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FRAGMENTARY MEMORIES: THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF FAMINE

ECHOES IN *DRACULA*

by

Moira Hegarty

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

Of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in English

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ABSTRACT

Fragmentary Memories: The Cultural Significance of Famine Echoes in

Dracula

By

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Utah State University, 2019

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This Plan B thesis explores the questions: What echoes of the 1845 Potato famine exist in *Dracula*, and how do those echoes impact our understanding of the famine's cultural impact? *Dracula* has been studied extensively both as an important example of gothic, Victorian literature and as a chance to reclaim a native Irish author from the British. By looking at *Dracula* through the lens of Ireland's 1845 Potato famine, some of the structural and narrative oddities resolve themselves, such as Stoker's decision to introduce so many opposing images and ideas to create a sense of uncertainty and rob the reader of an overarching allegory to guide the narrative. Rather than focusing on how a famine lens resolves issues with the narrative, this thesis will focus on three scenes from the novel that display distinct echoes of the famine and what they can teach us about the lasting impact of the violent imagery that surfaced during the tragedy. Each scene is discussed individually with the famine-based image that it reflects and the role of those images in the novel and culturally. Mina and Lucy's conversation

about graves with Mr. Swales echoes the questions surrounding the cultural and psychological impact of being surrounded by the dead and dying during the famine. The discovery of Lucy's vampirism evokes images of mothers cradling their children during the crisis, but also casts a sinister shadow on the devoutness of those mothers. The arrival of the *Demeter* in Whitby, the final scene this thesis concerns itself with, has interesting connections to the cultural image of the coffin ships, and the importance of the ship's log in unraveling the mystery of what happened echoes the weight placed on the diaries of Irish emigrants who traveled on the coffin ships. Examining these three scenes through the historical and cultural sense of the famine allows us to begin understanding not only the famine's influence on *Dracula* but also why famine scholars are interested in classifying the novel as part of the famine literature canon. As a whole, this thesis aims to demonstrate the value in further pursuing the role of novels, such as *Dracula*, that are drawing on famine themes but not necessarily about the famine, in understanding the psychological traumas embedded in the cultural memory as a result of the 1845 famine.

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Fragmentary Memories: The Cultural Significance of Famine echoes in *Dracula*

The enormity of the famine that now commenced has always been difficult to communicate... But sheer iteration will in time reward the earnest searchers with a sort of comprehension.

Malcom Johnston Brown, *The Politics of Irish Literature* (95)

In the past century, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* has been interpreted as everything from a threat of reverse colonialism and general fear of the East to a dramatization of the battle between superstition and British rationalism from an exploration of changing gender norms and sexuality in the late nineteenth century to a snapshot of the beliefs that surrounded Stoker in Victorian Britain.¹ In more recent decades, *Dracula* criticism has also started to explore the relationship between the novel's themes and Ireland's history with readings that interpret the novel as everything from an example of Stoker's conflicted nationalist leanings to an attempt to reconcile Ireland's traumatic history with the larger cultural memory.² While Stoker's novel has been studied extensively, its place in the Irish canon is still being negotiated, due in part to general problems and concerns being debated in the Irish studies community. (For example, should a Catholic or Protestant interpretation of Ireland's history be favored? How should critics account for the dialectic nature of Irish culture? Should rural narratives in the Irish language be favored over urban narratives in English?) Rather than trying to justify *Dracula*'s place in the Irish canon or as a famine novel, this thesis endeavors to answer the question of how the 1845 Potato Famine influenced specific scenes and components of *Dracula* and to begin discussing the significance of those echoes.

Answering the question of how the famine impacted the novel requires a basic acceptance of *Dracula* as part of the famine literature designation within Irish literature.³ This designation still needs to be discussed more fully within the Irish Studies community, though Sarah Goss makes a compelling case for reading the novel through a famine lens. Reading Stoker's novel as a piece of famine literature could help to explain and resolve some of the novel's oddities, though whether they should be read as Stoker intentionally invoking famine imagery or simply borrowing the images for their shock factor is debatable.⁴ One of the oddities that may be resolved through a famine reading of *Dracula* is Stoker's decision to present so many opposing images and ideas to create a sense of uncertainty and rob the reader of an overarching allegory that guides the narrative. The fragmentation, I will argue, reflects the psychological trauma experienced during the famine.

In order to fully articulate how the famine influenced scenes in the novel, this thesis is organized into several sections that explore aspects of the famine that help to shape the scenes in question. The first section briefly sketches the historical background of the 1845 famine and its politicization. Establishing the basic elements of the famine is necessary to understanding why echoes of the famine would appear in a novel written decades after the tragedy. The second section takes up the majority of the paper and will examine some of the most common images that developed during and shortly after the famine in conjunction with the echoes found in *Dracula* and other pieces of literature. This examination will focus on how famine images and rhetoric are being used in specific parts of the novel, and how this use of famine imagery and language either preyed on Victorian fears or utilized the cultural memory to quickly establish an image using the

famine as shorthand. The third and concluding section will propose several of the potential cultural impacts of using famine imagery as a shorthand in fiction. As a whole, this thesis aims to demonstrate the value in further pursuing the role of novels, such as *Dracula*, that are drawing on famine themes but not necessarily about the famine, in understanding the psychological traumas embedded in the cultural memory as a result of the 1845 famine.

The Great Famine

Although the psychological impact of dead bodies being unearthed, the burial of entire villages that succumbed to disease or hunger, and the unknowableness of a loved one's fate left a permanent scar on the lives and culture of the Irish, it is the continued uncertainty of the famine's impact that allows Ireland's history and literature to be haunted by images of the famine and its dead. As with all famines, the Great Famine has an intricate and tangled history with many factors that are simply impossible to separate from one another. However, a brief overview of the things that are and are not known about the famine and its impact on Ireland will help to frame the famine imagery Stoker borrows for his own haunting novel.

