocritical Victorian religiosity, the pious gloss on a pragmatic materialism. To do so, however, would be to ignore the degree to which a narrative of history shaped by the prophetic books of the Bible formed a part of the discursive world of Famine Ireland which was every bit as ‘true’ as the narrative of progress.”<sup>29</sup> Providentialism also should not be ignored because it has become intertwined with another ideology that had great contrasts between the verbal and observational universes. This ideology is termed political economy and has far reaching implications in famine policy.

## SECTION 5.2.2 – MORALITY AND ECONOMICS

The editor of the *Nation* from 1855 to 1876, Alexander Martin Sullivan, gave an accurate summary when he wrote, “There is probably no subject on which such painful misunderstanding and bitter recrimination have prevailed between the peoples of England and Ireland as the Irish famine.”<sup>30</sup> The perceived reality of the famine differed greatly on either side of the Irish Sea.

The English people, remembering only the sympathy and compassion which they felt, the splendid contributions which they freely bestowed in that sad time, are shocked and angered beyond endurance when they hear Irishmen refer to the famine as a ‘slaughter’. In Ireland, on the other hand, the burning memory of horrors which more prompt and competent action on the part of the ruling authorities might have considerably averted, seems to overwhelm all other recollection, and the noble generosity of the English

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<sup>29</sup> Christopher Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine*, 84-85

<sup>30</sup> Alexander Sullivan, “New Ireland,” Reprinted in Seamus Deane, *Field Day Anthology*, Volume II, 193

people appears to be forgotten in a frenzy of reproach against the English Government of that day<sup>31</sup>

The English government was perceived as immoral and illegitimate by Irish nationalists on account of the famine

However, if progress and atonement for sin were a measure of its conception of morality in the mid-nineteenth century, the government proceeded within the bounds of morality. Providentialism wove its rhetoric through the fiscal policies of famine economy and affected the actions of economists. Morash argues that providentialism and the principles of Malthusian population control began to overlap.

As the providential interpretation of the Famine as supernatural punishment for 'national sin' developed into a justification for starvation, disease, emigration, and death, it began to merge with that other great narrative of 'depopulation', Malthus's 'principle of population'. Similarly, in Famine novels such as Annie Keary's *Castle Daly* and Trollope's *Castle Richmond*, there are points at which it is difficult to distinguish a Malthusian reading of the Famine from a providentialist reading.<sup>32</sup>

Thomas R. Malthus so effectively employed moral arguments for his lessons on population, that his disciples were enabled to view those born into poverty as deserving death over government assistance. First published in 1798, the *Essay on the Principle of Population* exerted such influence in the political, moral, and economic factors of society that even now, two centuries later, the repercussions are still felt. Couched in the sufficiently sweet disguise of an elegant banquet held by a divine, caring hostess, Malthus removes all guilt or shame from withholding basic human rights to those born into poverty. The verbal universe of the 1840's resonated with lectures such as the following:

A man who is born into a world already possessed, if he cannot get subsistence from his parents on whom he has just demand, and if society

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 193

<sup>32</sup> Christopher Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine*, 93

does not want his labour, has no claim of *right* to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact, has no business to be where he is. At nature's mighty feast there is no vacant cover for him. She tells him to be gone, and will quickly execute her own orders, if he do not work on the compassion of some of her guests. If these guests get up and make room for him, other intruders immediately appear demanding the same favour. The report of a provision for all that come fills the hall with numerous claimants. The order and harmony of the feast is disturbed, the plenty that before reigned is changed into scarcity, and the happiness of the guests is destroyed by the spectacle of misery and dependence in every part of the hall, and by the clamorous importunity of those who are justly enraged at not finding the provisions which they had been taught to expect. The guests learn too late their error, in counteracting those strict orders to all intruders, issued by the great mistress of the feast, who, wishing that all her guests should have plenty, and knowing that she could not provide for unlimited numbers, humanely refused to admit fresh comers when her table was already full.<sup>33</sup>

Through this literary device, Malthus made wealthier individuals feel as though they were partners with the 'great mistress' when they allowed Mother Nature to 'execute her own orders' and cause certain numbers of the population to perish through famine.

In addition to the teachings of Malthus, the pervading evangelical ethos gave administrators the fuel to couple self-serving economics with morality. Boyd Hilton remarks, "They [the liberal social theorists of the Clapham Sect] helped, indeed, to give such potentially selfish policies an aura of economic righteousness."<sup>34</sup> In Boyd's preceding statement, a measure of cynicism can be discerned because it was written in the verbal universe of today, not in the midst of the concepts, propositions, and theories of the 1840's. On the other hand, there is a measure of sincerity in Richard Whately's words, "the Scriptures enjoin Charity to the poor, but give no directions as to the best mode of administering our charity. Now it is evident that all different modes of attempting to

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas Malthus, *Essay on the Principle of Population*, as quoted in Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750 - 1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 221.

relieve distress are not equally effectual, and that those which are altogether injudicious may even lead to more suffering than they remedy”<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, the following discussion regarding political economy makes an effort to uncover another key verbal universe of the 1840’s. The moral and political economies will be investigated and contrasted, and, four prominent perspectives on political economy in Ireland will be explored. Before the chapter conclusions are reviewed, a section is devoted to the late nineteenth century backlash against the correlation of morality and progress. An entirely different verbal universe had developed decades after the famine, which rejected the mid-nineteenth century notions of economic morality. It is valuable to compare several verbal universes to the stark observational universe of the physical and social realities of the Irish Famine. Each time this is accomplished new interpretations and discussions emerge. The point of this is to show that even within political economy, divergent perspectives existed as to the best way to apply its central tenets to Ireland.

### SECTION 5.3 – MORAL AND POLITICAL ECONOMIES CONTRASTED

The field of economics is an intriguing and intricate study with both academic and practical applications. In order to better understand the economic climate of the 1840’s, certain historical figures and developments in the economic sphere will now be examined. A primary purpose of the following survey of moral and political economies is to explain the narrow range of conservative economic thinking which the decision makers applied to relief policy. The principles of economic thought are diverse, but when political economy

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<sup>34</sup> Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, 205. The Clapham Sect was made up of William Wilberforce, Henry Thornton, Zachary Macaulay, John Venn, and others, Boyd, 7.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Whately, *Introductory Lectures on Political Economy* (London: B. Fellowes, 1832) 36.



was depended upon for the situation of the 1840's famine, few alternatives were investigated. The collectivist and nationalist writers discussed in the last section of this chapter reflect the cyclical nature of human thought. They call their reader's attention back to the reciprocal obligations of the moral economy that preceded the Great Irish Famine. They do not recommend a return to paternalism and deference, but do call for greater moral responsibility of those in economic power. The pendulum of reaction swung one direction away from the seemingly pre-modern conceptions of a moral economy, then later countered as a backlash against the inflexibility of political economy. Therefore, the following pages clarify the fact that though there was some room to manoeuvre within the science of political economy, the majority of administrators took a stance of inflexibility.

The most important factor in the operational definition of a moral economy is that the poor of society were morally entitled to a fair price for food. E. P. Thompson is generally credited with popularising the notion of a 'moral economy' in current academic discourse.<sup>36</sup> Thompson defines this moral economy by an examination of social protests in England during the eighteenth century, yet his findings can be also applied, however modified, to Ireland. By the famine years, traces of the moral economy were gone both in England and, at a different level, in Ireland, but it is the contrast between the moral and the political economies that makes the impact of political economy all the more significant.

One of the most important factors within a moral economy is that the "moral" price of food set by the people is of higher value to society than the "economic" price set by the market. In the moral economy of the eighteenth century, it was a farmer's duty to sell grain at a fair price, and not to hoard food in order to alter the market. If there existed

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<sup>36</sup> E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London: The Merlin Press, 1991) 351

grain at a fair price, and not to hoard food in order to alter the market. If there existed anything underhanded or oblique in the market procedure, it was considered immoral. Thompson introduced his premise with the verse from Proverbs 11:26 which says, “He that withholdeth Corn (or grain), the People shall curse him: but Blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it.” This was commonly understood by the poor and the wealthy, and especially by the farmers. One substantial farmer named John Toogood gave the following advice to his sons:

If the like Circumstances [referring to a food riot] happen hereafter in your Time and either of you are engaged in Farming Business, let not a covetous Eye tempt you to be foremost in advancing the price of Corn, but rather let your Behaviour shew some Compassion and Charity towards the Condition of the Poor.<sup>37</sup>

Thompson explained that the many food riots of the eighteenth century were considered morally legitimate by the people as they were only defending their appropriate right to a fair price. As he expressed it: “By the notion of legitimation I mean that the men and women in the crowd were informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights of customs, and, in general, that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community.”<sup>38</sup> The riots did not always entail theft or hostility, as the sole purpose of most food riots within a moral economy was to “set the price.” This involved a negotiation between the buyers and the sellers in order to come to an agreement on the price at which the food was to be sold. It was the responsibility of the people to pay a fair price and it was the responsibility of the sellers to offer the food at a fair price. In a majority of the circumstances, a compromise was struck. Yet even if a compromise was not found, violence and pilfering were not automatically the result. For example in 1766, corn was

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 245. As quoted from the MS diary of John Toogood, Dorset CRO, D 170/1

taken from the farmers by the Honiton lace-workers, sold for the popular price in the market, and then the money and the sacks holding the corn were brought back to the farmers<sup>39</sup> There were reciprocal duties of all classes in a moral economy and they were respected To clarify, “The forms of action which we have been examining depended upon a particular set of social relations, a particular equilibrium between paternalist authority and the crowd”<sup>40</sup> The important philosophical shift that occurred in the transition from a moral economy to a political economy was the removal of the moral importance of a mandatory fair price of food for the poor As the shift from paternalism began to take place, the one principle that did not change was that the ‘common good’ of the people was still philosophically of utmost importance However, the method of achieving the common good in a political economy was by maintaining a free and unregulated market instead of maintaining a fair price of food for the poor A paradigm shift occurred with the transition from a moral to a market economy Under a moral economy, humanity was best served by preserving a fair price for food for everyone Under a market or political economy, it was believed that the best way to serve all of society was to interfere with the market *as little as possible*

The word ‘market’ is somewhat problematic as it can be a definite place of exchange, or it can be a metaphor or an idealisation of the economic process The latter definition is more prominently used when referring to the economy “The breakthrough of the new political economy of the free market was also the breakdown of the old moral

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid , 188

<sup>39</sup> Ibid , 230

<sup>40</sup> Ibid , 249

economy of provision”<sup>41</sup> Thomas Bartlett hones the discussion of the collapse of the moral economy into a more specific Irish context. Though there was not the same degree of paternalism in Ireland as there was in England, the moral economy did function until its removal by the more stringent market economy. Bartlett quotes the historian W E H Lecky, whose view of a moral economy in Ireland may have owed more to wishful thinking on his part: “Among the many contradictions and anomalies of Irish life nothing is more curious than the strong feudal attachment and reverence that frequently grew up between the resident Protestant landlord and his Catholic tenantry in spite of all differences of race and creed and tradition.”<sup>42</sup> It was the collapse of the cultural détente or ‘moral economy’ in Mayo, as we have seen, that made the result of the potato blight in the 1840’s as deadly as it was. Before political economy came into being, the larger farmers and landlords had a moral obligation to give the poor an affordable price to purchase enough food to survive. As society began to embrace the principles of political economy and become partners with the ‘great mistress’ of the feast described by Thomas Malthus, the *greater* moral obligation to society resided in the preservation of free trade, not in the preservation of pauper’s lives.

Although one economic structure is actually titled ‘moral economy’ and the other structure has been designated as ‘political’ or ‘market’, this does not imply that the practitioners of political economy believed that it was any less *moral* than the moral economy of paternalism. Indeed, the proponents of political economy believed that it

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 273, 258

<sup>42</sup> W E H Lecky, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, III (London 1913 edn) 415. Quoted in Thomas Bartlett, “An End to Moral Economy: The Irish Militia Disturbances of 1793,” *Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland*, C H E Philpin, ed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 216

would have much more lasting success for society's good than the paternalistic structure could ever hope to achieve. Yet the human aspect that this contrast reveals is that the individual lives of the poor had value placed upon them in a moral economy but not in a political economy. Political economy put a far greater value on corporate society than on individual lives. The structure required only a certain number of the labouring poor population and when they began to exceed the required number, dearth was an appropriate manner to check the surplus. As the previous chair of political economy at Trinity and Galway, and a professor of political economy at University College, London, John Elliot Cairnes reviewed the political economy practiced during the famine two decades after it had occurred. He expressed his disapproval of the manner in which economists justified their seeking of the 'greater good'. Describing the difference between "*human* interests" and "*class* interests," he wrote, "This chasm in the argument of the *laissez-faire* school has never been bridged. The advocates of the doctrine shut their eyes and leap over it."<sup>43</sup> Completely disregarding the judgement of which economic structure had greater morality, the result of political economy advocates leaping the chasm with closed eyes was one million deaths and one million forced emigrations as a result of the potato crop. The cultural detente that constituted the moral economy in Ireland began to phase out at varying rates from 1790 to the early 1830's. As the paternalism and deference relationship began to fade between landlord and peasant, the individual lives of the Irish poor had less security. Bartlett argues that the beginning of the erosion of the moral economy of Ireland was marked by the widespread disturbances against the militia in the 1790's. The anti-militia riots "have a transcending importance in that they mark the end of the 'moral

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<sup>43</sup> John Elliot Cairnes, "Essays in Political Economy," Reprinted in Seamus Deane, *Field*

economy' - that balance, that tacit understanding, between governor and governed - which had characterized previous disturbances in Ireland"<sup>44</sup> The moral economy in Ireland did not vanish instantly, but instead was subject to a process of transformation. As it was discussed in chapter two, the moral economy was preserved in Mayo for a longer period of time, but by the 1840's, any principles of moral economy that may have been of help to those who starved during the famine had been removed by the pervasive influence of the tenets of political economy throughout all of Ireland, including Mayo. Bartlett bridges the gap from the collapse of moral economy to the eve of the famine.

With the militia disturbances of 1793 we see the beginning of that pattern of secret crime, organized outrage and military repression which characterized pre-Famine Ireland.<sup>45</sup>

After the collapse of this colonial version of a moral economy, the previously operational channel of communication between landlords and tenants was closed. In its place, crept 'secrecy, subterfuge, and deception' among the peasant classes.<sup>46</sup> Effective communication is very unlikely to occur under these conditions, yet it was in this communicative climate that the successive potato crop failures of the post 1815 Irish agricultural economy transpired. By the beginning of the Great Famine, the moral economy was well displaced by political economy.

Exactly what constituted the political economy engaged in during the 1840's? Its foundational principles originated in the middle of the eighteenth century under the instruction of Monsieur Quesnay and his disciples known as the French Economists, or

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*Day Anthology*, Volume II, 190

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Bartlett, "An End to Moral Economy: The Irish Militia Disturbances of 1793," *Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland*, 192

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 218

Physiocrats Quesnay “first endeavoured to explain of what wealth consists, by what means it is produced, increased, and diminished, and according to what laws distributed, in other words the first teacher of Political Economy”<sup>47</sup> Until this time, it was supposed that ‘wealth’ consisted strictly of the amount of gold and silver retained by a country or an individual Quesnay “showed that the abundance of gold and silver, and of every other commodity, is to be promoted, not by restrictions on importation, nor by bounties on exportation, but by the absolute freedom of external and internal trade, by security to every man the results of his industry or frugality, without attempting to order him what to produce or how to enjoy”<sup>48</sup> The early theoretical discussion taking place in France was the genesis of a vital school of modern economic thought “Indeed, Quesnay and his disciples were described by Karl Marx as ‘the true source of modern economics’”<sup>49</sup>

Following the Physiocrats, the next major step in the development of political economy was the publication of the *Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith in 1776 The timing of the *Wealth of the Nations* was important as

the publication of Smith’s work coincided with two major revolutions the American Revolution, which professed to speak in the name of a new “science of politics,” and the industrial revolution, which created the material conditions for both the new political science and the new political economy<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> These are defined as ‘weapons of the weak’ by Robert Scally in *The End of the Hidden Ireland* and James Scott in *Weapons of the Weak Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*

<sup>47</sup> Nassau Senior, *Four Introductory Lectures on Political Economy, Delivered before the University of Oxford* (London Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1852) 3

<sup>48</sup> Ibid , 4

<sup>49</sup> Joseph John Spengler, “Quesnay Philosopher, Empiricist, Economist,” *Political Economy A Historical Perspective*, Horst Claus Recktenwald, ed (London Collier-Macmillan Publishers, 1973) 11

<sup>50</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty England in the Early Industrial Age* (London and Boston Faber and Faber, 1984) 42

Although this publication was monumental for the study of political economy, readers and commentators on *Wealth of Nations* have noted the difficulty in finding congruency between it and Smith's first work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). By conviction and profession, Smith was a moral philosopher, however, some readers choose to focus on the de-moralisation of economy, humankind, and the poor which, they argue, occurs in Smith's latter work. Yet, as Gertrude Himmelfarb points out, this limits Smith's work by supposing that his "idea of a market economy was devoid of moral purpose, that his concept of human nature was mechanistic and reductivist, and that his attitude toward the poor was indifferent or callous."<sup>51</sup> She argues that this is not the case, and "that Smith was hardly the ruthless individualist or amoralist he is sometimes made out to be."<sup>52</sup> Instead, Smith intended that both works operate together as part of his 'grand design'.

A close reading of the *Wealth of Nations* itself suggests that political economy as Smith understood it was part of a larger moral philosophy, a new kind of moral economy.<sup>53</sup>

The writers and developers of political economy did not intend to create an amoral economic structure, but instead they sought a secularisation of morality by working to effect a separation of church and state. Thompson elaborates as follows:

The new economy entailed a de-moralising of the theory of trade and consumption no less far-reaching than the more widely-debated dissolution of restrictions upon usury. By "de-moralising" it is not suggested that Smith and his colleagues were immoral or were unconcerned for the public good. It is meant, rather, that the new political economy was disinfected of intrusive moral imperatives. The old pamphleteers were moralists first and economists second. In the new economic theory questions as to the moral polity of marketing do not enter, unless as preamble and peroration.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid , 48

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> Ibid , 201-201



The disciples of Adam Smith had trouble coming to complete consensus on the application of his theories, however, “the following seems a fair description of how the economists in the main-line tradition see Adam Smith’s work”<sup>55</sup>

- 1 The individual is the best judge of his own self-interest, and the more freedom the individual has to pursue self-interest within the law, the better off society will be
- 2 The more people are able to specialise, the greater the wealth of a nation The division of labour is the source of increasing productivity Therefore, the more a society is able to specialise, the greater its wealth potential
- 3 The third proposition, closely related to the second, holds that the larger the market, the greater the possibilities for specialisation The more one can enlarge trade between the city and the rural areas and between one country and another, the larger the market and the greater the degree of specialisation
- 4 Smith believed in a limited role for the state It should be concerned with defense, justice, and public works, all other economic activity should be in the private sector

Just as Adam Smith looked to Quesnay as a mentor, those who continued the development of political economy looked to Smith Had not Francois Quesnay died in 1774, Smith would have dedicated *Wealth of Nations* to him Similarly, “the political economists of the years 1815 – 1825, much like the economists of today, saw Adam Smith as founder of the scientific tradition in which they participated”<sup>56</sup> James Mill’s *Elements of Political Economy*, J F McCulloch’s *Principles of Political Economy*, and Jane Marcet’s

*Conversations on Political Economy* defined political economy as “the science of the laws that regulate the production, distribution, and consumption of wealth or commodities”<sup>57</sup>

Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo grew even more prominent than their predecessors with their attempts to further define the growing science From 1800-1840, public debate in economics was saturated with multiple editions of *Principles of Political Economy With*

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<sup>55</sup> Eli Ginzberg, “An Economy Formed by Men,” *Adam Smith and Modern Political Economy*, Gerald P O’Driscoll, Jr , ed (Ames Iowa State University Press, 1979) 37

<sup>56</sup> Gary Langer, *The Coming of Age of Political Economy, 1815 – 1825* (New York, Westport, London Greenwood Press, 1987) 15 See also page 17

*a View to Their Practical Application* by Thomas Malthus and *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* by David Ricardo. Among other factors, this led Nassau Senior to inform his students at Oxford University in the early 1850's that over the past 60 years, no other study had received as much attention and thought as political economy. Writings about political economy had been translated into every major European language, there were a number of newspapers in America devoted entirely to political economy, and in almost every university across Europe and North America there were professors of the academic discipline of political economy.<sup>58</sup> These professors were teaching their students about its origination with the French Economists, the continuation of Smith and his disciples, and the integrated work of Malthus and Ricardo.

Both Malthus and Ricardo were seeking to amplify and develop the field of political economy as each saw fit. They did not always agree, but their differences in opinion did not impede their friendship. Ricardo writes in his last letter to Malthus before his death, "And now, my dear Malthus, I have done. Like other disputants, after much discussion we each retain our own opinions. These discussions, however, never influence our friendship, I should not like you more than I do if you agreed in opinion with me."<sup>59</sup> A glance at Malthus and Ricardo will suffice before the more in-depth look at the economic teachings of Nassau Senior, Harriet Martineau, Richard Whately, and John Stuart Mill.

Malthus introduced his *Principles of Political Economy Considered with a View to Their Practical Application* by reminding his readers that although political economy can be thought of as a science, it is a science that involves the variables of humans and soil, so

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 15 –16

<sup>58</sup> Nassau Senior, *Four Introductory Lectures on Political Economy*, 10-11

it can therefore never be as concrete as a science with figures and numbers<sup>60</sup> He also criticised those who had attempted to define wealth either too broadly or too specifically He did not approve of Lord Lauderdale's definition of 'all that a man desires as useful and delightful to him ' Nor did he approve of the tight definition of the French Economists because "They have confined wealth or riches to the neat produce derived from the land, and in so doing they have greatly diminished the value of their inquiries in reference to the most familiar and accustomed sense in which the term wealth is understood"<sup>61</sup> Malthus stood in opposition to the belief in the inalienable, individual right to prosperity, wealth, and ownership As he expressed it

A country will therefore be rich or poor, according to the abundance or scarcity with which these material objects are supplied, compared with the extent of territory, and the people will be rich or poor, according to the abundance or scarcity with which they are supplied, compared with the population<sup>62</sup>

The principles taught by Malthus regarding population have been used to justify the argument that the pre-famine population of Ireland was too large and must be diminished

In *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, David Ricardo endeavours to define and discuss value, rent, wages, profits, foreign trade, tithes, poor rates, colonial trade, currency, banks, and other important subjects with the science of political economy In terms of some of his opinions of Malthus' work, he writes that Malthus' "Inquiry into

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<sup>59</sup> E C K Gonner, ed , *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (London George Bell and Sons, 1891) xxi

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Malthus, *Principles of Political Economy Considered With a View to Their Practical Application* Reprint of the 1836 second edition with additions from the author's own manuscript and an original memoir (Oxford Basil Blackwell and New York Augustus M Kelley, Inc , 1951) 1

<sup>61</sup> Ibid , 23

<sup>62</sup> Ibid , 33-34

the Nature and Progress of Rent” of 1815 was indeed “the true doctrine of rent”<sup>63</sup>

Ricardo also expresses his admiration of Malthus’ essay on population, but in a chapter devoted to a discussion of Mr Malthus’ opinions on rent, he identifies a few points in which he disagrees with Malthus. He accuses Malthus of falling into error and writes, “One of these errors lies in supposing rent to be a clear gain and a new creation of riches.” Ricardo instead argues “that rent is a creation of value”<sup>64</sup>. Within the discussion of rent, Ricardo also brings to light some differences of opinion between himself and Malthus in relation to population, wages, and price fluctuation.

