

REGULAR WILD IRISH: RACE, ETHNICITY, AND
IDENTITY IN IRISH AMERICAN FICTION

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ABSTRACT

Regular Wild Irish: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity in Irish American Fiction

examines the ways in which Irish American writers construct “Irishness” in fictional texts which borrow from and respond to literary and cultural discourses in the United States and Ireland in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It analyzes the short fiction and novels of Irish immigrant and Irish American authors writing from the antebellum period through the early twentieth century and particularly focuses on those figures who were publishing in the 1890s. *Regular Wild Irish* considers the links between the representational strategies used by Irish American writers and broader domestic and international discourses of race and ethnicity in the period. It argues that, while participating in various U.S. literary traditions such as sentimentalism, regionalism, and realism, Irish American writers complicated standard literary and visual representations of Irishness. *Regular Wild Irish* establishes that Irish American writers mobilized key, if sometimes competing, cultural discourses to shape an image of the American Irish that both engaged with national and transatlantic popular and literary discourses and theorized emergent forms of ethnic and racial identification in the late nineteenth century. Ultimately, *Regular Wild Irish* demonstrates that if, at the turn into the twenty-first century, Irishness is a “politically insulated” form of ethnic identity fashionable at a moment when white identity seems to be “losing its social purchase,” then it is worth thinking seriously about how Irishness was represented at the turn into the twentieth century, when the terms “white” and “Irish” bore a different, if related, set of anxieties than they do today.

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INTRODUCTION

Irish American fiction of the nineteenth century largely has been ignored by literary scholars due to their understanding that the short stories and novels written by Irish immigrants and their children from the antebellum period through the early twentieth century are marred by sentimental, romantic pretensions. Several “proto-realists” aimed to document Irish American life in the late nineteenth century, but few succeeded and, so the standard interpretation goes, it was James T. Farrell’s *Studs Lonigan* series in the 1930s that authentically inaugurated Irish American fiction. The literature produced by Irish American writers of the mid-to-late twentieth century such as William Kennedy, Maureen Howard, and Alice McDermott has been placed within a literary genealogy that, by and large, begins with Farrell. The critical disregard for nineteenth-century Irish American fiction is particularly striking given the traditional predominance of historicist and materialist analyses of ethnic literature and the fact that, as one of the largest immigrant groups in the nineteenth century, the Irish have been the object of extensive study by scholars of ethnic history. There is a surprising disjuncture between the wealth of historical, sociological, and cultural criticism about Irish immigrants and Irish Americans during the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries and the reluctance, among scholars of Irish American literature, to offer sustained criticism of the fiction produced by authors from these same groups.¹

This dissertation, *Regular Wild Irish: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity in Irish American Fiction*, offers a corrective to this critical neglect. At its most basic level it is a

1 See, for example, Higham, Handlin, Meagher, Miller, Kenny, Igantiev, and Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*.

project of recovery that aims to engage with late nineteenth-century fiction by Irish American writers on their own terms, by recognizing the literary and popular modes they were working in and trying to understand how these writers construct “Irishness” within those modes. It focuses on the short fiction and novels of three authors publishing in the 1890s. It examines: the ways American Celticism inflects the short fiction of poet and essayist Louise Imogen Guiney; the influence of realist representation, reform tracts, and popular cartoons on the *Tenement Tales of New York* by journalist James W. Sullivan; and the regionalism of Kate McPhelim Cleary’s short stories and novel. An analysis of the domestic fiction of the most influential Irish immigrant writer of the antebellum period, Mary Anne Sadlier, and a consideration of Farrell’s *Studs Lonigan* trilogy act as bookends to the central chapters of this project. Because questions about the ethnic identity of a single group are always bound up with representations and definitions of “out groups” the questions driving this project consider not only how Irish American writers construct Irish American identity but also how they represent ethnic and racial identities across ethnic groups in an American context. How do Irish Americans represent racial or ethnic difference in their novels and stories? What does their participation in particular literary genres or popular modes imply for their representations of Irishness? What do their constructions of various ethnic or racial group identities suggest about how they understand the Irish as an ethnic group? What links or dissociations do they represent among Irish America and other non-white or European ethnic groups in the United States?