The famine that struck Ireland in 1845 was known as the Great Famine, “an Gorta Mór,” the Great Hunger, and the Irish Potato Famine. This famine started in 1845, peaked in 1847 (Black '47), and officially ended around 1849, though the effects were still being felt as late as 1852.⁵ Potato blight imported from America to Ireland was the immediate cause of crop failures in Ireland during the period,⁶ which was part of a larger potato failure known as the Hungry Forties, though Ireland's experience with the crop failure

was the harshest. The impact of potato blight in Ireland was intensified because potatoes had become the staple crop for half of the Irish population, mainly tenant farmers and peasants, and farmers generally relied on one or two types of high-yield potatoes for survival. The reduction of genetic variety in Ireland left them vulnerable to blight and made crop failure both inevitable and deadly. If this thesis were interested in finding a single-factor cause, it would be tempting to rely on the type of blight because it is what actually caused the crops to fail. The blight as a cause of the famine is equally yoked with the role of potato as a staple food, absentee landlords, evictions, religious contention, poor management of relief efforts, and the continued exporting of other foodstuffs in the name of *laissez-faire* economics. The lack of a single-factor cause for the famine makes it nearly impossible to determine what elements were the most devastating to the Irish population and complicates efforts to create a homogenous narrative of the tragedy.

As stated earlier, part of the reason the famine had a disproportionate impact on Ireland was that the Irish peasant population was dependent on potatoes for survival. The expansion of the peasant class compounded this dependency during the Napoleonic wars due to the English demand for Irish food and supplies, which supported the population and allowing them, Irish peasants, access to other food sources (Kelly 8). However, the end of the French Wars meant the end of Britain's demand for Irish goods and many of Ireland's industries dwindled into extinction or were forced there by British economic laws. The decline in demand didn't create a decline in the peasant population, which once again became dependent on the potato for survival. Peasants also fell victim to absentee landlords, eviction, increasing demand for large swaths agricultural land, the Corn Laws, and, later, the Extended Poor Law of 1847.

The disproportionate impact of the famine on Ireland also caused the relief efforts to become disproportionately important, making them key factors in any study of the famine. The famine's magnitude resulted in any relief efforts and representations of the reactions to those efforts becoming political tools and issues. Early relief efforts were inadequate,⁷ and the financial burden of relief was foisted on the Irish landlords through local efforts and British absentee landlords who were reluctant, at best, to contribute to render aid to their tenants. In turn, relying on landowners for aid caused the eviction of tenant farmers and laborers during the crisis because they could not pay their rent, and perpetuating a vicious cycle between landlords and suffering peasants that escalated throughout the famine. When relief was available, it was conditional, sometimes requiring those seeking relief to surrender their land holdings, work on senseless public projects (many of which still aren't finished today), or go to workhouses that were overflowing and in danger of collapse.

The ineffectiveness of the relief efforts and the refusal to stop the export of Irish foodstuffs led to resentment among the rural Irish populations and helped foster the idea that the British were using the famine as a tool of genocide.⁸ John Mitchell, an Irish journalist and leading member of Young Ireland and the Irish Confederation, went so far as to write the following response to Charles Trevelyan's⁹ entreaty that the Queen of England appoint a day of alms-giving for Ireland:

Keep your alms, ye canting robbers; — button your pockets upon the Irish plunder that is in them — and let the begging-box pass on. Neither as *loans* nor as *alms* will we take that which is our own. We spit upon the benevolence that robs us of a pound and flings back a penny in *charity*. (“More Alms for the ‘Destitute Irish’”)

Mitchell also frequently insinuates in *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)* that the British are responsible for the famine. Later in the same article quoted just above he goes so far as to say that England is purposely draining Ireland of its people and its goods, and that if the English cared they would “say to their Government and their Parliament, ‘Take your fangs from the Irish throat, your claws off the Irish dish; plunder and murder Irishmen no more’” (“More Alms for the ‘Destitute Irish’”).¹⁰

The continual referencing of vampires and fangs is especially prominent in the rhetoric of the time and the decades after, which further establishes the belief of certain political factions that the British were directly responsible for the tragedy or for prolonging it. Many other Irish politicians and journalists delivered similar lines of rhetoric during the famine and in the following decades.¹¹ An attitude like Mitchell’s was often interpreted as ungrateful by the British, while other representations of peasants receiving relief characterized them as lazy, dirty, or immoral. Accepting relief or giving relief became a no-win situation for everyone involved and kept the rhetoric of economic consumption from dying down.

Beyond the strain of potato blight, inadequate relief efforts, and the conversion of the tragedy into political fodder, the most important thing we know is that death was the main byproduct of the 1845 Potato Famine. Despite this reality, the final death, emigration, and deportation numbers of the famine are consistently debated.¹² During the famine it was difficult, if not impossible, to keep accurate records of births, deaths, and emigrations (let alone the survival rate of those who embarked on the journey to Canada or America).¹³ Many people found themselves uncertain about the fate of their relatives and were suspended between mourning the loss of their loved ones and hoping they had

miraculously survived. Cormac Ó Gráda explains the difficulties of determining the famine's death toll as such:

The Irish Famine's cost in deaths cannot be estimated with precision. This is mainly because deaths were not registered and emigrants were only imperfectly counted at the time; small, inevitable inaccuracies in the 1841 and 1851 census totals compound the problem. Nevertheless, demographic historians estimate that the famine killed about one million people. This makes no allowances for averted births, or for excess mortality after 1851 - an aspect emphasized in some recent accounts. (*Black '47* 203)

Like the other aspects of the famine discussed in this section, the death toll, and who gets counted in that death toll, is a complex issue that cannot be fully explored by this thesis. However, the inability to assign a final number of deaths, averted births, and emigrants leaving Ireland during the famine creates a gaping hole in Irish history, preventing scholars from ever truly closing the door on famine studies and allowing the famine to haunt Irish history and cultural memory.