It has been argued that there are few writers that are more open to misunderstanding than Ricardo. This is just one of the many reasons that the subject of political economy is so contentious and can be misconstrued. E C K. Gonner, the editor of the 1891 reprint of Ricardo’s principles, wrote on the one hand,

So far is the work under consideration from being a perfect work that it is disfigured by blemishes and defects of very many kinds. Not only is it remarkable for infelicity of language, with all its fatal consequences of exaggeration and obscurity, but the grammar itself is halting.<sup>65</sup>

While on the other, he wrote, “Despite the manifest faults, he did more than any other man, with the solitary exception of Adam Smith, to render possible a systematic study of economics.”<sup>66</sup> Known as ‘classical economics’, the lessons of Malthus and Ricardo required further amplification and study. Peter Gray explains

Classical economic thought had, over time, become increasingly technical in expression and posed difficulties even for the well-educated laymen

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<sup>63</sup> David Ricardo, *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (London: John Murray, 1819) iv

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 499, 500

<sup>65</sup> E C K. Gonner, ed., *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, xxiv

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., lvii

Its leading practitioners in the 1840's were anxious not only to refine economic theory, but to translate it into policy<sup>67</sup>

The following four representative figures made attempts to do just that

### SECTION 5.3 1– THE VOICE OF NASSAU SENIOR

In addition to the influential efforts of Ricardo and Malthus, the actions and speeches of countless others contributed to the popularisation of political economy. Nassau Senior informed his students that, “ every country gentleman who has demanded protection to agriculture, every manufacturer who has deprecated free trade, every speculator who has called for paper currency, everyone who has attacked, and almost everyone who has defended, the measures of the minister for the time being, has drawn his principal arguments from Political Economy ”<sup>68</sup> But at the same time, Senior was not reluctant to argue that one of the principal motivating factors in the growth of the study also led to its retardation. There were simply too many people involved in the debate that did not know enough about the study as a whole

in Political Economy the different propositions are so mutually dependent, that it is impossible to reason safely concerning any one without constantly bearing in mind all the others. And yet nothing is more common than to find persons writing books and making speeches, and even proposing, with the utmost confidence, legislative measures involving principles as to which the acutest and most diligent inquirer has not been able to make up his mind, not only without having settled within themselves the meaning of their principal terms, but even without being themselves aware that they are using words to which they attach no definite ideas<sup>69</sup>

It is for this reason that he published his book, *Political Economy*, in 1854. Senior desired that political economy take on a much more definitive, concrete existence in public

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<sup>67</sup> Peter Gray, “Ideology and the Famine,” *The Great Irish Famine*, ed. Cathal Poiré, 88

<sup>68</sup> Nassau Senior, *Four Introductory Lectures on Political Economy*, 10-11

discourse, rather than the easily misinterpreted discipline that it was. He desired that political economy be no longer studied as an ‘art,’ but as a ‘science.’ The first two voices described here differed from the earlier teachers of political economy. “Neither Smith nor the postwar economists were perturbed, as J S Mill and Nassau Senior were in the 1830’s, with what Mill was to call the confounding of the “essentially distinct, though closely connected, ideas of science and art.”<sup>70</sup>

Senior distinguished a *history* as a statement of past facts, a *science* as a statement of existing facts, and an *art* as a statement of the means by which future facts may be caused or influenced. He remarks, “The first two aim only at supplying materials for the memory and the judgement. The third is intended to influence the will.”<sup>71</sup> He did not believe that political economy should have the power to influence the will, but instead only human judgement. The principles of the nineteenth century were so very concrete in his own mind that he believed there should be no variation from them.

According to Senior, “Adam Smith, the founder of modern political economy” considered the study as an art. Sir James Stewart, who published *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy* in 1767, and the English writers McCulloch and Mill all called the study a ‘science,’ but treated it as an ‘art.’ In Senior’s opinion, David Ricardo

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid , 15

<sup>70</sup> Gary Langer, *The Coming of Age of Political Economy*, 16. Referring to John Stuart Mill, “On the Definition of Political Economy, and on the Method of Investigation Proper to It,” *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy* (London: John W Parker, 1844, reprint ed., London: London School of Economics, 1948) 123. Mill wanted to distinguish between the practice of political economy – its art, as he called it – and the science of political economy – its collection of truths. Senior, in his *Outline of the Science of Political Economy* (London, 1836, reprint ed., London: George Allen and Unwin, 1938), went even further than Mill and denied the existence entirely of an art of political economy. It was, he argued, purely a science, albeit one subservient to the art of government.

and Monsieur Turgot of the French Economists were the closest to treating political economy as a science<sup>72</sup>

The time I trust will come, perhaps within the lives of some of us, when the outline of this science [of political economy] will be clearly made out and generally recognised, when its nomenclature will be fixed, and its principles form a part of elementary instruction. A teacher of the art of Political Economy will then be able to refer to the principles of the science as familiar and admitted truths. I scarcely need repeat how far this is from being the case at present<sup>73</sup>

The two hundred and twenty five page volume entitled *Political Economy* published by Senior in 1854 is an excellent attempt to bring about a transition in the study of political economy as an art to the study of it as a science. Senior defines political economy as “the Science which treats of the Nature, the Production, and the Distribution of Wealth”<sup>74</sup>

After introducing the work, he first endeavoured to explain the meaning of the word wealth. He wrote the following

Under that term we comprehend all those things, and those things only, which are transferable, are limited in supply, and are directly or indirectly productive of pleasure or preventative of pain, or, to use an equivalent expression, which are susceptible of *exchange*, (using the word exchange to denote hiring as well as absolute purchase,) or, to use a third equivalent expression, which have *Value*<sup>75</sup>

The science of political economy contains three branches according to Senior and each looks at a different aspect of the concept of wealth that he has just defined. The three branches relate directly back to his definition of political economy. They are the nature of wealth, the production of wealth, and the distribution of wealth. In terms of distribution,

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<sup>71</sup> Nassau Senior, *Four Introductory Lectures on Political Economy*, 18-19

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 42

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 53

<sup>74</sup> Nassau Senior, *Political Economy* (London & Glasgow: Richard Griffin and Company, 1854) 1

society is divided into three classes Those classes are the labourers, the capitalists, and the proprietors of natural agents<sup>76</sup>

Nassau Senior's academic journey of transitioning political economy from an art to a science lead him directly to apply many principles to the state of Ireland and its people In 1868, he published an impressive collection of his *Journals, Conversations, and Essays Relating to Ireland* Senior was a well-respected, vocal economist throughout the course of the Irish Famine Ironically, he is perhaps now remembered for his harshness and cruelty to the Irish people, but may have been privately well disposed toward them and toward the future of Ireland The legacy of Nassau Senior that has persisted in contemporary public memory is the accusation contained in Cecil Woodham Smith's *The Great Hunger*

Officially, it was declared that no deaths from starvation must be allowed to occur in Ireland, but in private the attitude was different "I have always felt a certain horror of political economists," said Benjamin Jowett, the celebrated Master of Balliol, "since I heard one of them say that he feared the famine of 1848 in Ireland would not kill more than a million people, and that would scarcely be enough to do much good " The political economist in question was Nassau Senior, one of the Government's advisers on economic affairs<sup>77</sup>

It is true that Nassau Senior succeeded in producing what is arguably the most stark, succinct description of what this thesis proposes Good people allowed a bad thing to happen In the eyes of political economy, Ireland's future best interests were foremost throughout the course of the entire famine Senior wrote and believed

Those who desired for the Irish people a right to relief, unlimited in extent and unrestricted in form, believed that they were asking for something possible, and useful, and just Those who resisted that demand believed that

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid , 6

<sup>76</sup> Ibid , 87, 88-89

<sup>77</sup> Cecil Woodham Smith, *The Great Hunger*, 373



they were resisting a measure, incapable indeed of complete execution, but quite capable, even in the imperfect degree in which it might be carried out, of destroying what property remained to the landlords, what capital was possessed by the farmers, and what industry, and providence, and domestic affection belonged to the people of Ireland - that they were resisting in short, a gigantic engine of confiscation and demoralisation<sup>78</sup>

Although this comparison may seem harsh to some readers, Senior was very much in contact with individuals on all sides of the question of Irish relief, even if he became a spokesperson for those in favour of restricting relief

It was not as though Senior took the circumstances in Ireland lightly, however. In his article, "Ireland in 1843" that appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* in January, 1844, he observed

For many years past Ireland has been the most painful subject on which a liberal writer could employ himself. It was not merely that he had to describe the great misery and great danger - not merely that he had to dwell on a state of society in which all the means of good seem turned to evil, - in which a fertile soil and a temperate climate have produced a population in want of all the decencies, and of most of what are elsewhere thought the necessities, of life - and in which religion itself is the source of cruelty, hatred, and crime. It was not merely this state of things that made Irish questions repulsive. It was the feeling that there were means by which the existing misery might be relieved, and the approaching dangers averted, but that the prejudices and passions of England and of Scotland rendered it useless to suggest, because they rendered it impossible to apply them<sup>79</sup>

Senior recognised that although the Irish appeared indolent in their own country, they were known to work extremely diligently in any other. He correctly observed one of the causes of the appearance of indolence among the Irish at home was that, "The competition for land has raised rents to an amount which can be paid only under favourable circumstances. Any accident throws the tenant into an arrear, and the arrear is kept a subsisting charge, to be enforced if he should appear capable of paying it. If any of

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<sup>78</sup> Nassau Senior, *Journals*, 212

the signs of prosperity are detected in his crop, or his cabin, or his clothes, or his food, some old demand may be brought up against him ”<sup>80</sup>

So in order to bring changes to the destitution of Ireland, Senior proposes that the causes of this destitution must be removed. Among his radical suggestions to accomplish this are the following: fully endow the Catholic church, grant £200,000 for education, abolish the Lord Lieutenantcy, and institute a yearly royal residence within Ireland. Much of his reasoning for these suggestions is clear and well thought out, even if quixotic. In terms of the full establishment of the Catholic Church, he appeals to financial reasoning:

It would not cost half of what we spend on the African squadron. It would not cost half of the expense of the armed force that it would enable us to reduce in Ireland. It would not cost one-tenth of the additional revenue which Ireland in a merely tolerable state of security, would pour into our Exchequer, and above all, it would not, like a Kaffir war or a Canadian fortification, be a new expenditure.<sup>81</sup>

His argument for endowment continues in terms of human equality. He uses Daniel O’Connell’s words to encourage that Catholics should feel themselves to be ‘subjects out - and - out, as the Protestants are.’ And his other proposal to encourage equality was to admit Catholic Bishops to the House of Lords or conversely to exclude the Irish Protestant Bishops which he suggests would “be not only free from objections, but desirable ”<sup>82</sup>

Senior’s arguments for the encouragement of education cannot be applied to his good will, but rather to his interpretation of the financial cost to Britain for Ireland’s alleged ignorance. He writes that the grant of £200,000 “ought not to be grudged. The ignorance and folly of Ireland cost us many millions directly in expenditure, and twice as

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid , 17

<sup>80</sup> Ibid , 46

<sup>81</sup> Ibid , 240

<sup>82</sup> Ibid , 72, 102

many, indirectly, in loss of revenue, as it would cost hundreds of thousands to give her adequate means of moral and intellectual education”<sup>83</sup> The final two solutions are justified by the geographical fact that, because the sailing from Dover to the Giant’s Causeway had been tailored to a mere 36 hours, there was no more need for a Viceroy in Ireland than there was for one in Edinburgh And finally, he advised that Her Majesty pay an annual visit to Ireland in order to make the Irish people feel a part of the United Kingdom He encouraged, “We do not mean a mere royal progress, from one great house to another but a real residence of several weeks - a residence long enough to make the presence of the Sovereign no unusual element in Irish life”<sup>84</sup>

Few, if any of Senior’s proposals took hold However, he did desire that positive economic change occur in Ireland Although not in favour of government relief efforts, he was a proponent of radical ideas such as the full establishment of the Catholic Church This opinion did not likely work in favour of his popularity among his contemporaries Yet he stuck to his ideals Stepping away from focusing solely on the Irish situation, Senior is remembered for his work in clarifying the study of the science of political economy According to Marion Bowley

Senior’s theory of value is a landmark in the development of the post-Ricardian period He inherited the legacy of the Ricardian discussions of the first quarter of the century, and he knew personally the economists of his time without being bound to mental stagnation by intimate friendships like Mill and McCulloch, since his friends belonged to the Whig political circles or to the law Not merely this, but he brought to the subject an intelligence trained to a nicety of definition by his legal education, while his outside interests brought him into direct contact with most of the pressing social problems of the time<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid , 112

<sup>84</sup> Ibid , 118-119, 122

<sup>85</sup> Marion Bowley, *Nassau Senior and Classical Economics* (London George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1937) 94

### SECTION 5 3 2 – THE VOICE OF JOHN STUART MILL

Once at least in every generation the question, “What is to be done with Ireland?”, rises to perplex the councils and trouble the conscience of the British nation’, wrote John Stuart Mill in 1868 <sup>86</sup>

Mill himself proposed answers to that perplexing question, but first, what role did J S Mill play in the development and policy introduction of political economy?

John Stuart was the son of James Mill, who was also a prominent political economist and utilitarian. Alexander Bain, a biographer of James Mill, records that the elder Mill found his philosophical ‘father’ in Jeremy Bentham <sup>87</sup>. Bentham, James Mill, and J S Mill have come to be described as three of the most important utilitarian thinkers in the English tradition <sup>88</sup>. Utilitarians subscribe to the doctrine that morality is based in actions that result in more pleasure than pain. As it is expressed in J S Mill’s essay, “Utilitarianism,” “In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. To do as you would be done by, and to love your neighbour as yourself, constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality.” <sup>89</sup> Utilitarianism affected each political economist as they were all in the common pursuit of a morally based manner in which to achieve the best possible outcome for society. Indeed, Mill’s essay on Utilitarianism “is part of a long tradition in moral philosophy which identifies right

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<sup>86</sup> Donal Kerr, ‘A Nation of Beggars’?, 1. Reference: John Stuart Mill, “England and Ireland 1868,” in J M Robson, ed., *Essays on England, Ireland and the Empire* (1992), 507.

<sup>87</sup> Alexander Bain, *James Mill: A Biography* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1967) 74.

<sup>88</sup> John Plamenatz, *The English Utilitarians* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1949) 2.

<sup>89</sup> J S Mill, “Utilitarianism,” *The Utilitarians* (Garden City: Dolphin Books, 1961) 418.

conduct as conduct achieving the proper end and (though somewhat more ambiguously) the proper end as happiness”<sup>90</sup>

When J S Mill undertook the task of writing his treatise, *Principles of Political Economy with Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy*, he believed that in order to prescribe policy, adequate knowledge and understanding of the present economy and society must be in place. In his view, this included many factors that were not included in the political economic analysis as it stood by the mid 1840's<sup>91</sup>. He therefore proceeded to write a detailed description of his own views of political economy that became more widely read than any of its predecessors. “The science of political economy held all thinking on social problems under its ban during the latter part of the Victorian era, and Mill's *Political Economy* was the standard textbook on the subject”<sup>92</sup>

The tenth chapter of his book is perhaps of most direct relevance to Ireland. It is entitled, “Means of Abolishing Cottier Tenancy,” and much of it is devoted to the argument that Irish cottiers should be converted into peasant proprietors. When the blight struck in 1845, Mill saw the occasion as an ideal opportunity to make the best possible result in his opinion out of a bad situation. We find that he even laid aside his work on the book for a complete six months during the famine in order to plead his case. “John thought he saw a chance of a thorough-going regeneration of agriculture in Ireland. With great spirit he urged the formation of small peasant properties. He had long recognized the

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<sup>90</sup> James Smith and Ernest Sosa, eds., *Mill's Utilitarianism* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1969) 1

<sup>91</sup> V W Bladen, “Introduction,” Reprinted edition of John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965) xxviii

<sup>92</sup> Ruth Borchard, *John Stuart Mill: The Man* (London: C A Watts & Co., Ltd. 1957) 99

superior productivity of small peasant owners like those who kept the French economy stable and healthy ”<sup>93</sup>

The term “political economy” as distinguished from “economics” has come to refer to a study of the functioning of the economy in which historical, political, sociological, customary, and non-logical aspects are treated, and in which “values” are examined and policies are discussed not only with reference to the probability of the expected results being achieved, but with reference to the acceptability of the results in the light of values of the individual political economist or of the society of which he is a member. Since most policies have indirect as well as direct effects, it is the business of the political economist to determine as carefully and as fully as he can these indirect effects <sup>94</sup>

It was to this business that J S Mill dedicated his efforts

In a private letter to Lord Monteagle, Mill acknowledged that Monteagle had written a strong argument against Trevelyan’s actions and against the Government policy. Additionally, even though Lord Monteagle was a landowner himself, Mill held the landlords responsible for the state of Ireland in 1848

Though I have not yet read Trevelyan’s article I have read your letter to him. You seem to have made out a very strong case against him, and in no small degree against the Government also. I should never think of bringing in a bill of indictment against the landlords for anything but the general and permanent social state of Ireland, and for that England ought to bear the largest share of the blame <sup>95</sup>

J S Mill had earlier expressed his criticism of landlordism in a series of forty-three articles published in the *Morning Chronicle* during the winter of 1846 – 1847. These articles were “not only an expression of Mill’s deeply held concern for Irish moral

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid , 92

<sup>94</sup> V W Bladen, “Introduction,” Reprinted edition of John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965) xxvii-xxviii

<sup>95</sup> J S Mill to Lord Monteagle, 15 October 1848, Monteagle Papers, Ms. 13,398 (5), NLI

regeneration, but a vigorous polemic directed at promoting a specific policy objective”<sup>96</sup> Mill believed himself to have at least partially met his objectives by providing “a theoretical riposte to the orthodox criticisms”<sup>97</sup> Mill’s views on peasant proprietorship proved to be enormously influential in the long term in Ireland

### SECTION 5.3.3 – THE VOICE OF HARRIET MARTINEAU

A third political economist whose work has direct applications to Ireland is the well-educated and creative writer, Harriet Martineau. With quite a different purpose from Nassau Senior or J. S. Mill, Martineau set about writing extensively on the subject of political economy. She expressed no desire to add knowledge or definition to the science, she instead desired to disseminate the information regarding its principles to a much wider sphere. Harriet Martineau went about accomplishing her goal of raising public awareness by writing numerous narratives involving fictional characters based on real life situations. Her stories put a human aspect on the impersonal principles of political economy and therefore called for a greater response of compassion and care. She explains her endeavours by writing,

The works already written on Political Economy almost all bear a reference to books which have preceded, or consist in part of discussions of disputed points. Such references and such discussions are very interesting to those whom they concern, but offer a poor introduction to those to whom the subject is new. They do not give us what we want. They give us its history, they give us its philosophy, but we want its *picture*.<sup>98</sup>

Martineau continues the justification of her method by reinforcing the fact that it is far more interesting and much easier to remember facts and concepts if they are connected

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<sup>96</sup> Peter Gray, *Famine, Land and Politics*, 156

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 158

<sup>98</sup> Harriet Martineau, *Illustrations of Political Economy* (London: Charles Fox, 1834) xi

with the plight of individuals. It would be interesting to surmise on how this approach would have affected the rigid application of political economy principles to Ireland in the most abstract sense. Yet, her purpose is stated thus: “We declare frankly that our object is to teach Political Economy, and that we have chosen this method not only because it is new, not only because it is entertaining, but because we think it the most faithful and the most complete.”<sup>99</sup> “Life in the Wilds,” set in Africa, “Hill and the Valley,” set in South Wales, and “Brooke and Brooke Farm,” set in an English village are a few examples of Martineau’s narratives that are used to convey principles of political economy. Throughout the volume, pages are included to summarise the principles contained within the stories. The narrative with which this thesis is most concerned however, is titled “Ireland: A Tale.”

The purpose of my title is to direct the work into the hands of those whom it most concerns, and my personages are few because it is my object to show, in a confined space, how long a series of evils may befall individuals in a society conducted like that of Ireland, and by what a repetition of grievances its members are driven into disaffection and violence.<sup>100</sup>

This can be compared with Nassau Senior’s view that violence is a potentially unstable element in the Irish character. Martineau’s narrative opens with a description of the Glen of Echoes, ‘a title which conveys more to an English ear than its Irish counterpart,’ and it is broken into the following nine chapters: Irish Economy, Irish Liabilities, Irish Adventure, Irish Crime, Irish Retribution, Irish Responsibility, Irish Impolicy, Irish Fatality, Irish Disaffection. The activities of the resident proprietor, Mr Rosso, are described with characteristic duality. On the one hand, “The riding, driving,

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., XIII

<sup>100</sup> Harriet Martineau, *Ireland: A Tale (Illustrations of Political Economy)* (London: Charles Fox, 1832) 11



shooting, and fishing parties, in which the young Rossos were perpetually engaged,” are counteracted by the seeming charity that this proprietor extended to his tenants “The school-house had been built by Mr Rosso, who, though himself a Protestant, wished his poor neighbours to have such an education as they were willing to receive, though it was mixed with much that appeared to him very baneful superstition ”<sup>101</sup> The latter portion of the sentence gives an indication of the way in which Martineau incorporated the contemporary British beliefs about Irish Catholicism and culture

The first ‘heroine’ and ‘hero’ of the book are introduced “Dora Sullivan was one of the most promising of the troop, and the master praised the prudence of her parents, and her own docility, for coming to the school as regularly as ever when she was past sixteen Dan Mahoney, who lived in the next cabin, and had frequent access to Dora’s society, from being the son of her father’s partner in his lease, had been long in love with Dora, and would have married her out of hand, if he had had so much as half an acre of ground to marry upon ” However, the Mahony family begins to struggle financially and therefore Dan’s qualifications as a suitor are lost Dora requests to leave school and assist her own family financially, so the reader finds that “Dora now sat at her spinning-wheel almost the whole day, and her mother doing the same, a respectable addition was made by them ”<sup>102</sup>

The story continues on in a similar manner, weaving principles of the Irish political economy throughout For example, at one point, Rosso and his brother Alexander have a discussion about the English Poor Law System and the implications that it carried for Ireland Also, it must be remembered that Martineau was writing this narrative nearly one and a half decades before the famine began The aspects that she presents throughout her

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid , 1, 3, 4

work, though flavoured with her own cultural prejudice, create a vividly accurate “picture,” as she referred to earlier, of Irish life and culture in the decade before the famine. The extent of her readership is unknown, but Martineau succeeded at least in part in attaining her desire to bring the voice of the Irish individual into earshot of the English people.

Though few changes would have been made at the governmental level, her ambition is applauded. ‘Fearlessly and temperately,’ she made political economy intelligible to her own social and political constituency.