The primary aim of *Regular Wild Irish* is to situate this body of late nineteenth-century Irish American fiction in relevant literary and cultural contexts and to consider

how ethnic and racial categories of identity are represented within narratives by Guiney, Sullivan, and Cleary. This dissertation's approach to Irish American fiction is advanced through a methodology that analyzes literary texts by Irish Americans alongside canonical texts, short fiction, cartoons, popular novels, and periodicals from the mainstream press and the Catholic and Irish American presses. It examines Irish American fiction within the context of three overlapping registers: nineteenth-century representations of Irishness, changes in the social and economic status of Irish Americans in the late nineteenth century, and the contradictory ideas about the racial status of European immigrants emergent at the turn into the twentieth century. Ultimately, *Regular Wild Irish* demonstrates the ways in which Irish American writers participate in the ambivalent discourses underpinning the representation of Irish Americans and other immigrant groups. It affirms that nineteenth-century Irish American fiction is worthy of critical attention. It argues that Irish American fictional texts make visible the shifting attitudes toward white European American identity in the period while also raising questions about contemporary critical approaches to particular literary modes associated with U.S. fiction.²

Foundational to this dissertation is the argument that the most influential scholars of Irish American literature have been shaped by the "exile motif" within Irish American

2 For purposes of linguistic variety and, more importantly, because I have been unable to find, in cultural treatments of Irishness in the United States in this period, a clear distinction between Irish Americans, Irish immigrants, and the Irish (in Ireland), I use the terms "Irish," "Irish American," and "American Irish" more-or-less interchangeably in this dissertation. When I am discussing the Irish in Ireland I make a point to make that clear. The use of these terms in this manner has a long tradition in Irish American historiography, and I follow historians here, although I admit that the elision between "Irish" and "Irish American" is somewhat problematic for contemporary Irish American studies. Unless otherwise stated, when I use the word "Irishness" I am referring to representations of Irish Americans and/or the Irish in an American context.

culture in their approaches toward nineteenth-century Irish American fiction. The historian Kerby Miller has shown, in his groundbreaking work on Irish immigration to the United States, *Emigrants and Exiles*, that nineteenth-century Irish immigrants were shaped as much by the rural, Catholic culture of Ireland in their interpretation of their identities as immigrants as they were by life in their adopted country or the migration experience itself. Miller argues that the culture of the Irish homeland fostered a worldview and ideology that led millions of Irish immigrants of multiple periods to interpret immigration as forced exile, not as an independent choice of individuals making logical, practical decisions to immigrate in the hope of greater opportunity. Irish immigrants consistently saw themselves as forced out by British or Protestant oppression and poverty and, therefore, the notion of “exile” has been a defining feature of not only first generation immigrant identities but also subsequent generations of Irish Americans. According to Miller, the exile motif has been central to the formation of Irish American group identity into the twentieth century. I am arguing that the inherited feeling of exile among Irish Americans also has an important legacy for critical treatment of nineteenth-century Irish American fiction. That is, the most important figures in the study of Irish American literature have been so influenced by the exile motif that they have interpreted the failure of Irish American writers to measure up to a particular literary standard as an example of the loss associated with exile.

What I want to argue in this dissertation is that the nineteenth-century Catholic Irish in the United States were a diasporic population, but that they were also producing texts which themselves express loss *and* engage in literary and cultural discourses of the nineteenth century in important and exciting ways. I do not want to say that the feeling of

exile outlined by Miller is exaggerated, but rather that it underscores the importance of reading nineteenth-century Irish American fiction with new interest. My analysis implies that former critics of this body of literature were asking a different set of questions than the ones I bring to this project. While the questions previous scholars have asked of nineteenth-century Irish American fiction were partially guided by the methodological assumptions of their period, they were also, I want to suggest, influenced by the sense of exile which has marked Irish American culture for decades. Recognizing the power of the exile motif in Irish American studies is a first step toward both clarifying the critical intervention being offered by this dissertation and understanding the ways in which the methodological assumptions and critical approach of this project diverge from or are consistent with previous scholarship.

The founder of Irish Studies in the United States, John V. Kelleher, explicitly connects the unsuccessful nature of nineteenth-century Irish American fiction with cultural loss in “Irish-American Literature, And Why There Isn’t Any” (1947). This essay focuses on Kelleher’s disappointed if facetious “quest” to write the great Irish American novel—a trilogy that would encompass three generations and allow him to capture Irish American cultural heritage “before it is forgotten altogether.”³ The essay recounts Kelleher’s frustrated attempts to hear realistic stories of nineteenth-century Irish immigrant life. In it, his taciturn grand-uncle named Dan refuses to share his Civil War experiences and Kelleher’s father’s generation represents the intricate mixture of cultures and relationships between the Irish born immigrants and their American born children. For Kelleher, the “contrast between Irish in America and Irish-American . . . was a tangle and not a dichotomy” and it is the story of this knotty experience of Irish American life

3 Kelleher, *Selected Writings on Ireland and Irish America*, 71.

that is lacking in late nineteenth-century Irish American fiction.⁴ The novels Kelleher evaluates are too often sentimental and ruined by a snobbish genteel moralism or they shy away from the realities and poverty of Irish American life. Kelleher's dissatisfaction with the lack of a tradition in Irish American literature is underscored in the essay's closing plea to "know what Dan did or thought or said or hoped, in 1870, in a mill town slum."⁵ Kelleher's essay was written in the post-War years and his approach echoes the influential New Critical school of analysis that has since been dismantled, but his essay is still relevant precisely because it is foundational to the accepted readings of nineteenth-century Irish American fiction today, some sixty years later. His approach to nineteenth-century Irish American fiction is underpinned by a sense of cultural loss which has influenced a newer generation of critics.