Dracula and Famine Images

It is widely accepted that the Great Famine was a defining moment in Irish History; but can the same be claimed for Irish literature? (Fegan, Literature 1)

The above question guides Melissa Fegan in her exploration of the Great Famine's impact on Irish literature when "it has been assumed that the proper medium for the famine was silence" (1). Fegan does conclude that that the famine was a defining moment in Irish literature, and it produced both silences and interestingly interdisciplinary narratives that have been overlooked or labeled as minor contributions. More importantly, though, Fegan's study points to the written instances of famine imagery and records that cross genre boundaries and encompass a variety of voices and reactions to the tragedy. Part of what makes the famine a defining moment for Irish

history and literature is the repetition of images, themes, structural and ideological quirks, as well as political implications and restrictions that have become stand-ins for the famine and its impact. Identifying and understanding three of the most common images from the famine can help us to understand why they appear in novels like *Dracula* that seem to have very little to do with the Great Famine at first glance. The three scenes from the novel the rest of this thesis focuses on all exhibit the controlling themes of famine literature, which Tom Hayden points out are “the universal themes that reverberate in the wake of national oppression and trauma” (9). Mortality, hunger, theft, miracles in return for hospitality, superstitions and supernatural occurrences, near destruction and survival, shame and guilt, unresolved anger, recovering pride and identity, suffering and redemption, and the loss of the very young and very old are all themes that appear in *Dracula* with various amounts of subtlety.

The scenes with strong links to the famine all happen early on in the novel and they create a foundation for the escalating human, cultural, and economic consumption of the rest of the novel. Each of the scenes will be paired with a specific image or theme from the famine. Mina and Lucy’s conversation about graves with Mr. Swales echoes the questions surrounding the cultural and psychological impact of being surrounded by the dead and dying during the famine. The discovery of Lucy’s vampirism evokes images of mothers cradling their children during the crisis, but also casts a sinister shadow on the devoutness of those mothers. The arrival of the *Demeter* in Whitby, the final scene this thesis concerns itself with, has interesting connections to the cultural image of the coffin ships, and the importance of the ship’s log in unraveling the mystery of what happened echoes the weight placed on the diaries of Irish emigrants who traveled on the coffin

ships. Examining these scenes through the historic and cultural lens of the famine allows us to begin understanding not only the famine's influence on *Dracula* but also why famine scholars are interested in classifying the novel as part of the famine literature canon.

Lies on the Tombstones

One of the most interesting images of burial and mourning rituals, and their purpose within a culture, in *Dracula* is when Mr. Swales starts telling Lucy and Mina the “true” stories behind the graves they are sitting above after Mina gets him to start talking about legends. Legends are a logical segue into the “lies” that Mr. Swales claims are being “invented by parsons an’ illsome beck-bodies, an’ railway touters to steer an’ scunner haffin’s, an’ to get folks to do something’ that they don’t other incline to” (Stoker 65). It is what Swales says about the graves and Mina’s theory about why the lies are on the tombstones that truly create a link back to the famine that deserves appreciation for its subtlety.

Mr. Swales is one of the old men Mina and Lucy meet when they visit the churchyard who “seem to do nothing all day but sit up here [in the churchyard] and talk” (Stoker 63), and he is comparable to a survivor of the famine who knew the victims of the famine before the tragedy struck. Swales knows about the less savory behaviors of the people buried in the churchyard, as well as which graves don’t have a body in them and are simply there because tradition dictates they should be. According to Swales, anyone whose grave says they were killed at sea isn’t in the grave (and if their body is in the grave, “who brought [them] home... to hap them here?”), and any of the graves that

emphasize a particular relationship probably indicates an underlying tension between the dead and the living (67). Interestingly, this knowledge makes Swales the one who becomes responsible for remembering and passing on the stories about the tombstones; he is essentially the seanchaí of Whitby who is responsible for maintaining the oral history of Whitby's graves.¹⁴ Swales' knowledge and position as an expert also allows him to provide outsiders with insight into local burial customs and how they change to fit the circumstances.

Woven among the true stories that Swales tells about the graves is a version of folk belief about why the dead need tombstones in the first place. According to Swales, one reason tombstones exist is so the dead can carry them to Heaven on Judgment Day and "prove how good they was" (Stoker 67). This means that even for the "half of them [graves] there bean't no bodies" in, there is an entry ticket waiting for the dead person – though Swales isn't sure how they'll get to Whitby to pick up the ticket or whether a tombstone will get someone through the gates of Heaven (65, 67). In many ways, this is an example of a person with limited religious education explaining what it takes to have a successful afterlife. The success of a dead or missing loved one's passage to the afterlife would have been a concern for those who survived the famine as well. The tombstones and memorials that have been erected in the aftermath of the famine represent a similar need to return to normalcy after a loss, as well as a cultural and emotional need to have something to help the survivors remember the dead with some sort of hope. Interestingly, it is an outsider who recognizes that in many ways the graves are there to please the relatives of the dead and not necessarily something that has to be presented as proof of worthiness. When Mina questions Mr. Swales about why he believes the dead have to

carry their tombstones, he replies by asking her what else they were for if not for guaranteeing passage into Heaven (67).

In many ways, Mina is right to believe the markers are there, lies and all, “to please their relatives,” and they serve a secular purpose within the culture that doesn’t rely on local superstitious beliefs (Stoker 67). In comparison to the role of Swales’ explanation for the tombstones, Mina’s question and theory about the tombstones is minuscule and easy to gloss over when examining the scene. However, Mina’s statement indicates that she has a better understanding of the secular need to curate memories after a personal or national tragedy than Swales does because he is so focused on the superstitions about death that he simultaneously scoffs at and believes in. Mina can recognize that the graves represent an idea for the surviving members of the population more than Swales does, but her explanation dismisses one of the practical purposes of a tombstone: acting as a physical reminder that a person with a story previously existed and deserves to be remembered.

Death and Burial

When viewed through the lens of a post-famine Ireland, the scene in Whitby’s churchyard can act as an explanation for the desire to remember the victims of the famine and prevent anyone from forgetting the magnitude of what happened as well as an example of how to engage with the beliefs about death that stemmed from the famine. It should not be surprising that some of the most common images from the famine period are centered on the interruption of death and burial customs. During the height of the famine, it was not uncommon to bury a person one day and discover their grave had been

unearthed by dogs the next day. Historian John Kelly relates the story of an Irish farmer whose wife's grave had been dug up by the dog of a carriage driver, who then had to return the wife's head to the farmer for reburial the next day (1). While grave robbing and stealing corpses for anatomical study were not uncommon before the famine struck Ireland,¹⁵ even the graves of paupers were usually safe from being dug up by packs of feral dogs. During the famine it became more common for a dead body to be uncovered accidentally or to never be given a proper burial at all because of a lack of resources or energy. While the unearthing of bodies during the famine caused the surviving family members and friends to continuously cycle through the grieving process, there were further complications to death and burial customs, and many of those customs were completely neglected during the time. Beyond the difficulty of maintaining death and emigration records, coffins and individual graves were difficult to come by because of the high death rates. Mass graves often held the majority of a village's population, and occasionally people who were not dead yet because medical help was not readily available. The disruption of the mourning process and the inability to stop and mourn a loss, or confirm a death, has resulted in stories, myths, and images that haunt Ireland's memory of the famine.