Since it is no longer a secret, however, that Ireland has been and is misgoverned, and since the readiest method of winning back the discontented to their allegiance is to allow those things to be grievances which are felt to be so, and to show a disposition to afford redress, I cannot but hold the part of true loyalty to be to expose abuses fearlessly and temperately, and to stimulate the government to the reparation of past errors and the improvement of its principles of policy.<sup>103</sup>

#### SECTION 5.3.4 – THE VOICE OF RICHARD WHATELY

It is apparent from a study of Richard Whately and his career and teachings that he most likely would not have greatly approved of the preceding statement by Ms. Martineau. Though he pursued a career in the church, his actions attest that his most eminent concerns were engaged in disseminating the classical tenets of political economy to the people of Ireland and England. One of the differences between Martineau and Whately was the fact that the creative writing technique employed by Harriet Martineau not only expressed the theories of political economy but also called for some social change. Even if the changes she sought were not radical, they at least prompted her readers to ask moral questions of

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 7, 16

political economy Whately on the other hand, was fully devoted to the British laissez-faire version of political economy and attempted to create many disciples “Whately used his position as Anglican Archbishop of Dublin from 1831 to crusade for the conversion of Ireland to true economic doctrine, in the belief that such an ideological assimilation would promote Irish development”<sup>104</sup>

Richard Whately was an intimate friend and former tutor of Nassau Senior. Many of their views were similar, but Whately presented his in a ‘more morally didactic form’ “Whately believed that morality was not to be derived entirely from the Bible, and that political economy could help Christians to discover it”<sup>105</sup> In his *Introductory Lectures on Political Economy*, Whately explained that he did not approve of the name ‘Political Economy’ He believed that it was ‘most unfortunately chosen’ and he felt that the title ‘is likely to suggest very confused and indistinct, and in a great degree incorrect, notions’ He wished that political economy had been called “*CATALLACTICS*, or the ‘Science of Exchanges’”<sup>106</sup> As the lectures continued, Whately taught his students more about catallactics, or what was commonly called political science Here, only two lessons will be cited as they best deal with the situation of famine First, Whately did not object to charity, but he wanted his listeners to understand that some forms of charity work better than others He did not believe in gratuitous relief As in the quotation cited above, he argued that, “the Scriptures enjoin Charity to the poor, but give no directions as to the best mode of administering our charity Now it is evident that all different modes of

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid , iii

<sup>104</sup> Peter Gray, *Famine, Land and Politics*, 15

<sup>105</sup> Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, 46

<sup>106</sup> Richard Whately, *Introductory Lectures on Political Economy, Delivered in the Easter Term, MDCCCXXXI* (London: B. Fellowes, 1832) 4,5,6

attempting to relieve distress are not equally effectual, and that those which are altogether injudicious may even lead to more suffering than they remedy”<sup>107</sup> In a later lecture, Whately gives the manner in which he sees as the best way of preserving a country from famine. He clarifies, “it may be observed, that agricultural improvement, accumulation of capital, commercial resources, and the other results of national wealth, afford the best preservative against the calamity of occasional *famines*”<sup>108</sup>

His lecture on famine was given thirteen years before the Great Famine began though famines, on a lesser scale, were regular features of the Irish economy. However, in 1848, three years into the period which this thesis is most concerned, Whately expounded further on his views through his address entitled *The Right Use of National Afflictions*. In essence, Whately employed this work to explain that the best manner to deliver Ireland from the evils that afflicted her was to fully embrace the principles of political economy that he had been teaching the people and to use the opportunity of distress to extend the education of those principles. He did not object but encouraged personal charity at the same time as he condemned government relief. He wholeheartedly believed that,

the prevailing distress has been, in several instances, greatly aggravated by the thoughtless dependence of some on gratuitous support, to which they imagined themselves to have a claim of right and by their consequent abandonment of the cultivation of the land, or [of their other] ordinary branches of industry<sup>109</sup>

As alternative options to waiting for relief from the public funds, Whately encouraged the people to “inculcate the duty of struggling manfully against all such temporal calamities as

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid , 36

<sup>108</sup> Ibid , 171

may be averted or mitigated by peaceable industry and prudent frugality” and to promote “the diffusion, among the people at large, of secular instruction, - of the cultivation of the mental powers generally, - with a view both to the religious improvement of your own flocks, and also to the general improvement of all those around you ”<sup>110</sup>

Archbishop Whately’s disapproval was not limited to depending on public funds. He also expressed his dissatisfaction with those who used the idea of providentialism to argue that God sent the potato blight to Ireland as a judgement for sin. He did not object to a notion of providence, or that God was involved in the affairs of men, but he did not approve of extending the idea to classify the blight as punishment. He asked, “ shall any one of us, uninspired men, presume to pronounce judgement on those who are cut off by sudden death, or who are visited by such calamities as an earthquake, a famine, or a pestilence? Shall we take upon ourselves to declare the counsels of the Most High, when he has *not* revealed them?”<sup>111</sup> The reason that Whately supplied for the ease in which many individuals adopted the idea of providentialism was that it is much more agreeable for man to be “quicksighted to the faults, real or supposed, of others, and especially of those in any way opposed to him, than to his own ” And he declared that, “These persons loudly call for reformation, but it is their neighbours, not themselves, that are to be reformed ”<sup>112</sup>

The reform that Whately was anxious to promote over the entire globe was to see individuals beginning to believe and to act according to the political economic regime to

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<sup>109</sup> Richard Whately, *The Right Use of National Afflictions* (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1848) 11. In the original pamphlet, there is a misprint that has been corrected here for clarity. The misprint reads, “ or of other their ordinary branches of industry ”

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid* , 21-22, 26

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid* , 14

which he himself was devoted. He taught on almost every aspect of economy, but the three lessons to be briefly reviewed here are *value*, *social status at birth*, and *trade unions*. Whately taught that in order for any item to have *exchange value* it must have three characteristics. It must be desirable, it must be scarce, and it must be something that can be parted with.<sup>113</sup> In addition to teaching the definition of other terms such as value, Whately also taught children to be content in the position to which they were born, but to work diligently throughout their lives in order to give their own children a better chance at life. He wrote that it was “not to be expected that many *poor* men should become *rich*, nor ought any man to set his heart on being so, [but] those who make good use of their time, and who are quick at learning, and grow up industrious and steady, may, perhaps, be able to earn more than enough for their support, and so have the satisfaction of leaving some property to their children.”<sup>114</sup> As the reader can infer, the Archbishop was in favour of inherited wealth and felt that anything that threatened that way of life was an evil not to be condoned. Among the worst threats to his favoured economic structure were trade unions. In quite a long vehement passage, Whately described the people of the United Kingdom who profess to be freemen and take pride in their liberty but who make the choice to associate with something that he depicts as a ‘tyranny more arbitrary and more cruel than that of the worst Government in the world.’ He continued,

They submit to be ruled by tyrants who do not allow them to choose how they shall employ their time, or their skill, or their strength. Their tyrants dictate to them what masters they shall work for, what work they shall do, what machines they shall use, and what wages they shall earn. Sometimes these tyrants order them not to earn more than a certain amount, sometimes

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid , 17, 18

<sup>113</sup> Thomas Boylan and Timothy Foley, *Political Economy and Colonial Ireland*, 83

<sup>114</sup> Richard Whately, *Easy Lessons on Money Matters For the Use of Young People*, 14th edn (London, 1855) 45, 46, cited in *ibid* , 89

not to earn less, and sometimes to refuse all work, and see their families starve. They are heavily taxed for the support of their tyrants, and if they disobey, they are punished without trial, by cruel beatings, by having their limbs broken, or their eyes put out with vitriol, and by death.

These unhappy persons are those who have anything to do with  
*Trades-Unions and Combinations*<sup>115</sup>

Whately was not one to mince words when it came to economic matters, particularly as they affected the most destitute and vulnerable strata in society.

England and Ireland were two different countries, cultures, and economies being forced to operate by the same rules. Those in favour of those rules believed that Ireland would eventually become a thriving, prosperous country if only she would subscribe to the same philosophies as her neighbouring island. Whately's own identity was a mixture of English and Irish as he explained that, "I have always looked upon Ireland as a *part* of my own country" (*Italics added*). He desired that Ireland would become "a really valuable portion of the British Empire, instead of a sort of morbid excrescence."<sup>116</sup> Though these particular words have a rebarbative sound to the contemporary reader, it did not prevent the teaching of Richard Whately from reaching millions of individuals.

From the 1830's to the 1860's, the numbers of Irish and English schoolchildren who encountered the principles of political economy, whether directly or indirectly, through Whately's *Easy Lessons*, could be numbered not in their thousands, or even hundreds of thousands, but in their millions. It is difficult to dispute the conclusion that, in his time, Whately was 'the most widely published of economists' and, by implication, perhaps, the most influential.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 86. As quoted from Richard Whately, *Easy Lessons on Money Matters*, 95-96.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 124-125. As quoted from Richard Whately, *Speech of the Most Reverend His Grace the Archbishop of Dublin, on Presentation of Petitions Respecting Education (Ireland), in the House of Lords, on Tuesday, March 19th, 1833* (London, 1866), Vol I, p 378.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 80-81. Reference J M Goldstrom, "Richard Whately and Political Economy in School Books, 1833 - 80," *Irish Historical Studies*, 16 (1966) 138.

Given his influence on political and economic thought, his pronouncement on famine carried a great deal of weight for his contemporaries. Therefore, this section draws to a close with an excerpt from his admonition for *The Right Use of National Afflictions* in which he classifies destitution, demoralisation, idleness, and any hope that the people may have stored in public relief or in political revolution as evil. These evils were linked to the distress which he feared unlike Trevelyan's optimism, was not nearing its end, even in 1848. Whately desired that the evils of the famine would be turned to good by patient labouring by all to lift Ireland from her 'excrescence'.

We have not yet, I fear, even nearly drained the bitter cup which it has pleased providence to allot to us. A great amount of destitution remains of such destitution as brings in its train not only disease, but what is far worse, a frightful amount of demoralization, and of destruction of peaceful and industrious habits. In some this has arisen from *compulsory* idleness, and from despair in others from wilful idleness, and from false hopes of such relief as cannot possibly be supplied, or of advantage to be reaped from political revolution. These evils still exist, and we cannot expect them very speedily to disappear. We must be prepared to continue to labour, patiently, and often with very partial success, for the mitigation of evils which are beyond man's power wholly to remedy.<sup>118</sup>

#### SECTION 5 4 - BACKLASH OF 'PROGRESS AND POVERTY'

Richard Whately was correct that the cup had not yet been drained by the year 1848. The harvest failed again in both 1848 and 1849 and even after the blight ceased, it took years for the crop to return to some sense of normality. The second half of the nineteenth century saw a severe shift in the verbal universe as it related to the 'progress' that was encouraged in the first half. This section provides a review of the dichotomy of rich and poor in the Victorian age and a survey of various voices on both sides of the debate over the morality of *progress*.



With the industrial age in full swing, the economy was booming. Yet the chasm between the rich and the poor caused the ‘prevalence of destitution’ to be “especially shocking within the context of the early Victorian economy”<sup>119</sup>. A contemporary author noted the dichotomy in the British Isles, “these islands where industrial freedom has for nearly half a century had greater scope than in any previous age or in any other country, but where also the extremes of wealth and poverty are found in harsher contrast than they have been ever found elsewhere”<sup>120</sup>. Yet the question of morality did not arise to check the rise in population of the working poor; instead, it asked how best to distinguish between the poor who could labour to provide sustenance and those who were unable and were truly destitute. After the late eighteenth century, a debate began among men such as Edmund Burke, Thomas Malthus, Jeremy Bentham, and others over the best possible application of the English Poor Law. “The Poor Law was a pivotal social institution in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries ‘providing relief, enforcing discipline, an expression of communal responsibility yet a potent reminder of social distance’”<sup>121</sup>. In the course of the debate regarding the Poor Law, it was established popularly that there was no moral obligation to relieve those who were able to work. The Poor Law was designed to assist only those of the ‘pauper’ status.

‘Poverty’ was regarded as the ‘natural’ state of the majority of mankind required to labour for subsistence; this was an immutable condition not a

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<sup>118</sup> Richard Whately, *the Right Use of National Afflictions*, 6

<sup>119</sup> Susan A. Williams, *The Rich Man and the Diseased Poor in Early Victorian Literature* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1987) 1

<sup>120</sup> John Elliot Cairnes, “Essays in Political Economy,” Reprinted in Seamus Deane, *Field Day Anthology*, Vol. II, 190

<sup>121</sup> Alan Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press LTD and New York: St Martin’s Press, Inc., 1999) 13. Reference: L. Bonfield, R. Smith and K. Wrightson, eds, *The World We Have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure* (Cambridge, 1986) 201

proper subject for human assistance. It was only those unable to labour for their subsistence who should be relieved as paupers. Pauperism emerged as a moral as well as economic problem: how to relieve the genuinely indigent without discouraging self-reliance and demoralising the labourer? This was nothing less than the application of market values to the ancient traditions of poor relief.<sup>122</sup>

However, the social status of those in a state of Victorian poverty held cause for alarm. “Britain had become a fertile breeding-ground for epidemic disease, which spread apace through the ranks of the poor. Not only were the poor undernourished and overworked, they were also deprived of such vital ingredients for health as clean surroundings and a supply of pure water.”<sup>123</sup> The description of the city of Manchester as ‘two towns in one’ gives an indication of the state of those in poverty. “‘In one portion there is space, fresh air, and provision for health, and in the other, every thing which poisons and abridges existence, the crowding of cottages and families together, dark and gloomy courts, which are both damp and contagious.’” Like Lazarus, the leprous beggar of the Bible, the lower classes of mid-nineteenth century Britain endured poverty and disease at the gate of the healthy rich.<sup>124</sup> Regardless of the outcome of the rhetorical debate between poverty and pauperism, moral reasoning was used by Victorian communicators to form perceptions of the lower classes. Various perceptions led to disparate, diverging behaviours.

The previously described ideologies of providentialism and political economy were used as two methods of ‘moralising’ some types of behaviour of the rich to the poor.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid , 19-20

<sup>123</sup> Susan A. Williams, *The Rich Man and the Diseased Poor in Early Victorian Literature*, 7

<sup>124</sup> Ibid , 5. Reference: Leon Faucher, *Manchester in 1844* (1844) 69

Boylan and Foley's indictment of the scientific nature of political economy is appropriate on the grounds that it provided the lexicon of morality to an immoral practise

There was a widespread view that political economy was both little known and little respected in Ireland. We argue that in an Ireland divided socially, economically, politically, and denominationally, consensus was sought in the new discipline of political economy, claiming to be scientifically impartial and to be an incontrovertible form of knowledge which transcended all divisions. But political economy was ideological, performing the crucial function of defending the socio-economic status quo and, in the words of a schools' inspector in 1833, tranquillising the country.<sup>125</sup>

The tranquillising of the country was a necessary step to convince society that *progress* was the way forward and social evils could be conquered by it. However, some opposed this idea and sought to prove its invalidity.

One powerful voice of opposition was that of the author Henry George. Over thirty years after the conclusion of the Irish Famine, he completed his work, *Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions, and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth*. The purpose for incorporating this work and a discussion of the criticism it encountered into this chapter is to place the political economy of the famine years into a wider context. Individuals living in the latter half of the nineteenth century had the advantage of hindsight. Unlike their predecessors, they possessed a great arsenal of specific pieces of evidence to support arguments for the success or for the failure of the principles of political economy. This thesis certainly does not attempt to solve the debate one way or the other. It will only summarise the claims made by Henry George and summarise the critique that ensued, as well as link his work to that of James Fintan Lalor.

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<sup>125</sup> Thomas Boylan and Timothy Foley, *Political Economy and Colonial Ireland*, xii

and later, Michael Davitt Lalor, it is worth recalling, was an individual who observed at firsthand the disastrous consequences of the famine

Francis Longe, the author of “A Critical Examination of Mr George’s ‘Progress and Poverty’ and Mr Mill’s Theory of Wages” declared, “It is often said that anything may be proved by statistics It may be said with equal truth, that anything may be proved by Political Economy”<sup>126</sup> This thesis does not propose to arrive at any questionable proof, it only proposes to better inform its reader of the economic climate of the nineteenth century Famine administrators and specifically the commissioners genuinely desired that progress would wipe out poverty in Ireland, but their success is debatable Therefore, the controversy raised towards the end of the century regarding the success or failure of progress is now referred to as the “backlash” that resulted from the influences that were on the Relief Commissioners

Henry George described the quandary that faced the world at the end of the nineteenth century He explained,

The present century has been marked by a prodigious increase in wealth-producing power At the beginning of this marvellous era it was natural to expect, and it was expected, that labour-saving inventions would lighten the toil and improve the condition of the labourer, that the enormous increase in the power of producing wealth would make real poverty a thing of the past [However] discovery upon discovery, and invention after invention, have neither lessened the toil of those who most need respite, nor brought plenty to the poor<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Francis Longe, *A Critical Examination of Mr George’s ‘Progress and Poverty’ and Mr Mill’s Theory of Wages* No date, multiple printing locations, Available at Trinity College Dublin, Early Printed Books #Pa 62817, page 3

<sup>127</sup> Henry George, *Progress and Poverty An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions, and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth The Remedy* (London William Reeves, 1884) 3, 5

George was dismayed by that state of affairs and used his book as an outlet for his frustration. For the purpose of this section, only two main points will be focused upon. First, Henry George did not subscribe to the Malthusian theory of population and second, he believed that the remedy for poverty was to 'make land common property'.<sup>128</sup>

In the chapter entitled "Disproof of the Malthusian Theory," he writes,

The accepted theory is, that the more that is required from Nature, the less generously does she respond, so that doubling the application of labour will not double the product, and hence, increase of population must tend to reduce wages and deepen poverty. I assert that the very reverse of these propositions is true. I assert that in any given state of civilisation a greater number of people can collectively be better provided for than a smaller. I assert that the injustice of society, not the niggardliness of Nature,<sup>129</sup> is the cause of the want and misery which the current theory attributes to over population.<sup>130</sup>

With the chapter, George argues it is the reverse of the Malthusian doctrine which is true because, for example, "Twenty men working together will produce more than twenty times the wealth that one man can produce where Nature is most bountiful. The denser the population the more minute becomes the subdivision of labour."<sup>131</sup> Among other pieces of evidence, he cites the fact that the population of the United States had been doubling every twenty nine years, but her wealth had been doubling much more often than that.<sup>132</sup> He concludes that particular chapter by declaring again that the Malthusian theory was false and that it did not assist in any type of solution to the problem.

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid , 107, 253

<sup>129</sup> This phrase, 'niggardliness of Nature,' was used by John Stuart Mill in his book *Principles of Political Economy, Book I* and it is to this usage that Henry George is referring.

<sup>130</sup> Henry George, *Progress and Poverty*, 106, 107

<sup>131</sup> Ibid , 113

<sup>132</sup> Ibid , 108

Henry George not only used his book to vent his thoughts and feelings, he also used it as a means to express his proposed solution. He believed that the only method to abolish poverty was to make all land common property – a suggestion that had a marked influence on his Irish followers. He claimed that if this was to occur, it “will substitute equality for inequality, plenty for want, justice for injustice, social strength for social weakness, and will open the way to grander and nobler advances of civilisation”<sup>133</sup>. These lofty ideals intertwine the lives of three different men from three different generations. Henry George was influenced by the writings of James Fintan Lalor, and both George and Lalor later had influence upon the thoughts and writings of Michael Davitt.

In 1847, letters began appearing in *The Nation* that captured the interest of such leading revolutionaries as John Mitchel. These letters ‘called for action, not debate’ and they were signed by the name “James F. Lalor”. After Mitchel’s paper, *The United Irishman*, was seized by Dublin Castle, his brother-in-law, John Martin instituted *The Felon*, in which many more of Lalor’s letters were printed.<sup>134</sup> Lalor exclaimed to his readers

I acknowledge no right of property which takes the food of millions and gives them a famine, which denies to the peasant the right of a home and concedes, in exchange, the right of a workhouse. I deny and challenge all such rights, howsoever founded or enforced. I challenge them as founded only on the code of the brigand and enforced only by the sanction of the hangman. Against them I assert the true and indefeasible right of property – the right of our people to live in this land and possess it, to live in it in comfort, security, and independence, and to live in it by their own labor, on their own land, as God and nature meant them to do.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 254

<sup>134</sup> Michael Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland*, 55,57

<sup>135</sup> James Fintan Lalor, quoted in Ibid, 63

Though it is not evident that Henry George directly quoted Lalor, the influence of thought is apparent in such sections of *Progress and Poverty* as “The Truth about Ireland ” George acknowledges that “Ireland, of all European countries, furnishes the great stock example of over-population The extreme poverty of the peasantry, the Irish famine and Irish emigration have been constantly referred to as a demonstration of the Malthusian theory worked out under the eyes of the civilized world ”<sup>136</sup> Yet he then argues that had the population not been subjugated to the hierarchy of English landlords, the actual soil of the land would have been more than sufficient to feed its inhabitants “So far as the people of Ireland were concerned, the food thus exported might as well have been burned up or thrown into the sea, or never produced It went not as an exchange, but as a tribute ”<sup>137</sup>

The following quote echoes the sentiments of Lalor

Had this food been left to those who raised it, had the cultivators of the soil been permitted to retain and use the wealth their labour produced, had security stimulated industry and permitted the adoption of economical methods, there would have been enough to support in bounteous comfort the largest population Ireland ever had <sup>138</sup>

George summarises the Irish situation by arguing that even if “Ireland [had] been by nature a grove of bananas and bread-fruit, had her coasts been lined by the guano-deposits of the Chinchas and the sun of lower latitudes warmed into more abundant life her moist soil, the social conditions that have prevailed there would still have brought forth poverty and starvation ”<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Henry George, *Progress and Poverty* (London The Hogarth Press, LTD, Condensed Edition, 1966) 50

<sup>137</sup> Ibid , 51

<sup>138</sup> Ibid

<sup>139</sup> Ibid , 52

Michael Davitt, the great voice of the Land League, looked to Lalor and to George in the formation of his philosophies. Davitt regarded Lalor very highly

There was no real Irish revolutionary mind in the '48 period except Lalor's. There were brilliant writers, ardent patriots, eloquent orators, and nationalist poets, a galaxy of talent, of fine characters, of noble idealists, and of splendidly earnest men. But it was only in the head and heart of a little, deformed gentleman-farmer's son - a descendant of an outlawed "Tory" of the early confiscations - that the spirit and fire and purpose of a true Celtic revolutionist were found.<sup>140</sup>

Davitt also realised the influence of Lalor upon Henry George as he wrote that "the wonderful little hunchback from the village in Queen's County indirectly, gave Henry George the social gospel of land nationalization - minus all its pro-rebellious Irish bearings."<sup>141</sup> Davitt describes Henry George as his friend and devotes an entire chapter of *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland*, to supply an anecdotal description of the situation when George was arrested twice because of his suspicious behaviour. Davitt uses the words of J. L. Joynes to describe the 'trial'. Among the pieces of evidence that the prosecutor laid before the justice of the peace was the fact that there were suspicious names and addresses in his notebook as well as the letters F C which apparently stood for Fenian Centre. Evidence against George also included the fact that he had stayed at the abbey graveyard with suspicious characters longer than necessary, and the fact that he had visited three shops that were owned by other suspicious characters. The pamphlet that George had written was also submitted as evidence with passages marked that were intended "to show that rent was only another form of robbery, and that the state was the true owner of the

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<sup>140</sup> Michael Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland*, 58

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, 65



soil, which private individuals ought not to be allowed to monopolize”<sup>142</sup> In response to these pieces of evidence

Mr George made a detailed statement, saying that he was the correspondent of an American paper, and that the note-book was simply used to found his letters upon, that his acquaintance was wide and included men who might be called suspicious, whose names the inspector had picked out from several hundred others, that the suspicious letters were not F C but T C, and were intended for town councillor instead of Fenian centre, that he had visited the ruined abbey for the purpose of inspecting the ruins, and without knowing that the curate was a suspicious character that he had gone into suspicious shops with the harmless intention of buying a button and finally, that his pamphlet could not be judged by excerpted passages torn from their context, but that he would be happy to present every one in the room with a copy for perusal at their own leisure, which copies he accordingly handed round at once<sup>143</sup>

Henry George was released Davitt does not overtly describe why he includes the above anecdote, but it appears to be in order to supply the reader with a better understanding of the personality of the author of *Progress and Poverty*