Charles Fanning is the most important contemporary critic of Irish American fiction. Fanning has made remarkable progress in recovering texts and identifying key writers and prominent themes in Irish American literature; he has done more for the recovery of nineteenth-century Irish American fiction than anyone else. His *Irish Voice in America: Two-Hundred and Fifty Years of Irish-American Fiction* has gone through two editions and *The Exiles of Erin: Nineteenth Century Irish-American Fiction* is the only access many scholars have to nineteenth-century Irish American literature. In fact, this project—and most recent critical works about Irish American literature—could not have been accomplished without Fanning's pioneering recovery and bibliographical work. In spite of his significant contributions to the field, Fanning's analysis in the *Irish Voice in America* reveals his affiliation with Kelleher's critical assessment of Irish American

4 Ibid., 73.

5 Ibid., 80 and 81.

fiction. He maintains that, with few exceptions, nineteenth-century fiction by Irish Americans is plagued by sentimentalism, didacticism, and romanticism.⁶ His analysis implies that, for the most part, nineteenth-century Irish American fiction is not worthy of extensive critical analysis. Both scholars suggest that writing by Irish Americans from 1845 to 1930 suffers from its inability to live up to the literary standards and talents of major American or Irish literary figures. Following Kelleher, Fanning's tone in *The Irish Voice in America* expresses a sincere regret over the perceived inability of Irish American writers of the nineteenth century to create a sustained body of realistic fiction and suggests that the Irish American tradition in the United States has suffered for it.

Indeed, the Kelleher-Fanning critical perspective has contributed to a lack of critical interest in nineteenth-century Irish American literature and this has directly influenced the representation and understanding of Irish American cultural heritage. For example, a recent volume on Irish American history and culture contains three chapters on Irish American music, dancing, and theater; two on Irish Americans in sports; and three on Irish Americans in labor movements and politics; but dedicates only one chapter to Irish American literature. Typical of other general interest essays on the subject, nineteenth-century writers such as domestic novelist Mary Anne Sadlier and journalist Finley Peter Dunne are recognized briefly but the chapter quickly moves into the discussion of more prominent literary figures of twentieth-century fiction such as Farrell, John O'Hara, Flannery O'Connor, Mary McCarthy, and William Kennedy. The important figure of Eugene O'Neill aside, Irish American literature, as noted above, is generally thought to have been inaugurated with Farrell's *Young Lonigan*. Even the 1997 anthology of Irish American women's writing, *Cabbages and Bones*, begins with a Ruth McKinney

6 See, for example, pages 72-77, 115-118, and 153-158 in *The Irish Voice in America*.

story from 1938. Both popular and scholarly treatments of Irish American fiction tend to occupy themselves with literature of the twentieth century rather than that of an equally rich, and as Kelleher knew, complicated moment in Irish American history and culture: the post-Famine years of the late nineteenth century.

As such, *Regular Wild Irish* has its origins in my own appreciation for the recovery work and analysis scholars, especially Fanning, have done, and my surprise at the lack of a body of critical analysis about nineteenth-century Irish American literary production. It is motivated by my desire to change the discourse about Irish American fiction written during the nineteenth century. Most scholars who have written about nineteenth-century Irish American literature traditionally have done so as a side interest from their primary field of Anglo-Irish literature or Irish studies. In contrast, *Regular Wild Irish* examines Irish American fiction in the context of an emerging and dynamic Irish American identity that was influenced by the complex social, cultural, and economic forces shaping a similarly contingent American national culture and identity. I examine Irish American literature through the lens of contemporary scholarship on ethnic literatures of the U.S. and American literary and cultural history from the antebellum period through the early twentieth century. In *The Invention of Ethnicity* Werner Sollors writes that “[B]y and large, studies tend less to set out to explore [ethnicity’s] construction than to take it for granted as a relatively fixed or, at least, a known and self-evident category.” He continues, “Ethnic groups are typically imagined as if they were natural, real, eternal, stable, and static units. They seem to be always already in existence.”⁷ It is this notion of a stable ethnic identity that is one premise of the critical perspective Fanning and Kelleher share. Their disappointment over the lack of realism in

7 Sollors, *The Invention of Ethnicity*, xiii and xiv.

Irish American literature of the nineteenth century is expressed repeatedly as a sense of loss over a literature that might have but does not sufficiently represent a unified, authentic Irish American cultural past.