The shortage of coffins and the shortage of funds to purchase the available coffins often resulted in bodies being buried without coffins or anything to mark their grave. However, there are stories of families doing whatever they could to obtain a coffin or even a box for a loved one to be buried in. One such story, recounted by Bernard O'Regan,¹⁶ involves both the desire for a coffin and the tragedy of not having time to confirm whether a loved one is actually dead. The child, Tom Burein, was two or three

years old when he contracted famine fever and it appeared he had died. When it came time to bury him, his aunt insisted on having a box at the very least to bury her favorite nephew and was successful in obtaining a box, though it was too short for the child. This didn't prevent her from burying the child in the box and she disjointed his knees and turned them up toward his hips so he would fit. Another funeral came along in the area and noises were heard from the box, so they opened it and discovered Tom was alive inside. The child ended up surviving the ordeal and the famine, though he was permanently crippled because his legs never straightened again (*The Great Famine*).¹⁷ While Mr. Swales' stories about Whitby's tombstones aren't as grim as the story of Tom Burein's burial, they both center on the importance of maintaining cultural belief systems in the face of disrupted burial rites and mourning practices.

Stories about death are a mainstay of famine history and folklore, though most of them don't have as miraculous an ending as Tom's does and often have fewer details. In some ways, these stories stem directly from the inability to observe wakes and hold funeral processions, because many people weren't healthy enough to observe the traditions and rituals, and people were dying so rapidly that the community couldn't keep up with the demand. Because the traditions and rituals had to be suspended so frequently during the famine, they were replaced by trap door coffins, midnight burials to avoid the shame of not having a coffin, and the decision to simply collapse the family cottage because everyone inside had died or would be dead soon. Most of the information available about the burial methods and interrupted rituals of the famine years comes from folk surveys conducted by the Irish Folklore Commission almost a century after the famine.¹⁸ One aside from the collection that Ó Gráda translates for his study of the

famine in memory “captures the horror of the famine” as told by a Cork farmer who claimed “if [he] told you where people were buried, you would not venture out at night” (*Black '47* 200). While the stories in *The School's Collection* might not be entirely factual or were based on memories that were altered by time, they – like Mr. Swale's stories about the tombstones – help us to understand the cultural impact of death on the Irish culture and why the echoes appear in *Dracula*.¹⁹

Destroying the Angel in the House

The next scene that has distinct ties to famine imagery in *Dracula* focuses on one of the women who encounter the Count: Lucy Westenra. The roles of women in the novel have been studied and discussed extensively by critics who are interested in the sexual nature of the novel. Generally, these discussions have focused on how the women are representative of Victorian fears about the “new” woman, the threats posed to the angel in the house, and the danger of female seduction.²⁰ There are many gender-based examinations of Lucy's role in the novel and her transformation into a vampire that directly address the male anxieties and reactions to Lucy's anti-maternal behaviors.²¹ However, Stoker's decision to represent part of this threat through Lucy Westenra's transformation into a vampire also draws on the rumors of cannibalism and neglect that were associated with Irish mothers during the famine. Examining Lucy's transformation and discovery with a famine lens provides a new understanding of the anxieties about contagions and anti-maternal behavior in post-famine Ireland, and the destruction of her image as the Victorian angel in the house is reminiscent of the images of cyclic epidemics from the famine and extreme behaviors displayed by desperate mothers.

This thread of extreme or manipulative behaviors is well cataloged, and the rumors of cannibalism are less frequent than other images of suffering women during the famine. One such image of a suffering woman cradling a dead child is James Mahony's *Woman Begging at Clonakilty* (Fig. 1), which appeared in *The Illustrated London Times*. The article that accompanies Mahony's images states that the woman is "carrying in her arms the corpse of a fair child, and making the most depressing appeal...for aid to purchase a coffin and bury her dear little baby" (100). Mahony was hired to provide sketches and correspond with the press and goes on to mention that the local hotel keepers tell him such scenes are not uncommon and women with similar requests arrive

in town daily. He doesn't indicate any specifically anti-maternal behavior on the part of this particular woman but mentioning that women with similar requests and in similar circumstances are arriving in the town daily throws suspicion on the intent of the mother. This suspicion surrounds all images of motherhood during the period that Stoker cashes in on to realize the anti-maternal fears



Figure 1 Mahony's *Woman Begging at Clonakilty* as it appeared in the *Illustrated London Times*.

fostered during the Victorian period that were triggered by Mahony's illustrations and article.

Stoker could have demonstrated Lucy's shift into anti-maternal, cannibalistic behaviors in several ways, but it is the decision to mimic images of a woman cradling her child that makes the scene so intense and creates a tie to the famine. In Mahony's etching, it is clear that the woman is cradling a child and from the accompanying article we know that the child is dead, and the mother is begging so she can afford a coffin for her child. Mahony's image is an interesting juxtaposition of virtuous motherhood and death, but Stoker makes the sinister implications of a mother cradling a dead child more explicit when the protagonists discover Lucy walking around outside her tomb.