George published his suggestions for Ireland’s regeneration nearly thirty years after J S Mill recommended that Ireland would best be served by converting to a system of peasant proprietorship Both men shared the philosophy that a stimulus of personal advantage was an efficient manner of overcoming slovenly behaviour Mill wrote “A permanent interest in the soil to those who till it, is almost a guarantee for the most unwearying laboriousness”<sup>144</sup> Henry George also wanted to see personal industry increase so he proposed even more drastic measures than did Mill To turn back to the criticism that arose from George’s work, George himself recognised that his proposal of

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 425 The description of George as Davitt’s ‘friend’ on page 361

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 426 As cited from J L Joynes, *Adventures of a Tourist in Ireland* (London Kegan Paul, Trench & Co, 1882) 25-39

<sup>144</sup> J S Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, reprinted, (Toronto University of Toronto Press, and London Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965) 327

making land common property would “arouse the most bitter antagonism,”<sup>145</sup> and it most certainly did. We will briefly note a cross-section of such responses. Isaac Cooke opens his “Reply to Mr. Henry George” with perhaps the most accurate and most unbiased summary of the book before he goes about refuting certain points. According to Cooke, George believed that intense poverty is an unnecessary result of progress and those who are in a state of poverty are certainly not culpable for their situation. Cooke, on the other hand, believed that poverty is inevitable on the road to progress and those in dire need have arrived there in part by their own irresponsibility. Cooke writes, “wherever industrial progress manifests itself thither workers are attracted, like the bees and the flies to the sources of sweetness. Those who, like the bees, store up a portion of their gains for future use, add to the general prosperity of the hive. Those who, like the flies, devote the whole to immediate consumption, furnish the painful contrast which has attracted George’s philanthropic attention. He blunderingly attributes the palpable evils to the conduct of the careful and industrious, whose example, on the contrary, indicates true remedy, and the reproductive expenditure of whose capitalised savings provides constant alleviation.”<sup>146</sup> Another critic, Francis Longe, first commends George’s work and then disagrees with his arrival at his proposed remedy. Longe regards *Progress and Poverty* as “an elaborate and powerfully written treatise, embracing a review of the most important elements of social and economic science.”<sup>147</sup> However, he shortly points out the fallacy into which he asserts that George had fallen into. He identifies it with the following description: “This fallacy

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<sup>145</sup> Henry George, *Progress and Poverty*, 254

<sup>146</sup> Isaac Cooke, ‘*Progress and Poverty*’ *A Reply to Mr. Henry George* (Liverpool: Henry Young, 1884) 24

<sup>147</sup> Francis Longe, *A Critical Examination of Mr. George’s ‘Progress and Poverty’ and Mr. Mill’s Theory of Wages*, 3

consists in identifying ‘product of labour’ with ‘labour’ ‘Product of labour’ is the thing produced, not the ‘labour’ or ‘work’ employed in producing it In confusing the theory of wages Mr George launches himself at once into a course of fallacy and paradox, as to the relation between wages and rent, which is exhibited both in his solution of his problem and in his remedy ”<sup>148</sup>

Arnold Toynbee published a ‘Criticism’ and Francis Wrightson wrote his ‘Analysis’ and ‘Refutation’ of Henry George, but possibly the harshest critique was published by Arthur Crump under the title, “An Exposure of the Pretensions of Mr Henry George, As Set Forth in his Book ‘Progress and Poverty’ ” Crump accuses George of coming “before his audience like Father Christmas, laden with presents, into a room full of delighted children The full and entire burden of his greeting is, ‘Here you are my worthy friends Messrs So-and-So have paid for it all’ ”<sup>149</sup> Crump examined one hundred and fifty nine pages of *Progress and Poverty* and wrote of the pages, “ we do not hesitate to say, that we have never in our experience come across a more confused mass of inconsistencies, contradictions fallacies, and absurdities ”<sup>150</sup>

The final pamphlet to be referred to here was written by E G Fitzgibbon He claims that his work will deal with *Progress and Poverty* in ‘plain English’ The section that is perhaps the most forceful is Fitzgibbon’s response to the remedy to poverty proposed by George Fitzgibbon acknowledges his outrage at the thought of abolishing private property and writes of the remedy as one that “punish[es] landowners as robbers by confiscating their property, giving them no compensation, and terrifying them with threats

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid , 6

<sup>149</sup> Arthur Crump, *An Exposure of the Pretensions of Mr Henry George, as Set Forth in His Book ‘Progress and Poverty’* (London Effingham Wilson, 1884) 3-4

of liability to further ill-usage And, whilst as to this no question of justice can arise, because the proposition has flagrant injustice on the face of it, he pretends to be unconscious of that fact, and professes to test whether it is or is not just by discussing a third and still further different matter - namely, whether private property in land is just, and submits this precious 'remedy' of his to no test whatever"<sup>151</sup> As history has shown, George's proposed remedy was not applied, but that did not mean that he had failed It was appropriate that poverty be examined, and both public debate and awareness were successful by-products of George's work The recent work of Gertrude Himmelfarb is helpful in summarising the debate regarding poverty and its relationship to progress She asserts, in a somewhat generous spirit towards the ideologues of political economy

What gave the question of poverty its urgency was not the fear of social revolution, of hordes of "dangerous classes" storming the citadels of property and power, but a profound sense of moral and social disarray<sup>152</sup>

Moral and social disarray is an accurate description of the British Isles in the nineteenth century Both of the ideologies that this chapter has dealt with led to the state of affairs at the end of the century Each had a profound impact on the British administration and on the Relief Commissioners Poverty was not abolished with the increase of progress as had been anticipated and hoped for by most administrators What is important is that political economy was not a rigid, uniform science, but offered many alternatives by way of policy and practice to its adherents The tragedy is that these alternatives were not considered by those in the Treasury in the late 1840's

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid , 32

<sup>151</sup> E G Fitzgibbon, *Essence of 'Progress and Poverty,' Extracted from the American of Henry George, and Done into and Dealt with in Plain English* (London W Swan Sonnenschein and Co , No year of publication) 8-9

<sup>152</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty*, 526

## SECTION 5 5 – CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

I cannot help thinking that the man who, in his ministerial capacity, must be looked upon as a public exponent of those principles of Government which have brought our country to her present calamitous condition, by a long course of illiberal legislation and unjustifiable neglect, ought to have his name placed before a story which details with truth the sufferings which such legislation and neglect have entailed upon our people <sup>153</sup>

In his ironic dedication of *The Black Prophet* to Lord John Russell, William Carleton performed a similar task to the one proposed in this chapter. He brought together the verbal and the observational universes of the Irish Famine and revealed them in their harsh conflict. The political concepts of Russell's service during the Irish Famine led to severe suffering on the part of the Irish people. Carleton wanted to make it clear to his readers that the cause and effect relationship of the 1840's verbal universe in conflict with the observable reality of death and forced emigration was not fate or coincidence. Carleton presented the fictional account of the famine as an argument that the government was directly involved in the outcome of the potato blight.

Indeed, the primary conclusion of this chapter is that the ideologies of providentialism and political economy that existed in the verbal universe of the mid-nineteenth century were in direct conflict with the observational universe of severe famine, and even with other verbal universes. When these two ideological constructs were applied to the event of the potato blight, a moral framework of justification for the ensuing deaths and forced emigration was produced. The eradication of two million souls from Ireland's soil was not accomplished in a moral vacuum. Instead, the principles of providentialism and political economy "seemed so fundamental to many contemporaries that it was deemed

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<sup>153</sup> William Carleton, *The Black Prophet* (London: Lawrence and Bullen LTD, 1899) v

impossible to correctly understand the social world or to found legislation consistent with moral principles without their guidance”<sup>154</sup>

The Victorian citizen deemed anything correlated with *progress* as equal to *morality*. In this light, the belief that the potato blight was divinely ordained to produce Ireland’s regeneration becomes more intelligible to today’s post-modern citizens. Those in charge of the public purse during the famine subscribed completely to the theory that the blight was the hand of God. Charles Trevelyan saw ‘Supreme Wisdom’ as overseeing the happenings of the distress and believed himself to be the dutiful civil servant honouring his God and his country. Additionally, “the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Charles Wood, beheved that God had intervened to bring about a ‘social revolution in Ireland,’ and he strongly supported Trevelyan”<sup>155</sup>. By many influential citizens of the day, anything that could bring Ireland into a more prosperous and civilised state was declared as *moral* – even the destruction of human life and culture. Therefore, one of the most favoured solutions to the economic dilemmas that faced Ireland was to convert Irish farmland to the well-established British model. This model was thought to be Ireland’s salvation from the economic, social, and cultural evils that it faced. Regarding the political economists, Peter Gray reveals, “Encouraging capital in land became their priority, along with securing guarantees of security for freedom of outlay and certainty of return. To be successful, a reorganisation of landholding was essential, as they held that only large scale capitalist farming on the English model could be efficient”<sup>156</sup>. Even though this reorganisation was

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<sup>154</sup> Gary Langer, *The Coming of Age of Political Economy*, 14

<sup>155</sup> Peter Gray, *The Irish Famine*, 48

<sup>156</sup> Peter Gray, “Ideology and the Famine,” *The Great Irish Famine*, ed. Cathal Poiréir, 88

contrary to the needs of the Irish farmer, it coincided with the science of political economy and was thought to be just in the long run

Nassau Senior resolutely insisted that government members be educated in political economy. He made the following strong comparison: “A government ignorant of the nature of wealth, or of the laws which regulate its production and distribution, resembles a surgeon who has not studied anatomy, or a judge unacquainted with law”<sup>157</sup>. No British administrator desired to be accused of this. Thus, if an individual who considered himself to be moral believed that the Irish Famine was sent by God, it became a moral requirement to see that the circumstance was used to its full potential for the prosperity of Ireland.

Yet even Prime Minister Russell, who was so chastised by William Carleton, saw the conflict between ideology and reality. He wrote to Lord Clarendon, “It is quite true that landlords in England would not like to be shot like hares and partridges. But neither does any landlord turn out fifty persons at once, and burn their houses over their heads, giving them no provision for the future. The murders are atrocious, so are the ejectments”<sup>158</sup>. There is very little evidence, however, that the Prime Minister allowed such observations to influence policy and practice on the ground.

A secondary conclusion to this chapter is that providentialism and political economy were not moral, nor were they scientific. Russell hinted at this, agreeing that the shooting of landlords was immoral, but the wholesale evictions were immoral as well. Christine Kinealy promotes this conclusion and remarks that political economy was actually culturally derived as opposed to morally or scientifically derived.

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<sup>157</sup> Nassau Senior, *Four Introductory Lectures on Political Economy*, 6

<sup>158</sup> Russell to Clarendon, 15 November 1847, Russell Papers, PRO 6G. Quoted in Donal Kerr, *'A Nation of Beggars'?*, 93

During the Famine, the ideas of political economy were invoked to justify non-interference in the grain trade, following the disastrous blight of 1846. This philosophy appeared to give a scientific basis to what were, essentially, culturally derived ideas of economic behaviour and social needs.<sup>159</sup>

As Seamus Deane notes the importance of Cairnes' contemporary views on the subject

It is important because it demonstrates how the Irish Famine and subsequent disorders arose from a radically defective and unjust system, which was upheld for what seemed to many people to be perfectly sound economic reasons. Cairnes explains that economic beliefs are culturally derived and that therefore they should not be clung to in the face of circumstances that contradict them.<sup>160</sup>

The essay was published twenty years after the famine ended and the verbal universe of Britain was changing. Cairnes wrote, "I shall now endeavour to show that the maxim of *laissez-faire* has no scientific basis whatever, but is at best a mere handy rule of practice, useful, perhaps, as a reminder to statesmen on which side the presumption lies in questions of industrial legislation, but totally destitute of all scientific authority."<sup>161</sup> As a different verbal universe emerged, the actions of the British administrators of the famine and those in charge of the Poor Laws as well came under a great deal more criticism. Men such as James Fintan Lalor, Henry George, and Michael Davitt paved the way to a new verbal universe that would not have been in as great of conflict with the observational universe of the 1840's famine as the universe of providentialism and political economy. Christopher Morash's analysis of John Mitchel's verbal war on Britain's 1840's verbal universe provides a fitting end to these chapter conclusions. While using the vocabulary of the political economists, Mitchel manages to twist them into signifiers 'of cultural hegemony'.

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<sup>159</sup> Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, 9

<sup>160</sup> Seamus Deane, Introduction to John Elliot Cairnes, "Essays in Political Economy," *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, Vol II, 184

<sup>161</sup> John Elliot Cairnes, "Essays in Political Economy," *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, Vol II, 189



“He accomplishes this reversal by undermining at the level of language the discourse of political economy, particularly in its free-market and Malthusian forms, subjecting its terminology to a series of satiric inversions”<sup>162</sup> Mitchel recognised, though he did not classify the conflict in these terms, that the concepts, propositions, and theories of the British administration of the 1840’s were in direct contradiction with the physical and social reality of the Irish Famine. The verbal and observational universes during the famine were in conflict and the Irish people died or fled in their millions as a result. Administrators were not just following orders, but closing their minds – and their eyes – to alternative ways of perceiving the disastrous observational universes that were unfolding before them. Why these alternatives were not successfully communicated to them is one of the key focal points of this study, and it is to this that we shall now turn.

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<sup>162</sup> Christopher Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine*, 66

## Chapter 6

### Senders and Receivers

“For the Commander of the Eliza”

*the others with emaciated faces and prominent, staring eyeballs, were evidently in an advanced state of starvation The officer reported to Sir James Dombrain and Sir James, ‘very inconveniently wrote Routh interfered*

*Cecil Woodham-Smith The Great Hunger*

Routine patrol off West Mayo, sighting  
A rowboat heading unusually far  
Beyond the creek, I tacked and hailed the crew  
In Gaelic Their stroke had clearly weakened  
As they pulled to, from guilt or bashfulness  
I was conjecturing when, O my sweet Christ,  
We saw piled in the bottom of their craft  
Six grown men with gaping mouths and eyes  
Bursting the sockets like spring onions in drills  
Six wrecks of bone and pallid, tautened skin  
‘Bia, bia,  
Bia’ In whines and snarls their desperation  
Rose and fell like a flock of starving gulls  
We’d known about the shortage, but on board  
They always kept us right with flour and beef  
So understand my feelings, and the men’s,  
Who had no mandate to relieve distress  
Since relief was then available in Westport -  
Though clearly these poor brutes would never make it  
I had to refuse food they cursed and howled  
Like dogs that had been kicked hard in the privates  
When they drove at me with their starboard oar  
(Risking capsize themselves) I saw they were  
Violent and without hope I hoisted  
And cleared off Less incidents the better  
Next day, like six bad smells, those living skulls  
Drifted through the dark of bunks and hatches  
And once in port I exorcised my ship,  
Reporting all to the Inspector General  
Sir James, I understand, urged free relief  
For famine victims in the Westport Sector  
And earned tart reprimand from good Whitehall  
Let natives prosper by their own exertions,  
Who could not swim might go ahead and sink  
‘The Coast Guard with their zeal and activity  
Are too lavish were the words, I think

Seamus Heaney  
Printed in *Death of a Naturalist*

## Chapter 6 Senders and Receivers

Chapter five concluded with Christopher Morash's interpretation of John Mitchel's 'satiric inversions'. Morash further states, "Mitchel recognized discourse itself as a site of struggle."<sup>1</sup> This is an illuminating statement for this study of the famine and interpersonal communication. Wars and battles have been waged between humans since the dawn of human existence, but, Mitchel recognised, and it is recognised here, that profound interpersonal struggle also occurs at the level of human discourse. For this reason, this chapter is devoted to the *senders* and the *receivers*. These are human beings who were involved at any level in the discourse of the Irish Famine. These are human beings who were involved in a struggle for rights, for culture, for economic and agricultural progress, for freedom, for power, for land, and even for their very existence. These were the senders and the receivers of the famine communications that failed so starkly to alleviate the great calamity of the 1840's.

### SECTION 6.1 – CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

Rarely are the strategies employed by people in order to withstand famine given attention, like many of the images of the 1840's famine made available at the time, the famine victim is on the point of death, or has just died, never receives a voice and usually remains unnamed.<sup>2</sup>

One of the objectives of this chapter is to supply a voice and several names to victims of the Great Irish Famine. This is not easily done because very little documentary evidence

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine*, 59

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Kelleher, *Feminization of the Famine*, 227

remains of famine victims of the 1840's. A sense of famine voices can be gleaned from the letters so heavily relied upon, but the first main section of this chapter will highlight some of the oral traditions of the descendants of famine survivors captured on tape by the Irish Folklore Commission and published by various authors. This section will also list just a sample of the many names of those in danger of perishing and those who actually perished.

A second objective here is to revisit the subject of 'souperism' in a more detailed fashion than previously accomplished. As the field of communication studies has a great deal to do with the understanding of human identity, this dissertation is not complete without a survey of an issue that has lent itself to such major misunderstandings and generalisations.

Finally, chapter six seeks to provide more details on four individuals that at various times in their respective roles have acted as both senders and receivers of messages. Those individuals are Sir James Dombrain, Edward Nangle, Sir Charles Trevelyan, and Tony Blair. Although many of the topics and individuals reviewed in this chapter have entered into the thesis previously, this chapter takes on a more pointed and detailed perspective. For example, chapter two provided a profile of the famine communicators that included a description of many senders and receivers, but there is a great deal more involved in a thorough description. The information in this chapter brings an important level of emphasis back to the *humans* that were involved in the communication of the Irish Famine as opposed to merely the communicative *issues* of the famine.

## SECTION 6.2 – VOICES AND NAMES

The reconstruction of an historical event purely from the source of folk memory would be ludicrous because “the evidence of much folk memory is flawed and confused. It is also often – consciously or subconsciously – selective, evasive, and apologetic.”<sup>3</sup> However, as a means to better understand the human aspect of an historical event such as the Irish Famine, the memories and stories of individuals are significant. Indeed, regarding the material of the Irish Folklore Commission, the author of the preceding statement, Cormac O Grada, avers “At its best, the record is vivid, eloquent, and compelling.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, using several different sources, the voices and names of those who suffered, died, or emigrated as a result of the famine will be recorded in this section. The references will be presented in a largely chronological fashion. The first oral record regards the onset of the blight in 1845. The records continue by chronicling the two major fears on the part of the Irish people – the fear of death by starvation and the fear of death by disease. The fears were realised in hundreds of thousands of instances and records of deaths are presented next. Finally, a few of those who were fortunate enough to evade death by emigration left a record of their experiences by their correspondence.

“The arrival of the blight in Wexford and Waterford from the Continent is recorded by the *Dublin Evening Post* on 9 September.”<sup>5</sup> A report from Mionloch near Galway City captures the shock and fear when the rot was discovered. “In the first year of the famine the potatoes rotted in the pits. It was Thomas Ward from Mionloch who first found out. He went out to the garden for potatoes for a meal. He stuck his spade in the pit, and the spade was swallowed. The potatoes turned to mud inside. He shrieked and shrieked

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<sup>3</sup> Cormac O Grada, *Black '47 and Beyond*, 195

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

The whole town came out. All the potatoes were in the same way.<sup>6</sup> Without sufficient nutrients, the people feared starvation and disease. The following excerpt is given by a man remembering the experiences related to him by his father who survived the tragic years

our parents who had lived through the Famine years, always seemed to live in its shadow. My father was 40 years of age when the potato crop failed in the year '45, in '46 the Famine came but in '47 conditions became more drastic every day. On many occasions, hours would be spent at the door of some charitable institution, soup school or a gentleman's house. Oftentimes after a long wait in the bitter cold the people would be sent away without a crumb of bread. There was no bread to be got for them. Every one was coming short and they were afraid to satisfy their hunger or eat enough, thinking the day was not far off when they found they had nothing left to eat. Those pitiful scenes remained fresh in my father's memory. People worn out with untold hardship, badly clad staggering for want of food, or any kind of nourishment, wending their way back to satisfy the hungry, gnawing pang with a drink of hot water or a mouthful of fresh grass or herbs they gathered by the roadside. This brought relief for a time. My father said he saw people dead on the roadside, such sights, their bodies all skin and bones, with bunches of green grass in their mouths, the green juice of the grass trickling down their chins and necks. Eating such foods brought on disease on the mouth and lips.<sup>7</sup>

On Friday, 18 September 1846, a memorial was written to the Lord Lieutenant from the inhabitants of Tubbercurry, Carrentubber, Ballyara, Tullacusheen, Clooneen, Sessua Common, Tullavella, Frenchford, Mullaun, Cloonacool, Sessua Garry, and Sessua Kilroy in the parish of Achonry. The memorial represented several thousand people who were in great fear of perishing from hunger if they did not receive assistance through the public works. The memorial states, 'The above named townlands contain a population of 4,200 who are destitute of food owing to the total failure of the potato crop and must

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<sup>5</sup> Brenden O Cathaoir, *Famine Diary*, 3

<sup>6</sup> Cormac O Gráda, *Black '47 and Beyond*, 200

<sup>7</sup> Cathal Poirteir, 'Seanchas faoin Drochshaol i dtimpeallacht Cho Ros Comain,' *Douglas Hyde Conference Proceedings*, 53. Reference: CBE 415 92-97

inevitably perish from hunger unless they get employment on the above named work whereby they may purchase provisions ”<sup>8</sup> Several hundred people signed their names or put a mark by their names if they were illiterate on this memorial in an attempt to make their voices heard before the Lord Lieutenant It is interesting, as this sample shows, that male voices were the sole registers of pleading and suffering in the official public sphere

**Figure 6 1**  
**Thirty Names of Illiterate Irish Individuals<sup>9</sup>**

Bartholomew O’Hara	Martin O’Hara
Bryan Rogers	Patrick Dyre
Mathew Gallagher	Bartholomew Quinn
James Gallagher	Miles Sweeney
Thomas Gallagher	Dominick Wynne
Patt O’Donnell	Philip Murphy
Michael O’Donnell	James McGowan
John O’Donnell	James Healy
Pat Byrne	William McEnally
Michael Walker	John Murphy
Pat Sweeney	Martin Scanlon
Laurence Kilcoyne	Pat Scanlon
James Burke, Jr	Walter Burke
Luke Walsh	Thomas Collins
Martin McHugh	John Brennan

In addition to the fear of starvation, people also feared contracting the fever Even in the giving of charity, a wariness of contagion set in “The alms would be stretched towards them, but nobody would look them straight in the face, for fear of their breaths and of the terrible disease they carried ”<sup>10</sup> A woman from Cork remembered hearing about the fear of fever from her mother She recounts a story about a neighbouring family

They were very badly off, for the men couldn’t get work anywhere around them The hunger brought on the sickness – the fever, God bless us – and

<sup>8</sup> Memorial to the Lord Lieutenant, 18 September 1846, Distress Papers 5301, cited in Liam Swords, *In Their Own Words*, 75

<sup>9</sup> Appendix IN, *Ibid* , 417–419

<sup>10</sup> Roger McHugh, ‘The Famine in Irish Oral Tradition,’ *The Great Famine*, 419

the two sons were buried. The neighbours went in and got some sort of a coffin and buried them. The couple of men that would go into a house where death from the dread sickness was would not enter without first having a meal, a good, full meal, they said there was more danger of contagion if they were hungry or weak. They buried them anyway and the poor mother was not able to go to the graveyard with them. Some time after when some neighbour went to see the old woman, she was found dead and her body almost eaten away with the rats.<sup>11</sup>

According to an account of the fever dead in County Sligo, there existed even less assistance from neighbours. “If somebody died in a house, the corpse was left unburied unless there was somebody in the house able to carry in one way or another the corpse to the graveyard and do the burial.”<sup>12</sup> One of the priests who led the first group of priests to Grosse Isle caught typhus, but he recovered and returned to minister to those on the quarantine island.<sup>13</sup> This priest, Father McGauran, spoke of his lack of fear of the fever: “I am not at all afraid of the fever, I have never felt happier than in my actual state. The Master Whom I serve holds me in His all powerful hand.”<sup>14</sup> There existed a correlation between lack of fear and active assistance of fever victims. For example, a gifted storyteller in south Connemara remembers the determination of his grandmother to help others. He described

There was a household west here in Muing in the townland of Leitreach Ard – Tomas Sheam Uí Chaoidhean’s family – and they were hit by the bad illness because of hunger, the cholera, God help us. But Grialais’s daughter (she was my mother’s mother) heard that there was nobody looking after them, so she went to them, and what she saw when she entered the house was them all bundled up together under their bedding on the verge of death. The old man was the liveliest of them, but even he was barely able to talk to her. Well, she had brought a few gurnet with her and she boiled them, and she mixed some of the yellow meal that she had also

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 418

<sup>12</sup> Cormac O Grada, *Black '47 and Beyond*, 200

<sup>13</sup> Brenden O Cathaoir, *Famine Diary*, 128, 132

<sup>14</sup> Fr. Bernard McGauran to Archbishop of Quebec, 24 May 1847, cited in Liam Swords, *In Their Own Words*, 185



brought through the juice of the gurnet, and gave it to them to drink. She saved them all from death, attending to them regularly until they were strong enough to look after themselves. And they always acknowledged afterwards that she had saved their lives.<sup>15</sup>

Those among the tenant farmers who did not fear death by starvation or disease were in the minority. Other fears existed during the famine years as well. For example, bakers feared that people would attack if they discovered flour dust upon their clothing. A man recalls, "My father was always nervous to appear in public with flour dust on his cloths, so ravenous were some people he feared they would attack him and kill him."<sup>16</sup> An individual remembering the fears of the bakers recalled another memory.