My approach entails, alternatively, that any ethnic American identity is incomplete and the result of a complex array of cultural and historical forces. Recognition of the “syncretism” of ethnic identities does not obviate the need for an analysis of the competing constructions of Irish American identity but suggests that the material and social consequences, as well as the literary implications, of these “inventions” are more than facile manifestations. This project, then, acknowledges the constructed or invented nature of ethnic identities while also recognizing the material, social, and political sources and ramifications of racial and ethnic classifications. It aims to dwell within the tension between these defining features of ethnicity.⁸ To do so, *Regular Wild Irish* attends to the significance of the exile motif in the formation of Irish American ethnic group identity, while it simultaneously moves beyond the feeling of cultural loss, dispenses with the New Critical standard, and insists that Irish American writers were producing work consistent with the cultural forms of their day in ways which deserve examination.

Regular Wild Irish situates Irish American fiction within three interrelated categories: shifting nineteenth-century productions of Irishness; transitions within a diversifying Irish American community in the late nineteenth century; and unstable and

8 This dissertation recognizes that “identity” is a term as complex as “ethnicity” and resists defining “identity” as a fixed category. The two broad theoretical perspectives on “identity” are essentialist and constructionist. To cite Danielle Russell “the essentialists contend that there exists an inner essence which is expressible through language. The constructionists counter that the subject is shaped by systems of language, culture, and ideology” (5). I follow the sense of “identity” defined by the constructionist perspective in this dissertation.

contradictory attitudes toward European immigrant groups whose white legal status was subject to repeated questioning in social and cultural contexts throughout this period. A consideration of the first of these categories, popular and changing productions of Irishness, shows that the Irish had a presence in American culture from at least the early nineteenth century. The earliest and most pervasive representation of the Irish in the United States came in the form of the “stage Irishman” who first appeared on the American scene in the character of Trushoop—an Irish immigrant cooper who drank, sang, and danced in *The Disappointment, or the Force of Credulity* (1767), a comic opera.⁹ The obstreperous, temperamental, imbibing stage Irishman had various cultural manifestations in the following years, many of which were consistent with depictions of the Irish in popular novels imported from London or Dublin, such as Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* (1800), Lady Morgan’s *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) and, later, Samuel Lover’s *Handy Andy* (1843).¹⁰ Most representations of the Irish in the nineteenth century had their roots in or were synonymous with the stage Irishman known as the Irish “Paddy.” The Paddy and his female counterpart the “Bridget” (or “Biddy”) were typically rendered as drunken, menacing, and surly. The props which accompanied these figures were “pigs in the parlor,” whisky, and fights turned into brawls.¹¹

Both Americans and Irish immigrants participated in the production of the stage Irish and, as one critic has noted, “subsequently each decade had its own dominant stage-Irish figure: Irish actor-manager Tyrone Power in the 1830s, Dublin-born actor playwright John Broughman in the 1840s, rough and ready ‘Mose, the Bowery b’hoj’ the intrepid volunteer fireman of music-hall farce in the 1850s” and Dion Boucicault and

9 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 12.

10 Ibid., 13-14.

11 Dezell, *Irish America*, 18-19.

Edward Harrigan at the end of the nineteenth century.¹² The characteristics of the stage Irishman had a long life in the American theater and were, from their earliest appearance, transported to other cultural forms in the United States including newspaper articles, cartoons, and popular fiction.

Perhaps the most familiar Irish fictional figure of early nineteenth-century American literature is Teague O'Regan, the drinking, bumbling, and "blarneying" character of Hugh Henry Brackenridge's novel, *Modern Chivalry*, published in multiple volumes during the years, 1792 to 1815. The popularity of *Modern Chivalry* marks Teague as the first in "a long parade of stereotypical Irish figures in mainstream American fiction" all of whom shared the characteristics of the stage Irish.¹³ During the early antebellum period, "rowdy and undisciplined behavior" occasionally was called "acting Irish" and, by the mid-nineteenth century, the Irish were often depicted as marked by an inherited poverty, captured by a superstitious religion, and having a racial difference potentially dangerous to American life.¹⁴ As will be discussed in Chapter One, the domestic servant, the Bridget, appeared frequently in mid-century women's magazines and Irish Catholic priests were often featured in anti-Catholic sensational fiction leading up the Civil War. A notable fictional character of the Civil War years was Private Miles O'Reilly created by Charles C. Halpine. O'Reilly was both soldier and war correspondent whose tales from the front were collected and reprinted multiple times as *The Life, Adventures, Songs, Services and Speeches of Private Miles O'Reilly*. Private O'Reilly's "accounts" were said to have entertained President Lincoln and reached best-