When the men first see Lucy wandering outside her grave, she is just "a dim white figure, which held something dark at its breast...dressed in the cerements of the grave" and the "something dark" ends up being a "fair-haired child" (Stoker 187). Despite only being able to see a vague silhouette of Lucy, the men all assume that she will be the same ethereal, angelic woman they knew before and that what they are about to see is a vision of angelic motherhood. This assumption is partially based on the way Lucy is standing and bending over the child: from behind it looks like she is cradling a sleeping child, and the noise the child makes seems like one that a sleeping child would make (187). The rest of the assumption is based on what the men knew about Lucy and their hope that Van Helsing is wrong about Lucy being transformed into something threatening and supernatural. Instead, the illusion is shattered when Lucy turns around and the men see that the visual indicators of her virtue are gone. As the light shifts her features into sight, Dr. Seward notices Lucy's hair is has turned dark and "sweetness was turned to

adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness,” and as she continues to turn he notices the blood “trickled over her chin and stained the purity of her lawn death-robe” (187).²²

While the initial destruction of Lucy’s place as the angel in the house triggers feelings of horror in the men, they don’t notice a change in her behavior until she realizes that she is being watched (Stoker 187-188). When she realizes the men see her, “with a careless motion, she [flings] to the ground, callous as a devil, the child,” and then she attempts to seduce Arthur while approaching him with “languorous, voluptuous grace” and speaking to him with “something diabolically sweet in her tones” (188). The moment Lucy flings the child she had been using as a meal to the side is the moment it becomes clear the protagonists will have to kill her to prevent the vampirism and anti-maternal behaviors from spreading. It is this act of anti-maternal behavior, coming from a woman the men believed to be a perfect angel in the house, that makes Dr. Seward say, “had she then to be killed, I could have done it with savage delight” (188). After finally accepting that their version of Lucy is completely gone and this new Lucy has to be destroyed, the men are able to go through with Van Helsing’s plan to make “the Un-Dead pass away” and lay Lucy’s desecrated corpse to rest (191-192).

Motherhood: Begging and Cannibalism

The key link between the discovery of Lucy’s vampirism and the famine isn’t just the destruction of the angel in the house, but the decision to make the fallen angel a cannibal as well as a bad mother. As with any famine, there are rumors of cannibalism associated with the Irish Potato Famine and they are generally about women, especially

mothers, consuming children. The myth of Irish cannibalism and, specifically, the consumption of children dates to Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* (1729) and horror stories from the Victorian period that feature families eating children in order to survive food scarcity.²³ Two notable rumors come from Thomas Carlyle, who wrote about 19th century parents poisoning their children in order to "defraud a 'burial society'" and using the payout to feed their other children ("Midas" 1078), and about people prospering after the famine through "workhouse grocery-and-meal trade, by secret pawnbroking, —by *eating* the slain" (*Reminiscences* 183). While the first rumor doesn't mention cannibalism, it does mention bad behavior on the part of the mothers, and there were similar rumors about fraudulent burial societies that included cannibalism. It is possible that Carlyle isn't being literal in his assessment of "Poor O'Flan," whom he also describes as a "human ferret" (*Reminiscences* 182). Because all that is known about cannibalism during the famine consists of rumors, there is no way to truly confirm whether cannibalism actually occurred. However, there is a common thread that gets mythologized during the famine period: parents, usually mothers, resorting to extreme behaviors or neglect so other children and family members can survive. Included in this set of images are those of mothers neglecting their most recent child in order to suckle an older child that had a better chance of survival, hiding a dead child so it could be eaten in the dead of night, or cradling a dead child while begging to garner more sympathy.

Wrecking the Demeter

The last portion of the novel with strong conceptual ties to the famine this thesis will discuss is actually a series of scenes that contain several famine themes and

elements. When the wreckage of the *Demeter* arrives just off Whitby, it draws on the mythologized version of coffin ships, not the realities of them, and gives a new, somewhat ironic, meaning to the term “coffin ship.” Rather than drawing on the idea that the coffin ships connected two countries with a string of bodies or refugees fleeing famine or disease, Stoker draws on the myth of decrepit ships that are harbingers of death and disease.

When the *Demeter* leaves Varna, it is not a coffin ship except in the sense that it is carrying several boxes of dirt, and one happens to contain Count Dracula’s body (Stoker 82). It is not until the ship arrives at Whitby that it resembles what a decrepit coffin ship looks like in the folk memories of the emigration ships: devoid of any crew, no one alive to explain the story of the ship, masts and rigging torn to shreds, and carrying a new version of famine to the shores of England. Like Lucy’s transformation into a vampiric, anti-maternal woman, the transformation of the *Demeter* into a coffin ship is a purposeful juxtaposition, this time between nourishment and hunger. Sarah Goss notes this juxtaposition and the false sense of security it creates when she points out that Dracula “sails into the harbor on a ship named for nourishment and plenty, but ironically, he [Dracula] is bringing with him hunger, disease and death” (84). Other than the apparently deluded ramblings of the dead captain, there is nothing to indicate anything supernatural about the absence of the crew and there isn’t much else that differentiates it from other decrepit ships that lost their crews to disease, mutiny, or insanity. In many ways, it is Dracula’s presence on the ship that transforms the *Demeter* into a coffin ship, rather than the physical appearance of the ship when it arrives in Whitby, though its resemblance to the nightmarish memories of emigration does help solidify the connection to the famine.

The rest of the *Demeter*'s significance within a famine interpretation of the novel is supported by the captain's log book and the lack of concrete facts and language it provides as evidence. Not only does it become the basis for the speculation and sensationalism that surrounds the *Demeter* following its arrival in Whitby, it also echoes firsthand accounts of the famine and the conflicting ways those accounts described the tragedy. The opening note to the log book, dated July 18th, states that "things so strange [are] happening, and I [the captain] shall keep accurate note henceforth," which immediately indicates there is missing information and renders the accuracy of the log suspect (Stoker 81). For example, the captain and his last remaining crew member refuse to refer to Dracula as anything other than "It." The crew member explains the situation on the ship to the captain as such: "*It* is here; I know it, now. On the watch last night I saw It, like a man, tall and thin, and ghastly pale" (83). To complicate matters further, the log is written in Russian, and according to the newspaper correspondent who is providing the translation, it needs to be taken "cum grano" (with a grain of salt) because it was dictated to him (80).