So great were the crowds of starving people who called at the workhouse during each day that the authorities were obliged to attach iron bars onto the outside of the windows of the bakery to guard against attack for bread, and my father told us that before he or any one of his five assistants appeared in public, they made sure to wash their hands and remove any whiteness of flour dust from their clothes or they stood in danger of being eaten by the starving people.<sup>17</sup>

One method of dealing with the fear of starvation was to steal provisions in order to ward off hunger. "In Galway city a woman stole some of the newly purchased meal that Colm O Caoidheain's grandfather was carrying on his back, she had cut a hole in the sack and used her apron to collect the escaping meal."<sup>18</sup> Another woman recounted the story of her father, "his mother made a big pocket for him inside his coat and he used to steal oatmeal and put it in this big pocket and bring it home and that's how he kept his family from starving and he was only a very young lad at the time."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Cormac O Grada, *Black '47 and Beyond*, 202-203. Reference IFC1073/31-32

<sup>16</sup> Cathal Poirteir, "Seanchas faoin Drochshaol i dtimpeallacht Cho Ros Comain," *Douglas Hyde Conference Proceedings*, 49

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 54. Reference CBE 485 241-245

<sup>18</sup> Cormac O Grada, *Black '47 and Beyond*, 207

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 208

As the antithesis of stealing, reports also abound of supernatural blessings occurring when generosity was practised. For example, for those who were generous with their milk, grain, cabbage, and corn, there existed a supernatural surplus. The following account from Rathmore in east Kerry is a fine example

I often heard that old Mrs Cronin grandmother of Father John Cronin, Lissyconnor, Rathmore, was very good and full of charity to the poor and hungry in the bad times. She used to always boil a lot of potatoes for the meals and she never used the ones left over after dinner for either pig or cows or poultry, but collected the best of them and put them near the fire to have them for any hungry poor person who might chance to call to the house for some bite to lessen their mad hunger. A few potatoes half cold and a basin of milk was a great boon to such starving people, and often they went away blessing the house and the owners of it. Many were the poor mother and father who came to her for one single head of cabbage she had growing in the field. It was poor fare but it kept many a family from starving in those days. A head or a couple of heads of cabbage boiled with a pinch of salt were divided out among the family and if they had enough of that they'd be very thankful. One day her husband seeing so much cabbage being carried away went into the house to blame her for giving away all the cabbage and asked her did she want to leave themselves with nothing at all? She denied giving away as much of it and said she only gave a few heads to a few poor women who were starving. "Come out now," said the man of the house, "and show me what cabbage is left for ourselves." She went out fearing the worst and hoping he would not blame her too much for helping God's poor. When they reached the cabbage field great was her surprise to find that there was not a single head missing out of the whole field.<sup>20</sup>

Millions of people were not fortunate enough to receive sufficient generosity to sustain their lives within Ireland. A man from County Limerick describes the two most prominent manners of perishing – hunger and disease. He described, "emaciated corpses, partly green from eating docks, and partly blue from the cholera and dysentery."<sup>21</sup> One memory of death in the workhouse is especially vivid

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 213. Other specific examples given on page 214. Reference IFC1071/133-34, McHugh, "The Famine in Folklore," 404-5.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 203. Reference IFCS424/136.

Seeing people die of hunger was awful but it could not equal seeing from other parts of the workhouse to a large room at the other gable-end of the Workhouse (the gable nearest the town of Castlerea) This room was called 'The Black Room' and the gable the 'Black Gable' for in this room the sick person was allowed to die Sometimes there were up to seven persons in this room From the window in this room there were a few boards slanting down to the earth and beneath was a huge grave or pit When a death occurred the corpse was allowed to slide down the boards into the pit beneath and 'lime' was put over the corpse, along the boards and along the wall of the gable This caused the wall to go black and gave the name to the 'Black Gable' This black gable was to be seen up to a few years ago and had retained its black colour The people who died of cholera in the Workhouse at this time were buried immediately after death without a coffin and wearing their own clothes in which they died There was also another large grave or pit at the back of the workhouse into which more corpses were put, mostly those who died of hunger<sup>22</sup>

Another horrific and vivid picture is described "I heard my grandmother saying – she was from the Kenmare side – that the worst sight she ever saw was a woman laid out on the street [in Kenmare] and the baby at her breast She died of famine fever – nobody would take the child, and in the evening the child was eating the Mother's breast"<sup>23</sup> As people continued to die of hunger and fever, those who remained were still fearful that they might be next "Sometimes fear of infection was so great that the houses would not be entered at all, but would be fired, or their roofs and walls broken in, the bodies of fever-victims being left inside 'There is an old ruin there across the river where a whole family died of fever', an old farmer who lived near Sneem, Co Kerry, told a collector, 'They had to knock the house down on them and the dogs drew away their bodies'<sup>24</sup> Peig Sayers recounts the burning of a cottage "Michael Garvey got the cholera, and he and the entire household succumbed They perished together I think he died before his wife He had a daughter,

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<sup>22</sup> Cathal Poirteir, *Seanchas faoin Drochshaol i dtimpeallacht Cho Ros Comain*, "Douglas Hyde Conference Proceedings, 49-50

<sup>23</sup> Roger McHugh, "The Famine in Irish Oral Tradition," *The Great Famine*, 419

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid* , 418

and had she survived, she would have been the finest girl in the parish of Dún Chaoin. Somebody went to their cottage door, and could see that they were all dead. All they did then was to set fire to the thatch on the cottage, burn it, and knock in the walls.”<sup>25</sup> A final gruesome reality awaited those who were in the throes of death. Accounts of those not quite dead being collected and placed in graves are sufficient enough to warrant this account’s validity.

Down by Mui Mor when the big house was a poor house, there was a man hired there to carry the people who died to the graveyard. He had made a trench in the graveyard, and he never closed it, nor did he put the dead in there more than once a week, since they used to die of hunger lying on the roadside by the gate in the hopes of getting something to eat. People who were not dead at all but close to it, he would put them in his wheelbarrow and carry them to the trench. He would let them down among the corpses and allow them to die there. That is how it was without a word of a lie!<sup>26</sup>

With chances such as these, the most fortunate event that many Irish individuals could seek was the opportunity to emigrate.

Emigration was not a novel concept for the Irish people. However, the severe shortages resulting from the failed potato crop caused the number of emigrants to increase dramatically. “Famine emigration did not truly commence until the end of 1846, following the more widespread second appearance of blight, and it peaked in 1852, long after the potato blight had disappeared from most of Ireland. Even when the Famine was over, the high level of emigration continued and, in the following sixty years, an additional six million persons left.”<sup>27</sup> Approximately eighty percent chose to go to the United States, but

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<sup>25</sup> Cormac O Grada, *Black 47 and Beyond*, 211

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 202

<sup>27</sup> Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*, 297

Britain, Canada and Australia were also among the destinations of choice<sup>28</sup> The letters of three emigrants to Australia and the letters of a prosperous Catholic farmer and his wife to their former servants who immigrated to Australia supply a vivid picture of post-famine senders and receivers Though the core of this thesis is concerned with communication in the midst of the famine, the effects of the blight upon interpersonal communication did not cease when the potato crop regained its health This review of emigrant correspondence sets the discussion in its continuing historical context

Isabella Wyly arrived in Adelaide, Australia in 1851 as an impoverished orphan Most of her letters sent back home were addressed to Matilda Wyly the widow of her own brother Thomas Isabella's letters "offer the moving chronicle of a woman's discovery of happiness against fearful odds"<sup>29</sup> Michael Normile left Dublin on 26 April 1854 with his sister Bridget It was Michael who received 'an ocean of consolation' from the letters his father sent from his home in County Clare and Michael's letters in return "were not scribbled aimlessly, but laboriously composed and neatly inscribed by an alert and reflective observer They provide singular insight into the personal experience of migration, and rich evidence of the contrasts between life in the two countries"<sup>30</sup>

Emigrant Michael Hogan's experiences in Australia began not with the famine, but with his exportation as a convict However, the letters that he sent to his brother Matthew in Tipperary from 1853-1857 radiate with passionate pleas for Matthew to emigrate from Ireland to a better, safer life in Australia Hogan encouraged his brother as follows

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, See also David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation* (Cork Cork University Press, 1994) 7-9

<sup>29</sup> David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, 97

<sup>30</sup> Ibid , 39

Dear Brother I am most anxious that you and family would Come out here where I Can make a happy home for you and myself This is the place where a man makes all for himself independent of any master for at once you purchase land here you have it for ever without taxes or any other Cess So I Expect you will have no hesitation but Come out at once for the sooner you Come the Better, which ever is the quickest way to Come out hear that is wat I desire If you wish [*me*] to pay your way out hear I will do so as I have said or mentioned before this is the Country where we Can Enjoy ourselves with the Best of every thing mpenden of a landlor of the Galling Yoke of oppression I also inform you that if my sisters son wish to Come out here Thomas Moore I will pay his passage <sup>31</sup>

Hogan was not alone in his praise of his new home, but other emigrants were more wary of encouraging others to come to Australia Isabella Wyly wrote, “I have great reson to be thankful in fact I have no reson to regret my coming to Austrilia, for I am much better off[f] than I ever should for [?] been atome”<sup>32</sup> Yet she also “told Matilda in 1857 that ‘I would never advise anny one to come here, for most people finds it a difficulty to get on Just now, perticular[l]y those who hav a large family’”<sup>33</sup> Michael Normile was appreciative of the opportunities afforded him in the new country but encouraged those who were able to stay at home in Ireland He wrote of the contrast regarding the potato crop “There is no Starvation or anny thoughts of it thank God Potatoes grew first rate these two last Crops I mean winter and summer crops”<sup>34</sup> Normile “blamed excessive emigration for depressing wages, sometimes using this argument to discourage unwanted additions to the flow At times he formulated his advice in the manner of an emigrant’s handbook, warning those with ‘a comfortable living at home’ to stay there, while

<sup>31</sup> Michael Hogan to Matthew Hogan, 22 June 1856, Reprinted in *Ibid* , 171-172

<sup>32</sup> Isabella Wyly to Matilda Wyly, 2 July 1856, Reprinted in *Ibid* , 113

<sup>33</sup> David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, 103

<sup>34</sup> Michael Normile, Jr to Michael Normile, Sr , 11 November 1855, Reprinted in *Ibid* , 75

encouraging unmarried men and women ‘that has to work hard at home and has not much by, it, to come here’ ”<sup>35</sup>

It is admitted by David Fitzpatrick that the collection of letters in *Oceans of Consolation* is ‘an unrepresentative non-sample’ of ‘individual representations of migration’ However, because the focus ‘is upon the forgotten vernacular of the steerage classes,’ the information in the letters validates this study of senders and receivers <sup>36</sup>

These three senders provided information about the new country of Australia to the receivers back home in Ireland and they provide current information regarding identity and language to today’s readers Isabella Wyly supplied clues regarding the state of her personal identity in Australia Although she wrote in 1859 that she retained a “thorough out and out Irish heart,”<sup>37</sup> her life in Australia was filled with opportunities that she would not have had in Ireland Isabella told Matilda, “I should have been a long time in poor old Dublin before I should show so well as I hav done here I am very comfortable and happy, and hav great reson to be thankful ”<sup>38</sup> Fitzpatrick summarises, “The letters chronicling Isabella’s ascent from penniless assisted immigrant to piano-owning matron are laced with dark references to failure and misfortune in Ireland ”<sup>39</sup> Michael Normile also recognised the destitution that existed in his home country His “letters are peppered with anxious enquiries about illness, and the formal exchange of affirmations of ‘good health’ had

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<sup>35</sup> David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, 67

<sup>36</sup> Ibid , 29

<sup>37</sup> Isabella Scott, 18 October 1859, Reprinted in Ibid , 133

<sup>38</sup> Isabella Wyly to Matilda Wyly, 2 July 1856, Reprinted in Ibid , 114

<sup>39</sup> David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, 106

profound personal importance for readers who had survived the horrors of the Famine in North Clare ”<sup>40</sup>

Regarding the use of Irish and English, emigrants were quick to use the language of their new home “Speaking Gaelic above a whisper outside the Irish wards also brands the emigrant for both the authorities and the swarms of predators ”<sup>41</sup> In regard to Michael Normile’s letters, they “make no direct use of the Irish language, which remained vernacular in the district, yet the musicality and balance of his prose distinguish it from the mundane manner of standard English via school reader Normile could compose a stately salutation, sharpen a description with a colourful proverb, half-conceal his innuendoes with an imperfect erasure, and roll out a polysyllable to add weight to his words ”<sup>42</sup>

Unlike many other countries to which the Irish emigrated, those who moved to Australia “dispersed throughout the settled districts with striking uniformity Irish settlers were evenly distributed not only between the colonies but within them In contrast with their compatriots in the United States, they were no more inclined to cluster together than were other immigrant groups ”<sup>43</sup> This hastened the loss of the Irish language and culture and the assimilation of the Irish into the Australian lifestyle A sense of bitterness is perceivable in Normile’s letter to his father, “A man coming to this Country he is nothing but a real fool for the first year especily Irishmen, for it is all the English system they have for working ”<sup>44</sup> Again the experiences of Michael Normile and Michael Hogan can be contrasted because, “The society in which Michael Hogan shone was overwhelmingly

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid , 60

<sup>41</sup> Brendan O Cathaoir, *Famine Diary*, 138

<sup>42</sup> David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, 48

<sup>43</sup> Ibid , 16

<sup>44</sup> Michael Normile, Jr to Michael Normile, Sr , 1 April 1855, Reprinted in Ibid , 71



Irish”<sup>45</sup> The purpose here is not to pronounce judgement on whether assimilation or Irish congregation was best for emigrants. Instead, the purpose is to raise the point that a greater level of contentment was experienced by Michael Hogan who retained closer ties with other Irish individuals in his new life in Australia than either Michael Normile or Isabella Wyly. The latter emigrants both surrendered more of their Irish identity than Michael Hogan and therefore did not want the same fate to befall those who were able to stay in Ireland. The element that remained consistent among the three emigrants was an expressed desire to value Irish culture at greater or lesser intensities.

The letters of William and Eliza Dalton to Ned Hogan and his sister Johanna “offer thoughtful commentary on the startling alterations in Irish life during the years of recovery after the Famine”<sup>46</sup> This series of letters reverses the direction of correspondence, causing those still in Ireland to become the senders of information and the emigrants to Australia to become the receivers. After the famine, William Dalton held 159 acres and leased 269 additional acres in County Tipperary. He and his wife Eliza belonged to the minor Catholic gentry of Munster. Two of their former servants, Ned and Johanna Hogan, had received state assisted emigration to Australia. The Daltons thought very highly of this brother and sister and “were united in praising the Hogans for their virtue and dutifulness both at home and beyond”<sup>47</sup> Fitzpatrick explains that the letters addressed to Ned and Johanna from William and Eliza “convey growing confidence in Ireland’s social and economic recovery.” One reason that the letters were written was because, “Famine and migration convulsed not merely politics and religion, but every element of Irish culture

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<sup>45</sup> David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, 165

<sup>46</sup> Ibid , 271

<sup>47</sup> Ibid , 282

Survivors naturally rejoiced in evidence of continuity and tradition in the period of adjustment ”<sup>48</sup>

In May of 1851, William told Ned, “There is no great improvement in this Country Since ye left it ”<sup>49</sup> Yet by 1853, the Daltons report, “This Country is fast Improving,” and in 1858, “This country is improving very much for the last 5 or 6 years notwithstanding there are numbers going to your country ”<sup>50</sup> Again, the circumstance of emigration is met with bittersweet emotion The Daltons were grateful that the Hogans had greater opportunities in Australia, but they also recognised the loss that Ireland faced as her people fled her shores Correspondence played a crucial role during the transition of personal identity of the first generation emigrants “Without linkage through letters, scattered families threatened to disintegrate For the post-Famine Irish, the letter was an indispensable agent for sustaining the unity of families and neighbourhoods fractured by emigration ”<sup>51</sup> It was through personal letters that the voices and names of Irish individuals did not get obliterated in the direct aftermath of the Irish Famine

### SECTION 6.3 – SOUPERISM

In contrast with the previous section, the practise of soupierism during the Irish famine was an attempt to disregard individual names and voices Those who engaged in the giving of items that were necessary for the sustenance of life in exchange for spiritual allegiance had more concern for their own agenda than they did for individual human beings If the legacy of one million deaths and one million forced emigrations was not dire

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid , 280, 276

<sup>49</sup> William Dalton to Ned Hogan, 15 May 1851, Reprinted in Ibid , 287

<sup>50</sup> Daltons to Hogans, 20 August 1853 and 17 August 1858, Reprinted in Ibid , 289, 293

<sup>51</sup> David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, 474, 495

enough for the Irish Famine, add to it the deepened hostility between the members of the Catholic and Protestant religions “The tag of soupierism lived on in Irish folk memory, casting a shadow over the impressive relief work of the Church of Ireland and the Protestant clergy, many of whom died of famine-related disease Claim and counterclaim poisoned relations, deepened the religious division, and influenced attitudes for decades to come ”<sup>52</sup> For this reason, the effects of soupierism should not be minimised It is of value for this study of senders and receivers to focus on the rise to prominence of soupierism and its zenith during the famine Also, instances in which the receivers of the message of proselytism were violated and instances when the senders offered honest charity will be cited and discussed

The verbal universe of the evangelical movement as part of imperial ideology spilled into all areas of politics and economics during the first half of the nineteenth century Another example of this universe conflicting with observational universe of Ireland is that the majority of Irish individuals were of the Catholic faith As Irene Whelan notes in her article “The Stigma of Soupierism,” “ the claims of the majority Catholic population posed an immediate and direct threat to the economic and political hegemony of the Protestant establishment ”<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the 1830’s saw a tremendous offensive launch of proselytism and propaganda With the condescending desire to bring Ireland into a more civilised and prosperous state, the religion of Catholicism became a target for devoted evangelicals Mission colonies began to be established in Ireland

Besides functioning as refuges for persecuted converts, the colonies were envisaged as economically self-sufficient communities which would

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<sup>52</sup> Donal Kerr, ‘*A Nation of Beggars*’?, 214

<sup>53</sup> Irene Whelan, “The Stigma of Soupierism,” *The Great Irish Famine*, Cathal Poirteir, ed (Cork, Dublin Mercier Press, 1995) 136

demonstrate to the surrounding areas the benefits of the traditional Protestant virtues of cleanliness, industry, and good management. But their chief function was to operate as missionary centres from which the surrounding areas could be evangelised.<sup>54</sup>

These types of settlements were established in counties such as Donegal, Kildare, Kerry, and Mayo under the auspices of the Protestant Colonisation Society. The perception of the lazy, potato-dependent Irish has been attributed to various causes, but those taking part in the colonisation efforts blamed the impoverished lifestyle on Catholicism. Therefore, the missionaries felt morally justified in their efforts because they felt they were taking the best possible action for the good of Ireland. It is at this point, however, that a differentiation can be made in relation to senders and receivers. In the communicative scenario of soupism, the Protestants are forthwith designated as the *senders* and the Catholics are the *receivers*. Although both factions sent and received messages, the focus here is upon the transmission of either relief or religious teaching from the Protestants to the Catholics. Donal Kerr highlights the sensitivity of the violation of proselytism

Most great religions, convinced that they are entrusted with a divine message of salvation, feel morally bound to propagate that message by making converts or proselytes. Yet, because of the sharply contrasting ways in which it is perceived, proselytism has always been a highly sensitive issue. What one religious group regards as praiseworthy missionary activity the opposing group perceives as immoral poaching, often, indeed, as little short of demonic. More than religious experience and conviction are involved, essential though these are, for closely, often inextricably, intertwined with the spiritual dimension of conversion are its social and political aspects.<sup>55</sup>

In fact, the social and political aspects of conversion are the most likely factors in causing violation to be made against the receivers.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 138-139

<sup>55</sup> Donal Kerr, 'A Nation of Beggars'?, 205

The anti-Catholicism thrust became a political doctrine, seeking “the complete extirpation of Catholic influence from any part of public life in Britain or Ireland, and the eradication of Catholicism as the religion of the majority population in Ireland on grounds that it was the cause of political subversion as well as economic backwardness”<sup>56</sup> In order to accomplish this goal, “Good organisation, and particularly the effective use of propaganda, were the hallmarks of evangelical commitment”<sup>57</sup> Yet, neither party was innocent of questionable behaviour Those who did ‘jump’ were shunned by the community in order to discourage any other fellow Catholics from succumbing to the proselytising efforts The proselytising historical fiction of Elizabeth Healy Walshe was used as a spoke in the wheel of propaganda, but, at the same time, it captures some of the negative actions employed by both religions

*The Manuscript Man or The Bible in Ireland* is a story that begins with the introduction of the Bryan family who has recently inherited an estate in the west of Ireland Published as an addition to the Religious Tract Society, this short novel humanises the many concepts that have previously been discussed within this thesis Though Ms Walshe takes on a more highly exalted perspective of the Irish language than many of her contemporaries, at least she tried to capture the emotional bonds between the Irish people and the Irish language in pre-famine Ireland

For example, when Major Bryan began to meet his new tenants on the estate, he encounters the fact that “with some of them he could speak only at second-hand, because they understood no language except Irish, and the majority of the others, while uttering

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<sup>56</sup> Irene Whelan, “The Stigma of Souperism,” *The Great Irish Famine*, 144

<sup>57</sup> Irene Whelan, “Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission, 1834 – 1852,” *A Various Country*, 124

English words, were translating their thoughts from the dearly-loved mother-tongue into what was to them alien speech ”<sup>58</sup> As a result of this difficulty in communication, Bryan decides that the most appropriate course of action to take is to learn Irish himself This turn in the plot introduces the principal character in the story, Mr Donat Clare, nicknamed “The Manuscript Man ” Clare is convinced by Major Bryan to teach Irish to his new landlord, but he is uneasy about it, saying, “Sir, I’m in dread it couldn’t ever come nateral to yer mouth ”<sup>59</sup> Whether or not the words would ever come naturally to Bryan, he endeavoured to learn This progressive landlord also hired Donat Clare to teach any tenants that wished to learn to read Irish Donat was ecstatic at the landlord’s commitment to his beloved language He tells Major Bryan that Irish “is at the core of my heart There isn’t a language like it on the tongue of mortal man, though now it’s only the talk of the poor, an’ the ould, an’ the lonesome, an’ rich people make a curiosity out of it, an’ lock up its manuscripts in glass cases, an’ call it a ‘dead’ language, but I can tell ‘em there’s a spell of life in it yet!”<sup>60</sup>

At this point in the story comes the subtle introduction of the two most prominent tactics used by both religions in the sectarian conflict The Protestant faction employed “the exchange of spiritual allegiance for material benefits of one kind or another employment, education, food, and clothing” which has now been termed “souponism ”<sup>61</sup> Those in the Catholic faith used the tactic of intimidation by ostracising anyone that chose to convert to Protestantism In the closely-knit Irish community, this was a harsh penalty

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<sup>58</sup> Elizabeth Healy Walshe, *The Manuscript Man, or The Bible in Ireland* (London William Clowes and Sons, Limited, 1893) 9

<sup>59</sup> Ibid , 12

<sup>60</sup> Ibid , 20

Within Walshe's work, the overt act of souperism is carefully avoided in the story because most likely it would not have been the most effective way to carry her intentions across. Another reason Walshe may have avoided strong souperism tactics was because she saw the potential damage that could be caused by affiliating too closely with Protestants of that nature. Regardless of her reasons, the most extreme act of proselytising in the novel is the loan from Major Bryan of a New Testament printed in the Irish language to be read by Donat Clare and those who were learning to read Irish.