12 Fanning, *Irish Voice* 12-13.

13 Ibid., 13.

14 Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 107.

seller status.¹⁵

By the late nineteenth century, Irish materials and Irish American figures increasingly were the subject of fictional treatment. Horatio Alger's tales consistently included Irish American street kids as foils to the boy heroes. A number of well-known authors of this period also adopted Irish themes or created Irish American characters including Harold Frederic, Richard Harding Davis, W.D. Howells, and Sarah Orne Jewett. Stephen Crane's *Maggie* is probably one of the most recognizable novels of the late nineteenth-century Irish immigrant ghetto. Maggie's mother, Mrs. Johnson, epitomizes the masculine, violent, and drunken stereotype of the female Irish and the novel's protagonist, Maggie, is a remarkable character, for the narrator, because this "pretty girl" somehow escaped the inherited dirt and filth of the slums. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, over the course of the century, the standard representations of the Irish had expanded to include not simply excessive drinking, violence, and poverty, but often were accompanied by ritualistic Catholic traits such as the "Irish" wake and keening.

While early to mid-nineteenth-century representations of the Paddy often contained elements of religious and economic degradation variously suggestive of inherited traits and an element of threatening violence or Celtic racial difference, by the turn into the twentieth century, representations of the Irish were fairly innocuous. There still was considerable popular interest in "backward" Irish figures, but, because of economic and political gains—among an array of other social and cultural changes—these representations were considerably less culturally powerful than in the past. More often than not, the Paddy was transformed from the violent and bumbling figure captured

15 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 85-86.

by police and thrown in the “Paddy” wagon to the harmless and well meaning driver of the police car.¹⁶ The house maid, Bridget, became a softer figure who still fumbled the cooking instructions but with less masculine overtones and a bit of respectability. Additionally, in the 1880s, Irish Americans began to campaign against negative representations of Irishness in the popular press. They counteracted such depictions of the Paddy with statues celebrating Irish heroes and heritage.¹⁷ There was also, among Irish Americans, a new embrace of the ancient Celtic culture of Ireland which fostered a sense of Irish race pride. The late nineteenth century was a period in which popular depictions of the Irish in the United States, while anchored in a long history of the familiar Paddy and associated characteristics of Irishness, were less invidious due to political, social, and economic shifts both within Irish American culture and the larger U.S. culture.

A second important context for thinking about Irish American literature in this period consists of the important changes and conflicts within traditional Irish American communities in the late nineteenth century. By the 1890s, Irish America was becoming an increasingly diversified group. On the one hand, immigrants continued to come at a fairly high annual rate from the poorest regions of Ireland with little to no skills, no resources, and as primarily-Gaelic speaking or bilingual.¹⁸ On the other hand, Irish Americans who were the children of Famine immigrants began to rise in status. While the newer immigrants took lower paying jobs, the more established Irish Americans obtained higher paying positions as laborers or moved into middle-class occupations altogether. These class and cultural differences caused fissures within Irish American communities. Even though the “lace curtain” Irish placed pianos in their parlors and tried to mix with the

16 Dezell, 18-21.

17 Casey, “Ireland, New York, and the Irish Image in American Popular Culture,” 85-103.

18 Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 346.

Anglo-American-dominated middle classes, it was difficult for the upwardly mobile to ignore the harsh realities of working-class and ghetto life; for most of the middle-class Irish, material success was accompanied by the sense that economic security was precarious at best. This insecurity was only exacerbated by the weight of newly arrived, and generally poor, immigrant “cousins.”¹⁹

Finally, the period at the turn into the twentieth century was also a crucial one for changing attitudes toward the racial status of European ethnic groups in American culture more broadly. From 1880 to 1920 mass immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe vastly altered the ethnic population of the United States and it, along with Jim Crow legislation, was an important feature of a culture in which consent and descent notions of identity were circulating and contested. As David Roediger has argued, when the nineteenth century closed fears that “the United States was about to lose its racial moorings” were rampant and the racialized “inbetween” status of Southern and Eastern European immigrants partially fueled these fears.²⁰ Attitudes toward race were inconsistent and often contradictory. While theories of the race sciences—in which racial groups were placed in a hierarchy of most-to-least civilized—circulated in popular periodicals and were readily consumed by the public, there was also the sense that “race was at once biological and cultural, inherited and acquired.”²¹

Regular Wild Irish draws from recent sociological definitions of “race” and “ethnicity” when using these terms in a contemporary context. From this perspective “race” is a categorization in which a large number of people sharing visible biological

19 Miller, 494.

20 Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 7. See Sollors’s *Beyond Ethnicity* for analysis of debates on consent and descent notions of ethnicity.