The lack of information, the mysterious circumstances that result in the captain tying himself to the ship, and the juxtaposition of a ship named *Demeter* carrying a vampire intent on draining London's populace of their blood can easily be interpreted as an example of Stoker taking the gothic nature of his story to the next level. But the news correspondent's verdict that the circumstances of the *Demeter* are "one more 'mystery of the sea'" is reminiscent of the way coffin ships and the written records of emigration experiences during the famine are treated as another mystery that cannot be solved (Stoker 84). Unlike other scenes in the novel that have echoes of the famine woven

through them, the events surrounding the *Demeter* illuminate how the coffin ships became mythologized in the collective memory and explain why Stoker would spend so much narrative energy on wrecking the ship that brings Dracula to England.

The Coffin Ships

The image of the coffin ship is integral to the cultural memory of the famine and is a popular choice for monuments and commemorations, so seeing a version of it in *Dracula* is not surprising. The term “coffin ship” is used to refer to any of the typically decrepit ships that carried Irish emigrants to Canada or America, and they acquired their name because it was unlikely that everyone who boarded the ship would survive the journey. Many of these ships weren’t meant to carry passengers, were originally slave ships, or were small ships that were never meant to cross the Atlantic. However, there were also American packet ships that were designed for carrying emigrants from Europe to America and could carry over four hundred passengers in relative safety. The diversity of transportation out of Ireland makes it difficult to create a cohesive image of what the famine emigrant’s experience looked like. Unfortunately, the coffin ships are one of the many understudied elements of the famine and so it is the myth that surrounds the ships and journey to North America that are embedded in the folk memory. In fact, what is known about the coffin ships is very similar to what we know about the overall death toll of the famine - vague, up for debate, and open to interpretation. For example, Reverend John A. Gallagher says, “Ireland was connected to Canada by a chain of dead bodies of her children - old man and infant, parent and child, found a grave in the Atlantic” (46). Yet it also appears that emigrants were really more likely to die in quarantine after

arriving in North America than on the ships. On one trip, the massively overloaded 1846 journey of the *Elizabeth and Sarah*, only twenty people died during the actual passage, and everyone else was in miserable condition but alive (Laxton 39). These were relatively low numbers of fatalities for such a heavily packed ship with passengers carrying a disease that was passed through lice.

The variety of accounts and the unknowns about the coffin ships could render it useless as a symbol of the famine and its magnitude, but in reality this uncertainty leaves space for folk narratives and speculation that emphasizes the deadliness of the coffin ships as a signifier for the unknown elements and magnitude of the famine. In many ways, the myth of the coffin ship is the way Stoker cements the proliferation of unknowns, supernatural and otherwise, that are introduced in the first third of the novel.

Conclusion: Sheer Iteration

Specifically I want to talk about the “famine” / About the fact that there never really was one / There was no “famine” (O’Connor)

There are those that agree with the above statement from Sinead O’Connor’s song “Famine.” There are those that might consider the events of the 1845 Potato Famine genocide or a calculated withholding of aid on the part of the English government. Some believe it was an act of God. There are still others who believe there are too many factors at play to truly assign a one-factor cause to the tragedy. While not an explicit piece of famine literature like the poetry that appeared in *The Nation*, *Dracula* provides a unique insight into the famine’s multifaceted, complex impact on Irish culture and memory. The fragmentation and distorted nature of Stoker’s novel houses multiple allegorical threads

that sometimes coexist, but often conflict when attempting to determine whether or not there is a controlling allegory in the novel. The same thing happens when delving into the history of the famine and its impact on Irish culture. It is tempting to arbitrarily decide that an element of the famine's impact should act as the most important element of a particular interpretation when the reality is that if one element is focused on too closely it is impossible to create a cohesive understanding of the famine.

Examining the echoes of the famine in *Dracula* helps us understand the cultural impact of using famine imagery out of its immediate context or as an intensifier in a work of fiction. One echo of the famine in *Dracula* is the use of a fractured narrative, which creates a mostly incoherent pile of information when the novel is subjected to analysis. However, that fracturing can also be seen as a literalization of Seamus Deane's concept of Ireland existing in a transnational condition that shaped and continues to shape the national identity of Ireland. According to Deane, this transnational condition can be understood as "one of incoherence, caught between two languages, Irish and English, two land systems, also Irish and English, two civilizations, one vivacious and wild, the other organized and dull" (51)—all tensions which can be seen in *Dracula*.

The success of Stoker's use of the famine as a shorthand in his novel is also dependent on the absence of explicit Irishness, which allows the psychological side of the famine to take precedence through what Joseph Valente calls "encrypted Irishness" (4). Drawing on the major images and tropes that came out of the famine rather than the Irish roots of the images allows the novel to draw attention to the uncertainties that came out of the famine and away from? the "Irish question" constantly circulating in England. This might seem like an impediment to the fundamentally Irish lens this thesis applies to the

novel, but the removal of the Irish “threat” from the famine images allows the reader to engage with the images and themes themselves instead of thinking about how the English might want to “improve” or “correct” an Irish image of the famine (Deane 55).

Reading *Dracula* within the historical context of the 1845 Potato Famine allows questions about correctness and accuracy to be set aside, which in turn allows the reader to focus on the psychological impact of the uncertainty and brokenness that followed the famine. The unknowable and indescribable nature of the famine has been well established by historical and literary sources, but most of those representations of the famine are focused on describing the events of the famine and making them more widely known. By refocusing the emphasis of a famine narrative onto the uncertainty caused by psychological trauma rather than the Irishness of the famine, readers perceive that the famine was more than just a crop failure that was complicated by politics, economics, and culture, and that can be understood if studied long enough. Readers are introduced to the idea that all of the existing famine narratives have some level of validity, regardless of whether or not they are more myth than fact. Applying a famine lens to *Dracula* allows readers to engage with the famine through this shifted focus and, as scholars, it shows us that the best way to understand the psychological impact of the famine might be to remove it from the demands of empiricism and embrace the unknowableness of the famine experience.

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ENDNOTES

1. The threat of reverse colonialism is seen in articles such as “The Occidental Tourist: Dracula and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization” by Stephen D. Arata. Arata’s article displays Dracula’s arrival in England as a threat that the Eastern races would mix with the English and dilute their racial superiority. Throughout the novel, the Eastern races include Russian, Romanian, German, Hungarian, Ukrainian, and any other ethnicities that traditionally lived east of the Ural and Caucasus mountain ranges. It is important to remember that the terms “Eastern races” and “Eastern Europe” are constantly in flux and are based on religion, ethnicity, geography, and cultural practices, so most scholars will establish their parameters for their work early on.