"The Manuscript Man" quickly becomes enraptured by the stories that he reads, written in his beloved language. Yet because the Catholic priests do not approve of him reading the Bible for himself and encouraging others to do the same, he is condemned, ostracised, and abused. Clare had previously been quite popular among all of his neighbours and they were eager to hear his stories, ballads, and Irish lore. However, after he started reading the Bible for himself, when he approached a crowd of his neighbours they began to throw stones and clods of dirt and to yell curses at him. The next day, a young man named Mike Rafferty finds him alone and apologises, saying, "It's hopin' you won't think the worse o' me for that sir. Sure a weeshy bit of a shout couldn't do you any harm, or I wouldn't ha' uttered it - an I didn't rise a stone at all. I only shouted to let the curse past me, in a manner."

To which Donat asked, "The curse past you? What does that mean?"

"Everyone was to have a curse that didn't shout afther the souper, an' they say you is a souper, Misther Clare."<sup>61</sup> Regardless of whether or not Clare had converted, the

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<sup>61</sup> Irene Whelan, "Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission 1834 - 1852," *A Various Country*, 127.

<sup>62</sup> Elizabeth Healy Walshe, *The Manuscript Man*, 144.

Catholic people had been taught to mistrust the Protestants and to ostracise anyone who was suspected of being a 'jumper' or a 'souper'. The story concludes with Donat Clare, "The Manuscript Man," and his family emigrating to the "rolling prairies of Illinois," where they could be taught "above all things else their duty to God and men, as revealed in Holy Scripture. Even his wife, once so adverse, likes to listen to the music of the old language, in the pages of the Irish Bible brought to the new home across the sea."<sup>63</sup>

It is interesting that there is no mention of either religion in the North American exile because that particular sectarian conflict was most conspicuously an Irish dilemma. The Religious War that was waged in nineteenth century Ireland had little to do with a belief in a Saviour but very much to do with a belief in religious power and strength. Few, if any, writers are able to keep a cynical edge from creeping into their handling of the emotionally charged events. As Desmond Bowen writes: "Continually there was brawling in the workhouses over Protestant proselytising and Catholic intimidation, and every disturbance was grist for the evangelical propaganda mill."<sup>64</sup> The occasion of the potato blight was the most potent weapon of propaganda that the evangelical movement could have hoped for. "No effort was spared to use what was regarded as the providential occasion of the Famine to win the native Irish for Protestantism."<sup>65</sup>

The colony that has come under the most scrutiny of using the famine to win converts is the Achill Mission run by Edward Nangle. On Achill Island in County Mayo, two primary organisations had the power to respond and give relief to the dying. The Achill Relief Committee and the Achill Mission both responded to the situation. The

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 189, 190

<sup>64</sup> Desmond Bowen, *Souperism: Myth or Reality?* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1970) 138

<sup>65</sup> Donal Kerr, *'A Nation of Beggars'?*, 210



method of famine relief used by Achill Mission supplies an example of the stripping away of the cultural and religious allegiances of Irish individuals by means of soupism. Identity is “the sense of belonging, security, recognition, and importance someone can feel by being a member of a group that is bound together by common values and lifestyles”<sup>66</sup> Each culture develops different identities in the lives of its participants. Whenever one group is in a position of power to knowingly or unknowingly place their identity at a higher level of importance, hegemony is in place. Prejudice has also evolved as a term to define this practice, but when prejudice takes the leap from thought to action, hegemonic erosion of identity occurs.

Achill Island is approximately 24 by 18 kilometres and is located off the west coast of County Mayo. It is predominantly hilly, with few trees, poor soils, many lakes, and many turf deposits. The settlements on Achill are unplanned, loosely clustered and small. They are all descendants of the traditional clachan format, with the exception of Dugort, which is the original site of the Achill Mission established by Edward Nangle.<sup>67</sup> Nangle arrived in Achill in 1831 aboard the S S Nottingham for the sole purpose of assessing “the actual situation on the island and its suitability for a proselytising mission”<sup>68</sup>. At no time did Nangle attempt to conceal that he was in Achill to do his best to create converts to the Protestant faith. Therefore he began the Achill Mission with that purpose in mind. It took two full years to drain and reclaim the land for the Mission, but by 1834, he had begun his settlement. An enclosed farm, a church, seven slated houses, an infant school, a printing

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<sup>66</sup> James Lull, *Media, Communication, Culture*, 187

<sup>67</sup> Fiona McGrath, *Emigration and Landscape: The Case of Achill Island* (Trinity Papers in Geography, No 4) 1, 2, 3

<sup>68</sup> Theresa McDonald, *Achill 5000 BC to 1900 AD, Archaeology, History, Folklore* (Dooagh I A S Publications, 1992) 76

office, and a small dispensary were developed <sup>69</sup> The first edition of Nangle's monthly journal, *The Achill Missionary Herald, and Western Witness*, was published in July 1837

This publication was disseminated for the purpose of "exhibiting the principles and progress of Christ's Kingdom, and exposing the errors and abominations of that section of the rival kingdom of Antichrist, commonly called the papacy, together with a practical exposure of the civil, social, and political delinquencies practised by the Pope's emissaries in attempting to re-establish his wicked usurpation throughout the world generally, and especially in this kingdom" <sup>70</sup> Although each edition contained different stories and updates, a common theme in every edition was the argumentation against transubstantiation Nangle believed that the respect paid by Catholics to the Eucharist was equal to idolatry and was not hesitant to name it as such In addition to rejecting transubstantiation, Nangle included horrific stories of Catholic intimidation tactics He attributed one story to the *Kerry Post* which described the public excommunication of a Catholic woman who had allowed her children to attend a school in which the Bible was read Nangle wrote,

The ceremony was made as imposing as possible - the priest came upon the altar dressed in black, and after reading a list of curses which were truly terrifying, and praying that they might all fall upon the devoted woman - the candles were extinguished - the bell was rung and the book was closed, and the soul of the unfortunate creature consigned to the flames of hell for ever, at least in the opinion of the simple congregation All the congregation, on pain of coming under the same curse, were forbidden to speak to her, which they have strictly adhered to <sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid , 77, 78

<sup>70</sup> Edward Nangle, *The Achill Missionary Herald and Western Witness*, Title page of Vol I, II, III from July 1837 - December 1840

<sup>71</sup> Edward Nangle, *The Achill Missionary Herald, and Western Witness*, 31 July 1837 8

This story was written in such a way to cause the readers to empathise with the ostracised woman and to send funds to help her in her plight

In autumn of 1845 after the news of the widespread blight had come to be realised, very little changed in the format or the articles in the *Herald*. There were no headlines announcing the arrival of the potato blight, nor were any of the letters and articles that denounced Catholicism set aside for a time. Instead, the 26 November 1845 issue simply decreed the following judgement on the potato rot

Our readers cannot fail to have observed the engrossing attention which agriculture has engaged for some years. And what with subsoiling and thorough draining, and the application of bone dust and guano, Ireland was to have been rendered so productive as to maintain four times the number of its present population, but in all these speculations, God, and our need of His blessing to render the best means effective, were omitted. What a practical rebuke has God given to this unhallowed boasting in the rot which he has put into that part of agricultural produce which constitutes the staple food of the population of this country.”<sup>72</sup>

Most of the November issue is devoted to tracking the Second Reformation in Germany, France, and Switzerland. The same disregard for the blight is given in the December 1845 issue, but in 1846 it is mentioned a minimum of six times. The causes, moral and otherwise, and the duties arising from the destruction of the potato crop are described. Nangle’s summary of the potato blight and the ensuing famine is that it was a method of providential interference to rid Ireland’s people of idolatry. One of the final references to the Irish Famine that is included in Nangle’s publication is an allegory that is called “A Family Starved by an Unnatural Step-Mother.” This literary device is employed by Nangle to accuse Catholicism of inflicting famine upon her people.

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<sup>72</sup> Edward Nangle, *The Achill Missionary Herald, and Western Witness*, 26 Nov 1845  
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A large family, to whom a most tender father had bequeathed immense riches, fell into the hands of a designing woman, whose vile deeds are too detestable to admit a full exposure. The following well authenticated facts, however, declare sufficiently her guilty conduct: having laid hold of the will she concealed it from the children and kept them in darkness and poverty, while she dressed herself in purple and scarlet, and lived in such comfort that her strength became gigantic. The wretched children were constantly found weeping, the more bitterly because they had heard how great was their father's love, and to what riches they were entitled by his will.<sup>73</sup>

The story continues, but in the interpretation of the allegory, it can be assumed that the will represents the Bible and the woman represents a sectarian stereotype of the Catholic church as the whore of Babylon, concealing the Bible and living the comfort of her enormous and beautiful churches.

In turning away from what was written in *The Achill Missionary Herald*, and *Western Witness* and looking at the actual events of the famine, it is clear that Edward Nangle did keep many people alive that would have most likely perished without his intervention. However, he accomplished this at the expense of their cultural, religious, and communal identities. According to Irene Whelan, "In the spring of 1847, Nangle reported that the colony was giving employment to 2,192 labourers and feeding 600 children a day in schools."<sup>74</sup> Yet in order to receive this aid he coerced many Catholics into changing their faith and identity. The relief that he awarded was tainted by his own agenda of proselytism.

<sup>73</sup> Edward Nangle, *The Achill Missionary Herald*, and *Western Witness*, 27 Jan 1847. 1. The original newspaper printed the phrase "too detestable to admit of a full exposure." The word 'of' has been dropped for the purpose of clarity.

<sup>74</sup> Irene Whelan, "Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission 1834 - 1852," *A Various Country*, 128. As noted from Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle: The Apostle of Achill, A Memoir & a History* (London, 1884) 161.

The acts of souperism were not isolated to Achill. In Dromkeen, County Tipperary, the Bishop of Cashel confirmed a church full of converts.

The converts, it appeared, had shown up for the occasion as they had been promised new clothing in return. They received the clothing and went through with the ceremony as agreed. The following Sunday, however, they appeared at Mass at the Catholic chapels situated nearby (sporting the new clothes, naturally), and publicly claimed that hunger and cold was what made them engage in the fraud.<sup>75</sup>

The reverend that assembled the crowd tried to get the clothes back, but the people refused. One boy in Kenmare did not fare so well. A "Bible-reader stripped a boy called Jones of the clothes he had received because he ceased to frequent the Bible school."<sup>76</sup> Just as the famine was coming to a close, Protestant missionaries believed that they were beginning to achieve their goals. The conversion campaign announced in 1851 that 35,000 Catholics had converted to Protestantism. If questioned why so many had done so in such a short time, it was declared that the famine was the catalyst that broke the bonds with the priest and exposed the errors of Rome.<sup>77</sup> Yet the victory that the senders felt was short lived. For example, the end results of the efforts on Achill Island are reflective of the rest of the souperism activity. "Out of a total of 6,000 inhabitants on the island, only ninety-two persons had converted in the nine years of the colony's existence."<sup>78</sup>

As seen, Nangle required the people of Achill to decide to forsake their cultural and religious identities in order to receive aid to survive. A review of the statistical data proves that the decrease in population in Achill from 1841 to 1851 was not as severe as the rest of

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<sup>75</sup> Irene Whelan, "The Stigma of Souperism," *The Great Irish Famine*, 151.

<sup>76</sup> Donal Kerr, 'A Nation of Beggars'?, 213.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 211; See also Irene Whelan, "The Stigma of Souperism," *The Great Irish Famine*, 146.

<sup>78</sup> Irene Whelan, "Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission 1834 - 1852," 'A Various Country', 126.

Ireland and much less severe than the rest of County Mayo. County Mayo lost 29.4% of her population in those ten years and the average loss for Ireland was 21.7%. The loss of 16.8% of the Achill's population compares favourably with the other two figures.<sup>79</sup>

However, the method of survival on Achill involved a severe social cost. *The Tablet* of June 1847 accused Edward Nangle and implied that his relief violated human rights. The paper printed, “no one gets anything whatever that does not go to the Protestant school and conform to the Protestant formula. In short, it is given at the Protestant clergyman's discretion to starve poor Catholics into Protestantism or, failing that, to let them starve.”<sup>80</sup> It was crucial for the church to play a role in famine relief, but disgraceful for many to take advantage of suffering and dangle the “carrot” of relief for the exchange of religious pledges.

Whatever success the Mission did experience was not to be permanent. In 1886, Reverend William Fitzpatrick wrote a pamphlet for the express purpose of trying to raise money in order to continue the work in Achill. Fitzpatrick compares the glorious scenes that he witnessed in 1855 when he visited the Mission to the state of near financial ruin in which it found itself in 1886. The Reverend appealed for donations because, “It will be therefore necessary if no funds from the Estate can be realised, to dismiss all the Agents, Clerical and lay, from employment, close the Schools, and abandon the mission, unless funds are specially contributed to avert so terrible a disaster to that part of Ireland.”<sup>81</sup> As

<sup>79</sup> Fiona McGrath, *Emigration and Landscape*, 3

<sup>80</sup> Irene Whelan, “Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission 1834 - 1852,” *A Various Country*, 129. As noted from Henry Seddall, *Edward Nangle: The Apostle of Achill, A Memoir and a History* (London, 1884) 143-144.

<sup>81</sup> Reverend William Fitzpatrick, *Achill As It Is, Compared with What It Was* (Dublin: George Herbert, 1886) 44.

1886 was the last year of activities taking place in the Mission, it can be assumed that sufficient funds were not donated to keep the Mission from closing<sup>82</sup>

One possible reason for Nangle's failure was the fact that his relief was not only given conditionally, it was also very poor and scanty. Asenath Nicholson spent the Christmas holidays in the Mission and was not pleased at all with what she saw there. As Theresa McDonald describes it, "Mrs. Nicholson castigated hypocrisy wherever she went, whether it was social or religious and Achill was no exception."<sup>83</sup> Nicholson recorded her disgust at the food allowance given to the school children, the pitiful daily wage of three to three and a half pence per day, and the damaged corn meal that was being distributed. She believed that the meal was dangerous to eat and explained that it was so poor that a "good American farmer would not give [it] to his swine."<sup>84</sup>

Nangle attempted to retaliate through discrediting Nicholson by warning the public about her and her behaviour, which he felt was incredibly inappropriate. Although Nangle does not mention her by name, it has been assumed by such scholars as Margaret Kelleher in *The Feminization of the Famine* that he was speaking of Asenath Nicholson when he wrote in the *Herald*,

She lodges with the peasantry, and alleges that her object is to become acquainted with Irish character, she states that she has come from America for this purpose. This stranger is evidently a person of some talent and education, and although the singular course which she pursues is utterly at variance with the modesty and retiredness to which the Bible gives a prominent place in its delineation of a virtuous female, she professes to have no ordinary regard for that holy book. It appears to us that the principal object of this woman's mission is to create a spirit of discontent among the lower orders, and to dispose them to regard their superiors as so

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<sup>82</sup> Theresa McDonald, *Achill Island*, Chapter 14

<sup>83</sup> Theresa McDonald, *Achill 5000 BC to 1900 AD, Archaeology, History, Folklore* (Dooagh I A S Publications, 1992) 80

<sup>84</sup> Asenath Nicholson, *Lights and Shades of Ireland*, 313, 314

many unfeeling oppressors. There is nothing either in her conduct or conversation to justify the supposition of insanity, and we strongly suspect that she is the emissary of some democratic and revolutionary society<sup>85</sup>

Even though Nicholson did not approve of the methods of Edward Nangle, it is important to note here that not all persons involved in the Mission colony were abusive or haughty with the money and resources that they had. “It is quite clear from the evidence of contemporaries that ordinary people were capable of differentiating between genuinely charitable evangelical Christians and the bitterness of sectarian prejudice. The career of Dr. Neason Adams of Achill is a case in point. Adams was a medical doctor who had joined the Rev. Nangle’s colony soon after its foundation and spent his whole life ministering to the health needs of the local people, for which he was held in great esteem locally.”<sup>86</sup> Dr. Adams “left a profitable Dublin practice in 1834 and spent the remainder of his life in attending the sick of the whole island, and furnishing medicine without fee or reward. [and] whose benevolence and real charity secured the affections, as well as the respect of the whole Catholic population of the island.”<sup>87</sup> It was possible to provide relief without divesting the suffering of their cultural identities. Dr. Adams, nicknamed the Saint Luke of Achill, provides an example of such relief. Neason Adams was a friend of Nangle, but unlike the Reverend, he gave relief without asking for proclamations of conversion. “It could be said that Dr. Adams’ brand of Protestantism, liberally spread with Christian charity, ameliorated the more strident aspects of Edward Nangle’s evangelism.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Edward Nangle, *The Achill Missionary Herald, and Western Witness*, 25 June 1845. 65  
Margaret Kelleher, *The Feminization of the Famine*, 75-76

<sup>86</sup> Irene Whelan, “The Stigma of Soupensism,” *The Great Irish Famine*, 152

<sup>87</sup> Irene Whelan, “Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission 1834 - 1852,” ‘*A Various Country*’, 131. As cited in James Johnson M.D., *A Tour in Ireland with Meditations and Reflections* (London, 1844) 239

<sup>88</sup> Theresa McDonald, *Achill Island*, 137



Not only did Adams minister to the sick in his role as doctor, he also took on the role of Treasurer of the Local Relief Committee. Some Christians offered honest charity to the receivers and gave relief regardless of religious affiliation. According to a memory about the famine,

Mr John Leyden Nevelle Baggot, a Protestant, built a school on the Leerow Road beside Ballymoe in which soup was supplied and given to the children regardless of religion. This school was known as a 'Soup School'. There is no record of John N L Baggot interfering with the religion of any child or their parents.<sup>89</sup>

Interestingly enough, the timing of cessation of converts to Protestantism coincides with the rejuvenation of successful potato crops. By 1855, it was clear that the 'Second Reformation' would not be a success in the region of Connaught. The Irish Protestant parsons knew the Irish peasantry more intimately than the English who were funding the proselytising campaign. Disregarding the exceptions of outright proselytising parsons like Edward Nangle, Desmond Bowen has assessed that most clergy did not support soupism as a means of evangelism. "They well understood that to keep alive, an Irish family might be forced to 'take the soup' of the proselytizers."<sup>90</sup> Therefore, from a standard of interpersonal communication, the relief efforts that had the greatest level of value for the personal identities of the Irish people were those that were given to the receivers without any exchange of religious allegiance involved. The Quakers, might be the exemplary benefactors at this level.

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<sup>89</sup> Cathal Poirteir, *Seanchas faoin Drochshaol i dtimpeallacht Cho Ros Comain*, "Douglas Hyde Conference Proceedings", 50

<sup>90</sup> Desmond Bowen, *Souperism: Myth or Reality?*, 144

## **SECTION 6.4 – INDIVIDUAL COMMUNICATORS**

Throughout this thesis, the beleaguered Irish individual in need of sustenance has often been named as the sender of a message and a member of the British administration has often been designated as the receiver of a message. This scenario did occur often and has much validity, yet at the same time it must be remembered that the administrators also returned messages, thereby transforming themselves into senders. This process caused the Irish individuals to take on the role of receiver. Every communicator has faculties for both roles. The following individuals have acted as both senders and receivers, and, a final perusal of their respective roles in the famine will bring this chapter to its conclusion.

### **SECTION 6.4.1 – SIR JAMES DOMBRIN**

The Inspector General of the Coast Guard, Sir James Dombrain, was one prominent official who registered the full impact of the message that the people were starving. The message that he attempted to send in response was the attempt to supply gratuitous meal to meet basic needs. For example, it seems that the most scandalous of his brazen acts against the agenda of the British administration occurred in the fall of 1846 when he distributed 11,663 pounds of free Indian meal in Clifden in order to keep people from dying. For this bold action, “he is rebuked by the Treasury. He had no authority, he is informed, to give meal away free. Instead, he should have called on the leading people in each distressed district to form a relief committee and raise a fund by private subscription, which might be increased by a government donation.”<sup>91</sup> Sir James seems to have gone in and out of favour with his superiors throughout his career. From the available editions of

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<sup>91</sup> Brendan O Cathaoir, “Famine Diary,” *The Irish Times*, (2 November 1996) 4. Dated from 28 October 1846. Amount of meal distributed also quoted in this source.

the Trinity College holdings of the British Imperial Calendar, it is clear that Dombrain was Inspector General of the Coast Guard from at least 1836 on through the famine. The 1836, 1838, and 1839 volumes record the following

DUBLIN INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF THE COAST GUARD<sup>92</sup>

Inspector-General, James Dombrain, esq

Assistant ditto, Captain W Neame, RN

First Clerk, G Burniston, esq

Second Clerk, C M Primet, esq (Spelled Pernet in the 1836 edition)

In the 1842 and 1843 editions, the Inspector-General was still listed as James Dombrain, esq. By 1845, the first year of the famine, he was listed as Sir James Dombrain, KB. He received his knighthood in the interim of 1843 and 1845. In 1850, this branch of the Coast Guard was dissolved. Up until that point, the Coast Guard played a key role in the administration of famine relief but was not authorised to give meal away for free. The Coast Guard was to establish a 'sub-depot' in any location where local relief committee efforts were inadequate. The need for their involvement was "much greater than officials had anticipated. the Coast Guard opened as many as seventy-six sub-depots along the south and west coasts."<sup>93</sup> Sir James Dombrain, as head of the coast guard and a member of the Relief Commission, was in a peculiar administrative position. His desire was to save the people that he saw suffering all along the west coast at any expense, but his job on the commission was to save the people with as little expense as possible. In the

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<sup>92</sup> *British Imperial Calendar*, 1835-1850 45

National Archives folder RLFC 3/1/450 - 3/1/475, Sir James Dombrain received 18 out of the 26 letters. All 18 of the letters were dated between 30 January 1846 and 3 February 1846. This number did seem high upon review of the surrounding folders, but it still gives an idea of Dombrain's importance in the midst of the famine. If not addressed to Sir James, the majority of the other letters were addressed to Captain J P Kennedy, Secretary to the Relief Commission or, another title used was Secretary, Scarcity Commission, Dublin Castle. Letters to Sir James were in regard to the present situation of the potato crop in the area being reviewed.