21 Roediger, *Working*, 35.

characteristics regard themselves or are regarded by others as a single group on that basis and “ethnicity” is a categorization based on shared cultural traits such as nation of origin, language, religion, and may also include race. Even though today it is more accurate to refer to Irish Americans as an ethnic group and not a racial group, when examining specific texts produced in nineteenth-century culture, as in a discussion of “Irish race pride” in Irish American fiction, and consistent with the language of the period, I often use the term “race.”²² My use of the anachronistic meaning for “race” is meant to reflect the common usage of the late nineteenth century, even though, admittedly, the term “ethnicity” quite often seems the more natural choice given contemporary definitions of these terms.

More specifically, in this period, there was not a clear sense of “ethnicity” as it is used today. The mid- to late twentieth century conceit of an “amalgamated” whiteness which eventually would identify all Americans of European descent as white in contrast to Americans of other ethnic backgrounds who were legally defined as non-white was not inevitable in the 1880s. According to Matthew Frye Jacobson, the processes by which these new European immigrants became “Americanized” as “Caucasian” and finally understood as racially similar to the dominant white culture in the United States was “nonlinear” and “glacial.”²³ Importantly, the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was a transitional period toward the cultural dominance of that broad understanding of whiteness. In short, the sense that American national identity was dominated by an amalgamated “white” identity dissociated from, for example, an Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-Norman descent occurred gradually as various race theories circulated

22 Parrillo, Chapter 1.

23 Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, Introduction and passim.

and finally were victorious in creating the quota system for European immigration in the 1920s. After the Johnson Reed act of 1924, the decrease in immigration allayed fears of European immigrant “mongrelization” of the United States. By mid-century, two world wars, the “racial limitations” of the New Deal, and the growth of the predominantly white suburbs aided the consolidation of a white and Caucasian racial identity familiar to most Americans today.²⁴

Attention to the confluence of these changes in cultural productions of Irishness, within the growing Irish American community, and toward racial categorizations of European immigrant groups underscores the importance of this project’s consideration of Irish American representations of Irish American identity in this period. It demonstrates that the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries were transitional for Irish Americans in a variety of ways. To further illustrate the complicated nature of the place of the Irish in this period, it is worth pausing upon Roediger’s analysis of the evolution of the anti-Italian (and before that anti-African American) racial slur of “guinea.” His discussion deserves review because it offers a good example of the “inconclusively white” status of the “new” immigrants and, more important for the framing of this dissertation, the somewhat precarious racial identity of the Irish in terms of slowly changing definitions of racial difference.²⁵ It demonstrates the more-or-less privileged, but uneasy, location of Irish racial status among the newer immigrants in the shifting racial landscape at the turn into the twentieth century.

24 Roediger, *Working*, 203. For a discussion of race, whiteness, and the New Deal see Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, Chapter 7. For a discussion of the legal and intellectual shifts underpinning the consolidation of white European American identity see Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*.

25 Jacobson, *Whiteness*, 65. Jacobson cites *Rollins vs. Alabama* (1922) in which an Alabama Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the conviction of an African American man, Jim Rollins, for marrying a Sicilian immigrant, Edith Labue. The court said there was not enough reliable evidence that Labue was a white woman—she was not “conclusively” white (4, 64-65).

“Guinea” began as a term for the gold coins which “took their name from the African slave trade for which they provided currency” in the seventeenth century. By the eighteenth century, African Americans began to be referred to as “guineas” as either a designation of people from a particular geographical region of Africa or as a racial slur. In Boston there was a section largely populated by African Americans called “New Guinea” and in the nineteenth century “slaves and free blacks sometimes employed the term as a badge of identity and a loose marker of origins in Africa.” By the time the “second wave” immigrants arrived the term solidly was associated with blackness and “guinea” began to be applied to Italians and, sometimes, Spanish, Greek, Jewish and Portuguese immigrants, as a way of marking their racial proximity to African Americans rather than Anglo-Saxon American whites.²⁶

In his discussion of “guinea” Roediger, then, outlines the way an old term (sometimes used to refer to black racial difference) was used to designate the racial difference of new populations of immigrant Americans resulting from Southern and Eastern European immigration. It also is suggestive for the ways the Irish were situated in these “messy” racial designations.²⁷ His analysis shows that Irishness was often associated with a problematic racial difference at mid-century and that it still had the potential to signify proximity to black racial difference in the late nineteenth century. Roediger cites *The Confidence Man* in which Melville portrays a “Black Guinea” begging for coins “either as a blackfaced white trickster or as a black mountebank who would whiten up in subsequent disguises.” The Irish American dominance in antebellum blackface minstrelsy (not to mention off-stage practices of blackface among Irish

26 Roediger, *Working*, 39.

27 *Ibid.*, 5.