2. Some examples include Gallagher’s *The Irish Vampire*, Ingelbien’s “Gothic Geologies: Dracula, Bowen’s Court, and Anglo-Irish Psychology,” and Kiberd’s discussion of *Dracula* in his book, *Irish Classics*.

3. There isn’t an official definition of famine literature, but the generally accepted definition is any piece of Irish literature that references the 1845 famine or utilizes cultural echoes of the famine. One of the best descriptions of the scope of famine literature is given by Christopher Morash who states: “Between 1847 and 1900, at least 14 novels and well over 100 poems were written which dealt with the Famine – to which can be added the numerous pamphlets travel narratives histories, journals, diaries, and other forms of writing which, when taken with an extensive oral tradition form the archive of Famine literature” (41). Melissa Fegan describes the scope of famine literature in similar terms and also notes that the genre “seems to impose restrictions and conclusions the authors would not necessarily have entertained outside literature” (“Traveler’s” 3), though that restriction doesn’t apply cleanly to all of the famine literature archives. Other definitions of famine literature focus on narrowing the scope of the genre to varying degrees based on what aspects of the literature are being emphasized and analyzed. For example, Fegan focuses one of her chapters on the evasion and tension displayed by some immigrant authors during the famine such as Anthony Trollope’s letters and his novels which display incredibly different stances on Irish-English relations (35-72).

4. It is true that the intent of an author is difficult to establish for pretty much all pieces of literature. Interviews, notes, and authorial statements do help us to understand what the author’s intent might have been when they are available. While not discussed in this thesis, we are fortunate enough to have access to notes made by Stoker while he was writing *Dracula*, though they tend to raise more questions than answers. However, it is also important to keep in mind that authorial intent should not limit the potential interpretations of the text. Interestingly, Stoker’s intentions are a common topic among popular discussions of *Dracula*.

5 The famine being discussed here should not be confused with the famine in 1879 which is sometimes called the mini-famine or “an Gorta Beag.” The main confusion between the two famines occurs in the folk surveys gathered by the Irish Folklore Commission, because the surveys were conducted between 1937 and 1939, almost a century after the 1845 famine. The surveys that were conducted had very few limitations and were gathered by school children, so the stories gathered show incredible diversity and are aptly named *The School’s Collection*.

6 In 2004, mycological research examining the world travels of *Phytophthora infestans* identified the haplotypes that were present in dried leaves dating from the time of the Great Famine and determined that the “epidemics caused by *P. infestans* in mid-19th century Ireland led to what is known as the Irish potato famine” (May 471). Being able to identify the strain of blight that caused the crop failures during 1845 certainly implies that researchers are able to definitively state that the cause of the famine and its devastation is known. But the identification of *P. infestans* is only part of the explanation and it has to be understood in the context of the famine years as a whole, thus it is not quite as definitive an answer to the cause of the famine as it may seem or as we might want it to be.

7 The inadequacy of the early relief efforts might have been because of “travelers still insist[ing] that the Irish were congenital liars” and the situation was less dire than newspapers or Irish politicians claimed (Fegan, “Traveler’s Experience” 362).

8. There is significant debate about the decision to designate the devastating events of 1845 as simply a famine rather than an act of genocide. Famine is defined as “extreme and general scarcity of food, in a

town, country, etc.” (OED) and it has been established that the period from 1845 to roughly 1852 was not a period of *general* food scarcity in Ireland. The only major food that was scarce in Ireland at the time was the potato, which acted as the staple crop for the Irish peasantry who could not afford to buy other foods. However, there are also issues with designating the period as a genocide. Firstly, the term “genocide” was not in use until almost a century after the tragedy and retroactively applying it to historical events is a dangerous precedent to set. Applying modern terms to past events is referred to as presentism in the historical field as well as other fields, though the connotations of the term vary. Whether or not presentism is acceptable in the historical field is a debate that I cannot do justice to in a mere footnote. A good place to start engaging with this debate is Peter Charles Hoffer’s “The Pleasures and Perils of Presentism: A Meditation on History and Law,” Carlos Spöerhase’s “Presentism and Precursorship in Intellectual History,” or François Hartog’s *Regimes of Historicity*. The second issue with designating the disaster as a genocide is that the legislation and decisions of the time were designed to prevent the government and private parties from rendering aid or relaxing food laws that would allow a majority of the Irish peasantry to survive the food scarcity. Instead, legislation was passed that claimed to be protecting free market principles and letting natural consequences befall an overly populous class. Actions, statements, and laws that were commonplace in the mid-1800s were deliberately and systematically not conducive to the survival of Irish peasants, but I do not know that these decisions were made in order to deliberately and systematically wipe out the entire Irish peasantry. It is ultimately an issue of whether or not English policies *at the time* should be interpreted as a deliberate, systematic destruction of the Irish peasantry and culture or not. For a more thorough discussion of the designation of the 1845 Potato Famine as a genocide, a famine, or something else entirely, I recommend beginning with Thomas Archdeacon’s “The Irish Famine in American School Curricula” or “Famine/Holocaust: Fragmented Bodies” by Christopher Morash.

9 Charles Trevelyan was a civil servant and colonial administrator whose work is generally overshadowed by remarks he made during the 1845 famine while serving as the Assistant Secretary to Her Majesty’s Treasurer under Lord Russell. His remarks are often used as evidence of genocidal intent on the part of British lawmakers during the famine.

10. To the best of my knowledge, John Mitchell is the author of the article in *The Nation* that these quotes come from, and he also quotes them in his 1861 book *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)* and doesn’t attribute them to anyone specifically. At the very least, they are commonly attributed to him and I have not found anything to indicate they were penned by another member of *The Nation*’s writing team, and they were written during his time with the paper.

11. Some examples of this are William Carleton’s *The Black Prophet: A Tale of Irish Famine*, the poetry of Thomas Davis, and anything written by a member of the Young Ireland or Irish Confederation movements.