While working directly with the people through the Coast Guard, Dombrain was liberal and creative with his relief strategies. One possible explanation for his generosity was his close proximity to the people on the verge of starvation. The local relief committees, who were also in physical contact with the people, reinforce this argument by their allocation of free food as well. This group of individuals did as much as possible to ward off the dehumanisation process of government bureaucracy and treat the starving hordes as people, instead of a political problem. We find that at this stage of relief, they "sometimes turned a blind eye to official instructions and handed out grain so utterly distasteful did they find the discharge of the duties in the face of such a human degradation"<sup>94</sup>. The internal struggle that the local relief workers faced was tremendous. A volunteer in Belmullet in May 1847 laments his plight in this way,

I would greatly prefer being a donor to being a distributor of relief. It is much easier for a man to put his hand into his purse, than to labour from morning to night in filling out strabout to crowds of half-clad, hungry

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<sup>93</sup> James Donnelly, "Famine and Government Response, 1845-6," *A New History of Ireland, V*, 279. T P O'Neill, "The Organisation and Administration of Relief, 1845 - 1852," *The Great Famine*, 216.

<sup>94</sup> Kenneth McNally, *Achill* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1973) 82.

people sinking with weakness and fever Between today and yesterday, I saw the corpses of a girl, a man and an old woman who died of hunger I saw thousands today of the most miserable people I have ever seen It is difficult for any but an eye-witness to form a correct idea of the position of the handful of persons in this miserable country<sup>95</sup>

From an emotional viewpoint, this volunteer is correct It is far less emotionally taxing to reach into a purse or wallet and give monetary relief However, the volunteer is also correct in that unless one was an eyewitness to the suffering, a vivid image of the starving people could not be obtained So despite the fact that it may very well be *easier* to give money, many people *did not want* to give any more money because they believed that it was someone else's problem

Sir James Dombrain, as the receiver of a plea for food to sustain life, chose to make the situation his problem However, he then had to become a sender of messages to the British administration after those in the treasury rebuked him It appears that most of the surviving letters written by him were written for the purpose of explaining his actions or defending his position On 22 September 1846, Routh forwards a letter to Trevelyan from Dombrain and writes, "I have been requested by Sir James Dombrain to lay before you the annexed further explanation in regard to the gratuitous issue of meal at Clifden under his authority"<sup>96</sup> Sir James defends his actions in the letter by writing,

I beg to state that at the station (the Killeries) where the first application was made to me, there was not a person within many miles who could have contributed one shilling, and when the chief boatman pointed out to me the wretched hovels in which he stated these people were actually dying for want of food, I considered the case one of pressing emergency, and could not resist the appeal made to my feelings to order some meal<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Cited in T P O'Neill, "The Organisation and Administration of Relief, 1845 - 1852," *The Great Famine*, 243

<sup>96</sup> Routh to Trevelyan, 22 September 1846, *British Parliamentary Papers Famine Relief in Ireland, Vol 1, Commissariat Series*, 507

<sup>97</sup> Dombrain to Routh, 18 September 1846, *Ibid*

Dombrain further informs Routh and Trevelyan that,

you will, I am sure, do me the justice to state, I neither sought for myself, nor those under my orders, anything more than the approbation of my superiors, and feeling conscious that I earned it, I cannot but feel deeply mortified and grieved at the censure their Lordships have passed upon me, for an act which I considered at the time to be one of pressing emergency<sup>98</sup>

Sir James felt compelled to follow his conscience and meet the needs of the people with whom he was face to face, and at the same time attempt to keep his superiors placated

This duality has a bearing on the argument that response to the needs of the people was in direct correlation to proximity, and it is also a reminder of the difficulty in passing messages through the channels of the relief network. When Dombrain acted outside of the legal chain of command, he was rebuked.

Before this gratuitous distribution of grain, Dombrain's reputation was already in question by Routh. In an eight-page letter Dombrain defends his reputation against Routh's allegations. For a student of communications, it is not too difficult to detect a great deal of his emotional state in the programming (encoding) of the message, and in his writing style and letter structure. Confined to handwriting as he was, he had to edit his letter as he wrote. Notice in the next two sections of his letter the portions that he added as important after thoughts.

I have been induced to make this observation from reading a Letter of Sir R. Routh to Capt. Neame dated the 16th Inst, in which he infers that I have been led away or induced to believe the distress is greater than it really is, or

it is his opinion that rather than ^ it is merely an Annual distress to which the Coast population of

he states

Donegal & Mayo ^ are subject to, and not distress arising from the failure of

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid

the Potato Crop of last Year”

Dombrain felt compelled to clarify that these were Routh’s opinions and not fact Sir

James defends his own expertise in judging the true situation by writing,

I feel that I may lay claim to some knowledge of the state of the Coast  
population by Annual Inspections of the Coast Guard force on the Coast of  
for nearly 30 years  
Ireland ^ giving me facilities in that respect which probably no other Person  
possesses in an equal degree<sup>99</sup>

Dombrain was not at liberty to directly say that he was more qualified than Routh, but his additions and coding style got his point across This man acted as both a sender and a receiver of messages From the standards that have been set forth in this thesis regarding efficient famine communication, Sir James Dombrain is arguably one of the best individual communicators that lived during the famine decade

#### **SECTION 6 4 2 – SIR CHARLES TREVELYAN**

In contrast with Dombrain, Sir Charles Trevelyan has been depicted in nationalist popular memory as the ‘supreme famine villain’ Trevelyan held tightly to the purse strings of the treasury in the belief that his actions were in the long-term best interests for Ireland When he received the message that people were starving, he sent a response of non-intervention to encourage economic and social regeneration

In a letter marked “Private and Confidential,” Lord Bessborough in his position of Lord Lieutenant wrote to Lord Monteagle on 30 September 1846 regarding the impending danger to Ireland, “ as you are well acquainted with Mr Trevelyan I wish you could

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<sup>99</sup> Dombrain to Routh, 21 June 1846, RLFC 3/1/3474, NA

open his eyes a little as to the state of this country and the danger that there is at this moment in attempting to apply the strict principles of political economy”<sup>101</sup> Monteagle understood and wrote back to Bessborough, “I shall write in the strongest manner both to Trevelyan and to his masters in the spirit you suggest. It is childish not to be prepared to act with vigor and resolution in the exigency in which we are placed. I am both an Economist and Treasury man but after what I have seen and know, the Government must be prepared to face much responsibility if they wish to keep society together”<sup>102</sup> Both of these letters were written confidentially by influential men in an attempt to fight against the famine policies.

On the same day that Monteagle replied to Bessborough, he attempted to drive home the facts of the emergency to Trevelyan. Monteagle even incorporates what appears to be an uncharacteristic argument by Nassau Senior. He writes to Trevelyan, “I doubt very much whether the magnitude of the existing calamity, and its danger is fully known or appreciated in Downing Street. . . as Senior said in a letter which I laid before Peel last year this scarcity must be considered as the invasion of a foreign enemy which all are called on to aid in resisting”<sup>103</sup> This forcefulness of thought from Monteagle and the potent and surprising analogy by Senior reveal that even the most unlikely figures privately realised that the Irish Famine was a massive human tragedy.

Trevelyan’s response to Monteagle’s plea requires more interpretation as it is clouded with seeming contradictions. The primary reaction of Trevelyan to the

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid

<sup>101</sup> Lord Bessborough to Lord Monteagle, 30 September 1846, Ms 13,396 (2), Monteagle Papers, NLI

<sup>102</sup> Monteagle to Lord Bessborough, 1 October 1846, Ms 13,396 (8), Monteagle Papers, NLI



communication expressed by Monteaale is to implore, “I must beg of you to dismiss all doubt from your mind of the magnitude of the existing calamity and its danger not being fully known and appreciated in Downing Street ”<sup>104</sup> It seems that Trevelyan was attempting to soothe Monteaale’s fears that the government would not properly respond to the situation He wrote, “The Government Establishments are strained to the utmost to alleviate this great calamity and avert this danger, as far as it is in the power of Government to do so, and in the whole course of my public service I never witnessed such entire self-devotion and such hearty and cordial co-operation on the part of Officers as I have on this occasion ”<sup>105</sup> From these words, the hypothesis is substantiated that administrators were diligent and efficient and not fearful to name the blight as a *great calamity* However, the contradiction arises in the phrase, ‘as far as it is in the power of Government to do so ’ Hidden in these words are all of the influencing factors that weighed upon the administrators and in particular the Relief Commissioners, regarding what exactly was in the power of the government and what was not On 8 March 1846, Trevelyan was not afraid to say that he wanted free grants bestowed “in order to avoid the calamity of a starving people ”<sup>106</sup> Yet when a starving people began to stare Trevelyan in the face, he turned a blind eye to their destitution and declared that the government efforts of 1846 and 1847 had been a complete success In *The Irish Crisis*, written in 1848 well before the famine was over, Trevelyan passed a verdict that seems incongruous to the modern reader His conclusion was thus,

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<sup>103</sup> Monteaale to Trevelyan, 1 October 1846, Ms 13,396 (9), Monteaale Papers, NLI

<sup>104</sup> Trevelyan to Monteaale, 9 October 1846, Ms 13,397 (1), Monteaale Papers, NLI

<sup>105</sup> Ibid

<sup>106</sup> Charles Trevelyan, 8 March 1846 Ms 7460, Larcom Papers, NLI

The famine was stayed. The ‘affecting and heart-rending crowds of destitutes’ (quoted from Count Strzelecki’s report to the British Relief Association), disappeared from the streets, the cadaverous, hunger-stricken countenances of the people gave place to looks of health, deaths from starvation ceased, and cattle-stealing, plundering provisions, and other crimes prompted by want of food, were diminished by half in the course of a single month.<sup>107</sup>

It is possible that these crowds were disappearing from the streets, yet they were disappearing because of death or emigration. Trevelyan seems to be in ignorant bliss over the high cost of the changes that he was seeing around him.

His decided ignorance regarding the costs of the changes continues throughout the course of the book. In each of its twelve chapters, he explains the measures taken by the government and by voluntary workers and he heralds each as a complete success. He explains his overall purpose in writing *The Irish Crisis* by writing, “we think that we may render some service to the public by attempting thus early to review, with the calm temper of a future generation, the history of the great Irish famine [sic] of 1847. Unless we are much deceived, posterity will trace up to that famine the commencement of a salutary revolution in the habits of a nation long singularly unfortunate.”<sup>108</sup> It is clear that Trevelyan believed with his entire heart that what he was writing was true, but it is equally clear that he was in fact ‘much deceived’. The ‘modernisation’ of the Irish countryside was achieved at a calamitous cost to the Irish people. Trevelyan, however, exemplifies the complexity of the surviving record of famine senders and receivers. This man described by many as the villain, believed himself to be the hero.

<sup>107</sup> Charles Trevelyan, *The Irish Crisis*, 65

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 1

### SECTION 6.4.3 – EDWARD NANGLE

Reverend Nangle has already been mentioned as the leader of the Achill Mission, but, in his role as a sender and a receiver, he also believed himself to be a hero much like Trevelyan

Edward Nangle and his followers saw themselves as pioneers in a land of darkness, purveyors of the true faith to a native population lost in superstition and plagued by poverty and underdevelopment <sup>109</sup>

When Nangle received the message that the people were hungry, he offered them food, clothing, and education on the condition that they abandoned their Catholic culture and adopted the faith and culture of the Protestant colony. He sent a very qualified message of response, but it must be recognised that he did not ignore the message of starvation. He took an active role as sender and receiver with the Irish people, the readers of the *Achill Herald*, and political figures such as Lord Monteagle.

The controversy that surrounds the activities and the methods of Nangle's proselytism is not a new debate, nor is it fought only on religious fronts. There seems to have been much criticism of the Mission even in the political arena. On 25 June 1845, Nangle wrote to Lord Monteagle in regards to an episode that he (Monteagle) had related to the House of Lords. Allegedly, in the middle of the celebration of mass, "the Protestant Missionaries interrupted the service by holding up what they called a consecrated wafer and asking the people if that was their god?" The Roman Catholics then allegedly "under the influence of excited feeling rushed upon the Missionaries and

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<sup>109</sup> Irene Whelan, "Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission 1834 - 1852," *A Various Country*, 113

would probably have destroyed them had not the Roman Catholic Priest interfered to save them”<sup>110</sup>

Nangle was outraged by this story and denied it. Although he recognised that his name was never mentioned, he asked Monteaule, “Suppose that I were to publish a defamatory story against a person designated as the Chancellor of the Exchequer under the Whig administration would not your Lordship be fully justified in considering the slander as directed against yourself, although your Lordship’s name might not once appear in the libel?”<sup>111</sup> Monteaule sent a response in which he admitted that the incident to which he had referred was not on Achill Island, but on Clare Island. Yet instead of offering an apology, he drew attention instead to one of the inflammatory woodcuts printed in *The Achill Missionary Herald, and Western Witness*, calling it “a graphic indecency and impropriety”<sup>112</sup>. Nangle expressed his displeasure, writing, “I regret that your Lordship has not frankly admitted your mistake”<sup>113</sup> and he defended the representation in the woodcut. Nangle argued that the woodcut depicting a consecrated wafer in the paws of a mouse just before he begins to nibble it disproves the theory of transubstantiation and is therefore not inflammatory, but instructive. He cited the Roman Missal written in Antwerp in 1594 that instructs that if the consecrated wafer should be taken by a mouse, then if it can be caught it should be killed and burnt, spreading the ashes in a holy place or under the altar. Employing the same dogmatic hair-splitting as his adversaries, Nangle explained to the readers of the *Herald* that if transubstantiation were correct, then there would be hundreds of tiny Christs in the stomach of the mouse because a mouse nibbles his food

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<sup>110</sup> Nangle to Monteaule, 25 June 1845, Ms 13,395 (3), Monteaule Papers, NLI

<sup>111</sup> Ibid

<sup>112</sup> Nangle to Monteaule, 1 July 1845, Ms 13,395 (3), Monteaule Papers, NLI

Because this is not possible, Nangle believed that transubstantiation was proved false and the woodcut is defended <sup>114</sup> Both Nangle and Monteagle were avid correspondents, but it can be argued that very little, if any, good was produced for the people by this series of correspondence

Edward Nangle did not achieve success through his tainted efforts on the island of Achill. However, he took his role as a communication conduit very seriously and in his own way cared very deeply for the people of the island. Irene Whelan captures the psychological attachment that this man had for his life's work:

Nangle may be remembered in local folklore for his association with the hated soupism, but the depth of his sincerity is also given credence in the story told about his final gesture when taking leave of Achill for the last time – how he stopped at the brow of a hill, turned his gaze towards Slievemore and his beloved colony, and wept <sup>115</sup>

#### SECTION 6 4 4 – TONY BLAIR

The final communicator to be mentioned here – in a somewhat incongruous setting, admittedly – is the present Prime Minister of Great Britain, Mr. Tony Blair. Obviously this British administrator cannot be held directly responsible for British policy during the famine years, but he has chosen to make a bold step and publicly send a message of rebuke against the actions of the famine administrators. Blair exposed the general failure of the men who were in power during the famine years. His striking words are probably the closest that a British Prime Minister will ever come to making an apology to the Irish.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. Also Nangle, *The Achill Missionary Herald, and Western Witness*, 20 Oct 1837 30. And the backside of the Title page for Vol IV, V, VI from January 1841 to December 1843.

people, therefore they should not be taken lightly. He acknowledged that the British administrators were to blame through their inaction. He said,

Those who governed in London at the time failed their people through standing by while a crop failure turned into a massive human tragedy. We must not forget such a dreadful event. It is also right that we should pay tribute to the ways in which the Irish people have triumphed in the face of this catastrophe.<sup>116</sup>

Not only did Blair condemn his own countrymen, but he praised the Irish for their triumph in the midst of tragedy. He also did not minimise the famine by referring to it as an ‘unfortunate event’ or a ‘sad time’. Instead, he named the Great Irish Famine as the *massive human tragedy* that it was. Though nothing can change the events of the famine, powerful words such as these communicate a desire for reconciliation and for the healing of cultural memory. Mr. Tony Blair included himself among the important famine communicators, who, however belatedly, has sought to make amends for his predecessors in office.

## SECTION 6.5 – CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

Ideological struggle occurs at the level of discourse and each of the communicators named or described in this chapter entered into some level of a communicative battle. In the case of the Irish Famine, even the battle of words was actually a case of life or death, country or emigration. This chapter has spelled out a few of these struggles by giving those involved in famine communication a voice and a name.

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<sup>115</sup> Irene Whelan, “Edward Nangle and the Achill Mission 1834 - 1852,” *A Various Country*, 134.

<sup>116</sup> Quoted by Rachel Donnelly, “Blair Admits Famine Policy Failure by British,” *The Irish Times, Online*, Internet (2 June 1997). 1. Full text of statement is supplied as Appendix F.

One method of supplying a voice and name to the famine victims is the review of oral tradition. Granted, human memories are an inaccurate source for some famine details, but they are an excellent foundation for creating an audible portrayal. The onset of the potato blight is remembered with horror. The stench of decaying potatoes and the black putrefied mass of what was once a life-giving substance remained in the memories of those who survived the famine. There were long waits in the bitter cold and desperate depression after being turned away without any provision. The people of Ireland feared the possibility of disease and starvation, and they remembered the dead who were green from eating grass or blue from disease. Various actions were taken by the Irish people. Some stole provisions to stay alive, others gave of their time or their resources to those who were worse off. Stories abound of supernatural blessings to those who gave, but many also sacrificed their own lives in the process of their selfless giving. Memories of death prevail when the voice of famine victims is raised. Mass graves, dead along the roadsides, people spending their last moments of life thrown in among the dead, and cabins burned with their dead inhabitants inside are just a few of the memories of death.

Even the excitement of new possibilities in a foreign land was tempered by the memories of the dead left behind, the fear of the unknown, and the loss of country and culture. Emigrants to Australia such as Isabella Wyly, Michael Normile, and Michael Hogan spoke of the joys and the challenges that faced them in their new lives. Conversely, those who remained in Ireland such as William and Eliza Dalton wrote of Ireland's post-famine recovery process, but lamented the great loss of her people. By seeking out the voice of the people who were most affected by the loss of the potato, the human element of the Great Irish Famine is heightened.

The struggle for life and culture continued for those who faced the circumstance of soupierism. The Protestant evangelicals sent the message that food, clothing, shelter, work, and education could be attained if the receiver chose to adopt the Protestant culture. This method of proselytism reached a climax during the famine when some Catholics ‘took the soup’ to remain alive. However, ‘converts’ such as these were easily lost when the potato crop regained its health.

Finally, four famine communicators played significant roles as senders, receivers, or both. Sir James Dombrain attempted to respond to the message of the starving people in a manner that would prevent death by starvation. When he supplied free meal, he was reprimanded by the administration and required to send messages to defend his actions. Sir Charles Trevelyan was one of the communicators who sent the reprimand to Dombrain. These two communicators had opposite reactions when they received the request for government intervention from the Irish individuals. Trevelyan anticipated that the occasion of the potato blight could be used to bring Ireland out of its state of poverty. He had little interest in preserving the lives of all of Ireland’s poor. One marked difference between Dombrain and Trevelyan was that the Inspector General of the Coast Guard walked among the starving spectres and the Permanent Secretary of the Treasury made famine decisions from the comfort of his London office. This fact does not account for all of their respective actions, but it is a key factor.

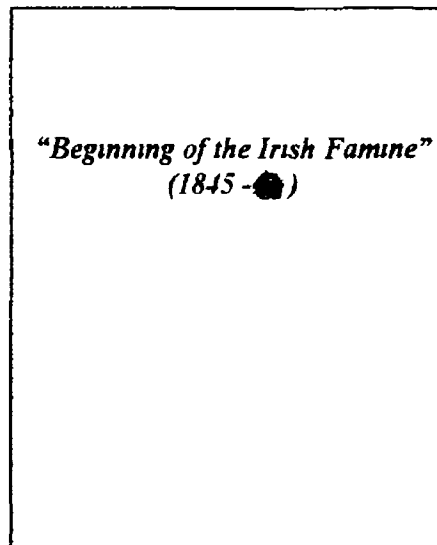
Edward Nangle did live and work among the Irish people of Achill Island, and, he did offer them provisions. But, assistance from Nangle came with a price. He used the opportunity of scarcity to speed his goals of converting the Catholics. He made no apology for his methods, but nor could he look back on his life as a success. The British



Prime Minister Tony Blair looks upon the Irish Famine as an occasion of failure on the part of those who were governing at the time. Through this public recognition, he has become the sender of an important message of reconciliation between the Irish and English nations. Every individual who sent or received messages regarding the occasion of the potato blight of 1845-1849 played a part in the struggles described in this chapter and in this dissertation.

**Chapter 7**  
**Conclusion**

***Cover Page to the Correspondence between  
Lord Monteagle and Sir Robert Peel<sup>1</sup>***



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<sup>1</sup> Cover page, Ms 13,400, Monteagle Papers, NLI

## **Chapter 7 Conclusion**

The cover page on the previous page was a most curious and telling find in the famine record. At least Lord Monteaale or his hired clerk had the wisdom to change their mistake when they had pronounced the famine over prematurely. It can be imagined that the year 1846 was originally written, but sometime in '47 or '48, Monteaale or a clerk thought, 'when is this going to end?' So he hastily scratched out the year. No one ever completed the title page by rewriting a final year.

This cover page visually serves the purpose of the conclusion. It causes the reader to reflect that the individuals living during the famine years had to live through each day's events as they occurred. They had to do the best possible job they were capable of doing without the benefit of hindsight and with the presence of multiple influencing factors. There is much in the famine record to impress. Thousands of letters received by the British administration in Ireland were handled with efficiency and organisation. Upon examining the multitude of indexes, abstracts, lists of duties to be performed, and other efficient clerical techniques used by the various governmental structures, one cannot help but admire the staff that carried out the details.

The archival record of the famine years also contains many items that reveal the sincerity with which the British administrators performed their duties. In an uncharacteristically humorous moment, Charles Trevelyan utilised satire to get his point across in a letter to Stephen Spring Rice. He explained how diligently he and his fellow civil servants had been working as a result of the distress in Ireland by writing, "The

extreme labour and anxiety attendant on the most difficult and responsible task which has ever fallen to my lot, might well make me and others who are toiling with me

Repealers ”<sup>2</sup> Yet he quickly returns to a less humorous tone and reveals what I believe are his deepest and sincerest beliefs about the relationship between Great Britain and Ireland Trevelyan wrote on the 2 September 1846

But I have no fear of these measures of Relief leading to any such deplorable result [Referring to the repeal of the Act of Union ] The poorest and most ignorant Irish Peasant must, I think, by this time have become sensible of the advantage to him of forming part of a powerful Community like that of the United Kingdom, the Establishments and pecuniary resources of which are at all times ready to be employed for his benefit <sup>3</sup>

If such resources existed, why did the Exchequer place the fiscal responsibility for remedial action at the local level? What material advantage passed to the Irish from the ‘pecuniary resources’ of the ‘powerful community’ of the United Kingdom? For despite his confidence in the sinews of empire, *a minimum of one million people died and a minimum of one million people were forced to emigrate because the potato crop failed* Why and how could this have occurred?