Americans in Philadelphia and elsewhere) is suggestive for the relationship between Melville's character and "Irishness."²⁸ Further, Roediger points up Frances E. W. Harper's novel *Trial and Triumph* in which "guinea" is used in direct "proximity with questions regarding the [Irish] immigrant's whiteness." In one scene in the novel an African American schoolgirl has a dispute with an Irish American classmate and later comments on her inability to express her anger: "My Guinea was up, but I was afraid to show it." Roediger argues that Harper's replacement of the more familiar phrase for being angry—"to get my Irish up"—with one using the term "guinea" blurs the boundaries between Irishness and Africanness in Harper's late nineteenth-century novel.²⁹

Roediger's history of the term "guinea" captures the transitional moment in American racial categorizations and Irish placement within these hierarchies best when illuminated by a related note about Louise Imogen Guiney. Guiney was the daughter of upwardly mobile Irish immigrants and her essays and stories are the subject of Chapter Two. She was well read and drew the affection of the Boston literary elites; Annie Fields, Jewett, and others took a liking to Guiney's sharp wit and skill as a poet. Of these, as a young writer, Guiney most admired Olive Wendell Holmes. Holmes, significantly, referred to Guiney as his "little golden guinea."³⁰ Holmes's reference to Guiney as his "guinea" was doubtless a pun on her last name; however, it also demonstrates the ways, at the turn into the twentieth century, the middle-class Irish were on the cusp of full access to the social, cultural, and political privileges white legal status offered, which

28 Ibid., 38. For a discussion of the role of Irish Americans in antebellum blackface minstrelsy and of "blackface masking" by Irish Americans perpetrating violence against African Americans, see Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 103-104, 107.

29 Ibid.

30 Fairbanks, *Louise Imogen Guiney*, ix.

they had been benefiting from since at least the early nineteenth century, and the ways Irish racial status was still somewhat threatening. The precarious and contradictory nature of Irish racial status is, on the one hand, partially a function of the fact that, as noted above, the nation itself was deeply influenced by scientific racism and slowly moving toward a broader definition of white identity as “Caucasian” and, on the other hand, a result of the legacy of the suspect nature of Irish racial and religious difference. Holmes’s reference to Guiney as his “guinea” signals that the association between the Irish and a problematic racial identity still obtained in some form at the turn into the twentieth century.

Moreover, questions about representational strategies in Irish American fiction are particularly interesting in this moment due to the transitions within Irish American culture, within the framework of gradually changing ideas about race and ethnicity in the United States more broadly, and within the evolution of productions of “Irishness” in nineteenth-century America. As this dissertation demonstrates, fictional texts by Guiney, Sullivan, and Cleary tend to normalize Irish American white status and to take for granted many of the privileges that entails while also theorizing the processes of, not “becoming white,” as such, but of the amalgamation of “marginal” white groups into the Caucasian race. Through a set of familiar strategies for representing race, racial difference, and whiteness such as miscegenation fantasies, references to blackface or “blackening up,” and inquiries into the representation of vulnerable white womanhood, Guiney, Sullivan, and Cleary variously represent and complicate caricatured depictions of Irish American identity and critique Irish American group practices. Drawing upon some of these familiar forms of designating racial otherness and ethnic affiliation in late nineteenth-

century American literature and culture they explore the manner of the relationships between the Irish and other ethnic groups in the United States. By engaging with popular literary and cultural forms such as American Celticism, urban realism, the literature of tenement reform, and regionalist fiction, they pose questions about what a European racial background means for Irish or Irish American racial status. In sum, in sometimes competing ways, and to varying degrees, the texts under consideration in this dissertation all reveal the stakes involved for Irish Americans and Irish immigrants in the transitional moment among European immigrant groups and the shift toward mid-to-late twentieth-century ideas about which groups could claim (and to what degree they could claim) a white and Caucasian racial identity.