12. Death is the main byproduct of any famine and accurate death tolls are pretty much impossible to obtain for famines in general, so the continued debate about the death toll is not unique to the events of 1845. But with all of the political and cultural byproducts of the Great Famine, it is necessary to differentiate between a debated death toll, the inability to quantify the amount of suffering, and other, more quantifiable, byproducts such as the rise of nationalism and the rise of peasant class resistance to legislation that favored absentee landlords during the next appearance of potato blight.

13. As with many of the historical topics mentioned in the first section of this paper, the complexities of famine emigration from Ireland to other parts of the world are too varied and intricate to do justice to in this thesis. For a good introduction to the intricacies of Irish immigration to America during the famine, I suggest starting with Edward Laxton’s *The Famine Ships: The Irish Exodus to America, 1846-51*.

14. A seanchaí is a traditional Irish storyteller and oral historian and they have played a key role in creating a cohesive canon of Irish folklore, legends, and history.

15. This was especially true when Britain’s Anatomy Act was made law in 1832 and allowed corpses to be donated for dissection (An Act for Regulating Schools of Anatomy). Theoretically, this would have lowered the rate of “resurrection men” (grave robbers) providing stolen cadavers to surgeons for study and anatomy lessons, but it didn’t lower the number of dead bodies leaving their graves as cadavers or to make room for more bodies to be buried. A good place to begin looking at this issue and its impact on literature is *Literary Remains* by Mary Elizabeth Hotz, especially chapters one and three which address burial reform and the politics surrounding dead bodies, respectively.

16. Bernard O’Regan is one of the many people who were interviewed by BBC 2 for the documentary *The Great Famine* and well versed in the history and lore of the Skibbereen parish, which is where Tom Buerin was buried alive in the Skibbereen Abbey famine plot.

17. This story is also briefly recounted in Peter Quinn's "In Search of the Banished Children: A Famine Journey" (156).

18. These surveys were conducted by school children based on weekly questions and headings that were given to their teachers by Seán Ó Súilleabháin and Séamus Ó Duilearga, the organizers of the project. Though this wasn't the most reliable, or controlled, way to collect data about the 1845 famine and other subjects the organizers were interested in, it is an excellent gauge of how survivors remembered death and burial, as well as what they told their descendants about the famine.

19. Because *The School's Collection* was focused on collecting stories from rural areas of Ireland, the records are usually in Gaelic so it is necessary to rely on translations of the stories. These stories and their translations often require a significant amount of context and explanation, so including more than just this brief excerpt from a story translated by Ó Gráda is impractical in this thesis. The records can be accessed by anyone through *The Dúchas Project*, which aims to digitize the National Folklore Collection. For more information on the Irish Folklore Commission and *The School's Collection* I recommend starting with Briody Mícheál's 2007 article "The Irish Folklore Commission: 1935-1970: History, Ideology, Methodology."

20. The term and image of the angel in the house stem from Coventry Patmore's poem of the same name in which he describes his wife as the ideal Victorian woman. The angel image became one of four stereotypes assigned to Victorian women: angel, demon, fallen woman, and old woman. Nina Auerbach's *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* is inherently concerned with how these stereotypes were actually impacting the women of the era as compared to the stereotypes themselves. Despite the realities of an individual woman's life, the stereotypes flourished in literature and art during the Victorian period. Throughout the novel, Lucy Westenra embodies the image of the novel, but she is transformed to represent other key issues surrounding the angel such as the threat of women becoming like Eve and seducing good men into a life of sin. The key characteristics and domestic roles assigned to the angel were "to remain virtuous, pure, and untainted by the dangerous worldly contact with which her husband was necessarily involved" (Hoffman 265). This purity also meant that she was not supposed to have sexual desires, as having such desires would make her a fallen woman. Despite the requirement that the angel remains pure and have no sexual desires, she was also expected to spend her life bearing and caring for children. A recent study of *Dracula* that focuses on the image of the angel in the house is Lauren Rocha's "Angel in the House, Devil in the City: Explorations of Gender in *Dracula* and *Penny Dreadful*." Rocha's study focuses on how gender is imagined in *Dracula* and the TV series *Penny Dreadful*, and she notes that Lucy's transformation exemplifies one of the threats of vampirism: "the corruption of women into sexual, uncontrollable beings" (31).

21. A good place to start looking into the relationship between Lucy's transformation and male anxiety in the novel is Christopher Craft's "'Kiss Me with Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*." I also recommend looking at Carol Christ's "Victorian Masculinity and the Angel in the House," Andrew Smith's *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity, and the Gothic at the Fin-de-siècle*, and George Stade's "*Dracula's* Women, and Why Men Love to Hate Them."

22. The significance of this image lies in the staining of the purity of Lucy's death robe, not that it is made of lawn fabric. Lawn was simply a very nice fabric during the Victorian period that a woman of Lucy's standing would have worn frequently and would be among her nicest clothing, which she then would have been buried in.

23. Rumors of cannibalism in Ireland date back to some of the earliest accounts of Ireland, but those rumors generally had more to do with human sacrifice and rituals than reactions to food scarcity (Ó Gráda "Eating People" 25). These early rumors of cannibalism make the rumors that surfaced during the famine seem credible to outsiders and lends plausibility to the accounts. However, like many rumors of cannibalism during famines the rumors are difficult to corroborate and are considered a taboo topic. Some written records of the rumors from the 1845 famine include the following: "The Three Angels" by John de Jean Frazer (*The Cork Magazine* August 1848), John Mitchel's mention of "insane mothers [who] began to eat their children, who died of famine before them" in *The Last Conquest of Ireland* (212), newspaper articles in *The Galway Vindicator* (1 April 1848) and *The Times* (23 May 1849), and two open letters from Reverend James Anderson to Prime Minister Lord John Russell published in *The Tablet* that describe an case of famine cannibalism related to him by a relief officer in Claggan (the letters were published in the 26 May 1849 and 16 June 1849 editions respectively). For a detailed synthesis of Irish famine cannibalism and the roots of Irish cannibalism rumors, I suggest reading the "Lucht Feola Daoine dIthe, Consumers of Human Meat" section of Cormac Ó Gráda's *Eating People is Wrong: Famine's Darkest Secret*.