There are no easy answers to this question In a land of tremendous agricultural potential, millions were removed from the land when a single food source failed The wheat, the oats, the corn, and the livestock did not fail or perish when the potatoes did, but sustenance such as these were used as cash crops for rent and were largely out of reach for the subsistence level farmers Many scholars have therefore developed theories to answer the question why The oppression experienced by the lowest classes in Ireland was severe,

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Trevelyan to Stephen Spring Rice, 2 September 1846, Monteagle Papers, Ms 13,400, NLI

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

and, much like the caste system, the society in which an individual was born was most likely the society in which he or she would die. Students of history have created a large body of scholarly work that explain a great deal about the years of the famine.

This thesis approaches that wealth of information and the actual letters and documents written during the famine in order to glean knowledge about the workings of interpersonal communication. By intertwining human communication theory to a fixed segment of time, much has been learned about social behaviour and intercultural communication. It was discovered that even the best of intentions on the part of famine relief workers was not sufficient to make their systematic efforts at communication yield the desired actions. Individuals and groups became virtual prisoners of their own communicative cages. The messages of human suffering were encoded to the best abilities of the respective communicators, yet feedback from their intended receivers came in the form of pre-established political and economic morality that placed “British interests above humanitarian action.”<sup>4</sup> It is in this way that cultural hegemony crushed the communicative process, with disastrous consequences.

The principles of human communication provide explanations to the many past, present, and future debates regarding the famine. A discussion using the lexicon of communication studies explains why it was possible for Prime Minister Russell to say and actually believe “that the whole credit of the Treasury and means of the country are ready to be used as it is our bounden duty to use them, and will, whenever they can be usefully applied, be so disposed as to avert famine, and to maintain the people of Ireland.”<sup>5</sup> Much

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Gray, “British Public Opinion and the Great Irish Famine 1845-49,” *Douglas Hyde Conference Proceedings 1995* (Boyle: Roscommon Herald, 1996) 62.

<sup>5</sup> Lord John Russell, 17 August 1846, *Hansard*, LXXXVIII: 777-8.

like Charles Trevelyan, Russell said and believed that the efforts taken in Ireland were of lasting success. They kept six of the eight million people in Ireland alive and in the country and the loss of the other two million was considered an unfortunate step in the process towards Ireland becoming a more industrious portion of the United Kingdom. It may best be summarised that “it is necessary, then, to think of communication not so much as individuals functioning under their own autonomous power but rather as persons interacting through messages”<sup>6</sup>. Messages, encoded with cultural tendencies, inherent bigotry, emotional pleas, and other complexities, took on a sense of communication momentum and replaced communicative clarity. This momentum became too fast and powerful to save the lives of the unfortunate poor.

To provide a final conclusion and summary of this work, I offer the following framework. If the simple communicative structure of the famine is narrowed to its basic component parts, the Irish peasant is the sender, sending a message of physical need to the receiver, who is the British administration. By operational definition then, communicative clarity would be the proper decoding of the message in the form of relief that removed physical need. Politically and economically, there was little chance that the British administration would have responded in such a manner. In fact, one of the arguments of this thesis is that the Relief Commission was the point at which effective communication consistently failed. Following the analysis undertaken in this research, the seemingly contradictory evidence became more understandable. The commission was established to fulfil an obligation that the British administration had to the island to which it had been joined in the ‘forced matrimony’ of the Act of Union. Nominally, its purpose was to

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<sup>6</sup> David Mortenson, *Communication* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1972) 54

relieve the people of Ireland, but in all actuality, it was encouraged to act as an agent to bring about social change that was considered positive in the agenda of the United Kingdom

The roles that were played by the Relief Commissioners and other members of the British administration raise questions about the definition of 'morality'. In many famine circumstances, a traditional understanding of morality is difficult to apply. If morality is defined as defending the helpless or saving innocent human lives, then the administrators, the receivers of a message of starvation, failed. If, however, morality was best served by the maintenance and encouragement of progress, as was thought by the evangelical movement, then Ireland's interests were morally served. A 'moral' pronouncement is made virtually impossible by the changing, conflicting standards.

On some level, each chapter in this dissertation dealt with the question of morality. Investigation of the moral justification used in the communication patterns of the British administrators was a through line for each phase of research and analysis. Perhaps the best way to summarise the conclusions that can be drawn from the material presented in this thesis is to review the communicative situation first presented in the introductory chapter. The three leading actors: Sidney Osbourne – calculating political economist, his companion – giver of sympathy and charity, and the young girl – the suffering victim of hunger and poverty. Osbourne – an equivalent to Charles Trevelyan – attempted to 'congeal' his companion 'by using arguments against encouraging such bad habits' and he 'read fresh lectures on the evil of being led away from right principles,' but he admitted that in order to stand by the principles of political economy he had to be 'hardened' from

the sights like the ‘fleshless arms’<sup>7</sup> His companion – an equivalent to Sir James Dombrain – moved by the face of suffering, bent the rules of political economy and decoded the message from the famine victims more accurately than Osbourne by performing actions that met physical needs

Little is revealed about Osbourne’s companion, but it can be determined by his actions that he had a greater level of empathy with the Irish people than did Osbourne himself Empathy, affinity, and similarity enhanced communicative clarity, but the colonial dimension which cultural empathy implies inhibited it The more concern or care the receiver has for the sender, the greater the receiver will attempt to accurately decode the message from the sender and act upon that message Yet in the situation of the famine, the receiver was the coloniser and the sender was the colonised Therefore, in every exchange of communication during the famine, the needs, desires, or wants of the receiver were placed at a higher level of importance than the sender because hegemonic power rests with the coloniser, not the colonised

The greater that the fields of experience overlap between any two communicators or groups of communicators the greater chance they have of efficient communication The victims in danger of starving to death had very different fields of experience than those who were in a position to relieve their suffering There was very little communicative representation for speakers of Irish or participants in the Gaelic culture The voices of dissent such as John Mitchel or James Fintan Lalor were jailed to ensure silence Without a shared system of values, communicative clarity was greatly impaired The reality of the situation was that the Irish were a colonised people being required to

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<sup>7</sup> Sidney Osbourne, *Gleanings*, 79, 91-92



embrace the language, religion, and culture of their colonisers. The Relief Commission assisted as an agent of this transition.

Those who were sending a message of starvation sought to ensure that the message reached receivers who had greater cultural empathy with the lower Irish classes, were less rigid in their adherence to the ideologies of providentialism and political economy, or were in closer physical proximity. Effective circular communication had a higher degree of probability when the verbal universe of the receiver of famine messages was not in conflict with the observational universe of suffering.

For example, if more individuals felt the desire and ability to express ‘dissent’ against the strict principles imposed by political economy, there may have resulted relief that would have preserved those who died or left. Flexibility in political economy would have enhanced communicative clarity. When the Relief Commission received a request from Reverend M. Waldron for two tons of Indian corn to be delivered immediately, but with three months credit to pay for the delivery, the response was as follows:

This is quite impossible to advance funds to individuals, or make imports of Food on credit. If it is once commenced it would know no end.<sup>8</sup>

Yet the dire situation of the peasantry made those who were in contact with them aware of the need to look more to the principles of the older moral economy instead of the rigid and seemingly heartless political economy. The local relief committee in Cong resolved that the population of Cong “should be able to obtain it [food] at something of a reasonable rate and within their reach.”<sup>9</sup> A printed letter addressed “To all those who are above Want in

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<sup>8</sup> Response to Rev. M. Waldron from the Relief Commission. 12 September 1846, RLFC 3/2/21/48 (Mayo), NA.

<sup>9</sup> Cong Local Relief Committee to the Relief Commission, 24 November 1846, RLFC 3/2/21/48 (Mayo), NA.

this Time of Famine” was written by the rector of Castlebar, William Baker Stoney. Among other things, Stoney urges, “Let everyone do something. Go on then - procure a ton - or half - or a quarter of oat or Indian meal. Get an honest scale, with a baker’s bucket. Sell in small quantities, once, twice or three times a week. Be sure always to keep within the cost price, *never over it*”<sup>10</sup>. Yet at the same time, the head of the Commissariat Department was advocating a minimum of 10% additional mark-up to any sale of grain. When the moral and political economies were pitted against one another, the peasantry paid the price in more ways than one.

The local relief committees were working intimately with those who were most at risk of starvation, therefore they saw the flesh wasting from the bones and most likely touched their hands occasionally as they sold or distributed food. The words of the Kilkelly Local Relief Committee to the Relief Commission make it clear that the individuals at the local level were more intimately involved with the senders of the message for assistance. They requested the set up of a food depot in Kilkelly and wrote, “If you do not do so, at once, the name of a relief committee in Kilkelly will be a mockery”<sup>11</sup>. Proximity affected action.

A conclusion of this work is that the results of the Great Irish Famine of 1845 - 1852 cannot be blamed exclusively or unilaterally on a person or group of people. Instead, the blame rests heavily on the failed communication between the Irish individual, trying to make their needs known, and the British administration, meeting the perceived needs of the Irish with as little alteration of their own agenda as possible. This communication system,

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<sup>10</sup> Printed letter from William Baker Stoney, copy received by the Relief Commission on 2 November 1846, RLFC 3/2/21/79 (Mayo), NA.

however, served the interests of British Rule in Ireland. There were people giving the correct message to the administration if only they had wanted to hear it and act on it. Sir James Drombrain and Edward Twisleton have been used as examples of Relief Commissioners attempting to decode the messages of those requiring physical assistance with the type of accuracy that might have helped to alleviate the calamity. However, the administration allowed the noise of the many inhibitors to effective communication to destroy the clarity of the message. Communication failed and much was lost in the process.

This thesis is concluded with the last stanza of a poem written by Thomas Davis, who died in 1845, the first year of the blight. He would have been dismayed to live through an era during which Ireland's voice was so crushed. Yet today, over one hundred and fifty years after Black '47, her voice has a new resonance in the economic and cultural climate of the present day. Davis wrote,

May Ireland's voice be ever heard,  
Amid the world's applause!  
And never be her flag-staff stirred,  
But in an honest cause!  
May freedom be her very breath,  
Be justice ever dear,  
And never be ennobled death  
May son of Ireland fear!

So the Lord God will ever smile,  
With guardian grace upon our isle.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Kilkenny Local Relief Committee to the Relief Commission. 8 February 1847, RLFC 3/2/21/27 (Mayo), NA

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Davis, "Nationality," Reprinted in Seamus Deane, *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Vol II*, 53

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## **Appendices A – E**

**Statement of Mr Tony Blair  
Letter from Sir James Dombrain  
Two Letters from Richard Pennefather  
Instructions for Local Relief Committees and Sample Cover Letters**





10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON SW1A 2AA

THE PRIME MINISTER

I am glad to have this opportunity to join with you in commemorating all those who suffered and died during the Great Irish Famine.

The Famine was a defining event in the history of Ireland and of Britain. It has left deep scars. That one million people should have died in what was then part of the richest and most powerful nation in the world is something that still causes pain as we reflect on it today. Those who governed in London at the time failed their people through standing by while a crop failure turned into a massive human tragedy. We must not forget such a dreadful event.

It is also right that we should pay tribute to the ways in which the Irish people have triumphed in the face of this catastrophe. Britain in particular has benefited immeasurably from the skills and talents of Irish people, not only in areas such as music, the arts and the caring professions but across the whole spectrum of our political, economic and social life.

Let us therefore today not only remember those who died but also celebrate the resilience and courage of those Irish men and women who were able to forge another life outside Ireland, and the rich culture and vitality they brought with them. Britain, the US and many Commonwealth countries are richer for their presence.

31 May 1997



about 10 miles to the P.O. of Ballycastle or Ballyp.  
I found from the officers that great distress  
existed for want of food and from thence  
up to this place with the exception of the  
immediate neighbourhood of West Park there  
has been the same unvarying account. The evidence  
are too strong to be resisted and may be  
addressed under the following heads.

- 1<sup>st</sup> The extraordinary rapidity with which  
all the supplies sent in of Indian Corn  
there have been sold <sup>in</sup> and the small  
quantities ~~allowed to each applicant~~
- 2<sup>nd</sup> The great distance many have been  
known to travel to procure so small  
a quantity as half a stone in some cases

10 - 12 I even 14 Miles.

3<sup>rd</sup> The frequent appeals made to me by all  
Chapels to keep up these supplies.

4<sup>th</sup> My own personal expenses <sup>particulars</sup> and ~~examination~~  
<sup>as to</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> Stock of Food on hand among numbers  
who are not generally in the habit of buying  
many of which had not 5 days food left  
nor any <sup>prospect</sup> ~~means~~ of procuring any, unless  
supplies <sup>are</sup> sent in.

They sh. may be much distinctly  
understood that my enquiries have been  
directed to the distress existing from the  
failure of the Potatoe Crop of last year and  
that I have wholly omitted in my account  
those who are annually objects of charity. I feel  
that I may lay claim to some knowledge of

of the state of the Coast Population in Annual  
Inspections of the Coast Guard force on the  
Coast of Ireland, <sup>for nearly 30 years</sup> giving me facilities in  
this respect which probably no other  
Person possesses in an equal degree.  
I have been induced to make this observation  
from reading a letter of Sir R. R. R. to Sir J. L.  
Stewart dated the 16<sup>th</sup> Inst, in which he infers  
that I have been led away or induced to  
believe the discrepancy is greater than it really  
is, or rather that <sup>it is his opinion that</sup> it is merely an Annual  
discrepancy to which the Coast Population of  
Donegal & Mayo <sup>be it true</sup> are subject to, and not  
discrepancy arising from the failure of the  
Potato Crop <sup>last year</sup>

RWFC3/1/3474

~~They strongly to impress on the minds of the  
Comm. the necessity of keeping in view  
the fact that from the declaration made by  
the Govt. Government all parties look to them  
and them only for supplies of Food~~

I am fully impressed with  
the conviction that unless supplies are sent  
speedily and abundantly the next 5 or 6  
Weeks will be so many of intense suffering  
to the Poor, ~~which is indeed a~~  
~~contemplated~~ - I believe many will be without  
food or the means of procuring any,  
and I most urgently & strongly recommend  
the Comm. to consider any Works which

may have been decided upon within  
the space alluded to by witnesses  
particularly in the vicinity of Clifden  
and the Killenies where public works  
have been a gift <sup>for</sup> under the Act of 1841.

I further regret to state that  
the disease which affected the Potatoes of last  
year has already shown itself in the new  
crop. I am, therefore, at Mr. Blake's (Rory's)  
where a quantity was dug of his earliest potatoes  
and I send a small specimen both of the roots  
and leaves for the information of the Commission.  
The seed planted was some reserved from last  
year and was perfectly sound and good but there is  
a symptom of disease &c. &c. in the tubers.

The Brown Spot makes its appearance on the leaf  
the Tumor ceases to grow. The <sup>Crop</sup> ~~stems~~ from which ~~the~~  
were taken <sup>should</sup> ~~might~~ now to be quite fit for use but  
none could be found larger than the largest of  
those I saw and the Crop a young one a fortnight  
later but these likewise showed signs of the disease

On my arrival at this place  
I found Mr. Adamantides had arrived with  
meat on board and being aware of the absolute  
necessity of an immediate and abundant supply  
at Cheltenham I joined in a requisition to the C<sup>o</sup> of the  
M<sup>t</sup> to proceed to Cheltenham and land there all  
the Indian or Meat 500 sacks which he  
has on board and which he has obligingly  
consented to do and I submitted a letter he written  
to the C<sup>o</sup> in my Report requesting them to



approval of the Officer having done so. This supply  
altho' large will not I am confident last more  
than 1 Week.

I have the honour to be  
Sir

Your most obed<sup>t</sup> servant

W. Stanley Edge

Howe

Rehef Communisme

7/22/8

(Dublin Castle)  
7<sup>th</sup> February 1845

Adm

Sir,

In reply to your letter of the 6<sup>th</sup> instant, I have to state, that if you are desirous of seeing me, I shall be happy to see you on the day named, after 3 o'clock but must beg to inform you that the ~~both~~ parties to whom all representations should be made ~~communications made~~ respecting the means of alleviating the distress arising from the failure of the Potatoe crop, are the Commissioners appointed by Government to enquire into the same.

The Under Secretary can do no more than forward to them such statements as he may receive.

I am Sir

Your obedient Servant

Thos. Robt. Fleming  
Kingscourt

(Signed) Richard W. Carrifalk



# INSTRUCTIONS TO COMMITTEES

OF

## RELIEF DISTRICTS IN TOWNS.

---

*Extracted from Minutes of the Proceedings of the Commissioners  
appointed in reference to the apprehended Scarcity.*

---

THE Commission having had under their consideration the necessity of establishing Local Committees, properly organized in Towns where destitution is likely to prevail, through whose superintendence the approach and progress of distress in such localities may be watched, and the means of relief administered according to the instructions of Government

IT IS RESOLVED.

I. That the Mayor, or, where there is no Mayor and Aldermen the Chairman of the Town Commissioners of any Town in which it shall be established on good and sufficient grounds, that extreme distress is near at hand in consequence of the failure in the Potato Crop, be requested to convene a meeting composed of the following classes:—

Mayor and Aldermen.

The Town Commissioners, (in Towns where there is no Mayor and Aldermen )

Clergymen of all persuasions.

Chairman of any Poor Law Union which may include any part of the Town.

Poor Law Guardians of Electoral District or Districts  
Magistrates of Petty Sessions.

That this meeting should select from amongst themselves not more than 20 members, who, with the Resident Magistrate, (if any), the Coast Guard Officer (where available), and an officer of the Board of Works, should form the Local Relief Committee.

II. That each Committee should hold regular periodical meetings at a place or places to be fixed by them ; where all Committee business should be transacted , and that regular minutes should be kept of their proceedings in a book to

be supplied to them from this Commission, and that three members should be a quorum.

III. That it is evident, and is also in strict accordance with the views and instructions of the Government, that the owners of property and other rate-payers are the parties both legally and morally answerable for affording due relief to the destitute poor, and that the same parties are, from their local influence, and their knowledge of the situation and wants of the people in their neighbourhood, best able to furnish such relief without waste or misdirection of the means employed.

That the measures to be adopted by the Officers of Government are to be considered merely as auxiliary to those which it is the duty of the persons possessed of property in each neighbourhood to adopt

That the Local Committee should, therefore, put themselves in communication with such persons, and should solicit subscriptions from them proportioned to their means, and to the extent of distress in the locality to which they belong.

That where notwithstanding such subscriptions some assistance is likely to be required from the Government a list of the sums subscribed, together with a list of individuals from whom subscriptions might have been expected, should be confidentially brought under the notice of the Lord Lieutenant, who, after due consideration of the case, will determine on the sum to be contributed from the funds at his disposal in aid of the local subscriptions

In cases where there may arise a scarcity of food within a district, or the price of food may have been artificially raised, the Government will be prepared to transmit to the Local Committee, at cost price including the expense of carriage, a quantity of food corresponding to the amount of the subscriptions paid in for that purpose, and to place that food in the hands of the Local Committee for distribution, on their own responsibility, at cost price, or as wages of labour to destitute persons employed on local works, or when absolute destitution is united with inability to labour in gratuitous donations

IV That in cases wherein any assistance is afforded by Government, either in aid of local subscriptions, or otherwise, the following rules are to be invariably observed in the administration of relief —

1st.—A task of work shall be required from every person capable of giving it, who applies for relief

2nd.—The payments for the work performed shall be made in food, and shall in every case be limited to such a quantity of food as will be sufficient to support the workman and the helpless persons of his family

3rd.—If in any case it be impracticable to pay in food, the payments in money shall be limited to what is absolutely necessary for the above purpose.

4th.—Gratuitous relief shall be afforded only to those persons who are entirely incapable of giving a day's work, and who have no able-bodied relative on whom they are dependent, and in these cases only in which their reception in the Workhouse of the Union to which they belong, is, from want of room, impracticable, and, lastly,

5th.—The works in which destitute persons are employed shall be in prosecution of some public improvement, approved of by this Commission within or adjacent to the distressed locality, and shall be such as will be capable of being brought at once to a close when the circumstances of the people are improved

V —That the Committee should be prepared with plans or suggestions of small useful works of public improvement, for the employment of the destitute poor, in all cases where relief is given to the able-bodied

VI —That the Committee should divide the town into districts, and should obtain minute reports of the circumstances of each family from whom application for relief may be made that at their meetings certificates or tickets should be given to such only as are ascertained to be without means of providing food for their families that such certificates or tickets be the authority to the Superintendent of the Public Works for receiving the persons to whom they are granted, and that a register of all certificates or tickets granted by the Committee be preserved in a book to be supplied for that purpose by this Commission

VII —That the Secretary or person officiating as such. of the Committee, should take charge of the books, and other documents, and should conduct the correspondence with this Commission

VIII That Towns in which there is no Mayor and Aldermen, nor Town Commissioners, be considered as coming under the class of County Relief Districts

J P KENNEDY,

Secretary

Castle, Dublin

14th May 1840

Printed by J. G. & Co. at the Press of A. J. O'Connell, Dublin

*copy*

CASTLE, DUBLIN,

*P. Phil 10/16/6*

SIR,

By the direction of the RELIEF COMMISSION, I have the honor to transmit to you six copies of Instructions to Town Committees, with the object of explaining the plan and principle on which it is proposed to grant relief, and of promoting a cordial understanding in its administration between this COMMISSION and the Gentlemen of the Cities and Towns throughout Ireland.

The establishment of such Committees is most essential to the due administration of relief, for it is by their local knowledge that the reality and extent of the distress can be tested, that the most suitable description of employment can be provided, and the most judicious course pursued to obtain, according to their means, the contributions of the community as inseparable from those of the Government.

Arrangements are now in preparation to establish Central Depôts of Maize, from whence a supply, to be distributed on the principle of these Instructions, may be forwarded to the interior, and directions for the use of the Corn Meal are now circulating through the country

The COMMISSION look forward to the influence of your example in this great undertaking, and they rely on the co-operation of all classes to support it, and I am directed respectfully to suggest the propriety of your nominating at once a Relief Committee for the Town of *Lisburn* — in accordance with the principles contained in the accompanying instructions

I have the honor to be,

SIR,

Your very obedient Servant,

*Chairman of  
Seven Commissioners  
Lisburn*

*JHK*

Secretary

Copy

CASTLE, DUBLIN

17th March 1846

MY LORD,

By the direction of the RELIEF COMMISSION, I have the honor to transmit to your Lordship six copies of Instructions to Local Committees, with the object of explaining the plan and principle on which it is proposed to grant relief, and of promoting a cordial understanding in its administration between this COMMISSION and the Gentlemen of the country.

The establishment of such Committees is most essential to the due administration of relief, for it is by their local knowledge that the reality and extent of the distress can be tested, that the most suitable description of employment can be provided, and the most judicious course pursued to invite, according to their means, the contributions of the community as inseparable from those of the Government.

Arrangements are now in preparation to establish Central Depôts of Maize, from whence a supply, to be distributed on the principle of these Instructions, may be forwarded to the interior, and directions for the use of the Corn Meal are now circulating through the country

The COMMISSION look forward to the influence of your Lordship's example in this great undertaking, and they rely on the co-operation of the Landed Proprietors to support it, and I am directed respectfully to suggest the propriety of your Lordship nominating at once

a Relief Committee for the district comprising the Baronies of Louth and Loughrea upon the principle contained in the accompanying instructions. The general Committee will probably find it necessary to select localities in different parts of the district where sub-committees or quorum may meet on different days of each week so arranged that the same Clerk may attend each meeting to record the proceedings in the general minute book. Sub-committees will feel obliged by your informing them to whom the books for the Committee should be sent in the first instance. I have the honor to be,

MY LORD,

Your Lordship's very obedient Servant,

JHK

Secretary.

To the Marquess of Clanricarde  
Lieutenant of the County  
of Galway.