As yet, there are no critical volumes focusing strictly on nineteenth-century Irish American literature, but there are a few studies of twentieth-century Irish American fiction worth noting.³¹ In 1979, Daniel J. Casey and Robert E. Rhodes edited the first critical work dedicated to the examination Irish American fiction. The Casey and Rhodes volume, *Irish-American Fiction: Essays in Criticism*, set out to analyze works which “illuminate[s] the life of the American Irish community.” The editors and contributors consider Irish American fiction “for the ways in which it supports or contradicts stereotypes of the Irish character and provides background for disputed factual issues.”³² Canonical and better-known figures, such as Finley Peter Dunne, F. Scott Fitzgerald,

31 There have been numerous studies which concentrate on specific authors associated with late nineteenth-century Irish American literature such as literary biographies of Finley Peter Dunne, Kate Cleary, and Louise Guiney and journal articles on Katherine Conway, James Jeffrey Roche, and John Boyle O’Reilly. Works by Dunne and Guiney are currently anthologized in the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*.

32 Casey and Rhodes, *Irish-American Fiction*, x.

Farrell, Edwin O'Connor, and Elizabeth Cullinan are discussed in individual chapters. Other essays in the collection consider fictional texts by John O'Hara and John McHale as well as Jimmy Breslin and Pete Hamill. Most of the women writers included in the volume are discussed in a single chapter: "Women's Perspectives in Irish-American Fiction from Betty Smith to Mary McCarthy." The collection also includes a selected bibliography of fifty-two Irish American authors. Echoing Kelleher, the editors explain their volume's focus by saying: "In truth Irish-American fiction has only lately come of age—Irish immigrants to America were, in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, more pragmatic and less inclined toward literature."³³ While the editors of *Irish-American Fiction* maintain the bias toward twentieth-century literature in Irish American studies, which I discussed earlier, this work of criticism is an important initial work of recovery.

A second significant publication on Irish American literature came in the form of a 1993 special edition of the journal *Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the United States* (MELUS) dedicated to Irish American literature and edited by Fanning. This edition expanded on the work of Casey and Rhodes's book by examining drama and poetry in addition to fiction. Joyce Flynn's essay on "the iconology of the subterranean in late nineteenth-century Irish American drama" is an early critical work to engage with nineteenth-century literary productions by Irish Americans.³⁴ The issue also includes two essays on novels from William Kennedy's Albany series; an article on Mary Doyle Curran's autobiographical novel, *The Parish and the Hill*; an essay on twentieth-century Irish American political novels; and an examination of Maureen Howard's autobiography

33 Ibid., 174.

34 Fanning, "Irish-American Literature."

Facts of Life. The issue ends with a section called “Reconsideration: James T. Farrell” which includes three essays on Farrell’s work and life and the publication of an early Farrell story “The Dance Marathons.” This volume, as much as anything else, has solidified the centrality of Farrell (and, by association, the mid-twentieth century) to Irish American literature: a portrait of Farrell adorns the cover of this edition of the MELUS journal.

There has been increased critical interest in Irish American fiction more recently, with three volumes published within the last decade: Ron Ebest’s *Private Histories: The Writing of Irish Americans, 1900-1935* (2006); Margaret Hallissy’s *Reading Irish-American Fiction: The Hyphenated Self* (2006); and Sally Barr Ebest’s and Kathleen McInerney’s *Too Smart to Be Sentimental: Contemporary Irish American Women Writers* (2008). Ron Ebest’s *Private Histories* is a literary history that addresses the lack of attention to early twentieth-century fiction among scholars of Irish American literature. *Private Histories* identifies common themes shared by writers of this period. His study considers texts by F. Scott Fitzgerald and Eugene O’Neill as well as lesser known writers such as mystery writer John McIntyre and novelist and labor activist Jim Tully, among others. The key themes he focuses on include religion, marriage, family, disease, economic hardship, social status, and education. Hallissy’s *Reading Irish-American Fiction* analyzes five novels by Irish immigrants and Irish Americans. These works were all published in the last decade of the twentieth century but span key moments of Irish American history as they are set in the United States and Ireland in years between the Famine and the late twentieth century. Hallissy exploits the broad historical span of these novels to “fill in the blanks” for Irish Americans interested in their cultural history. Her

goal is to educate readers about the Irish past and its relationship to Irish American life. Finally, Sally Barr Ebest's and McInerney's *Too Smart to Be Sentimental* is the first critical text entirely devoted to Irish American women writers. The contributors write about fiction, nonfiction, and poetry by Mary McCarthy, Elizabeth Cullinan, Maureen Howard, Mary Gordon, Alice McDermott, and others.

Consistent with the changes in the study of ethnic literature in general, these contemporary critical texts break from the Casey and Rhodes volume's examination of Irish American literature as a either a documentation or "defense" of Irish American life.³⁵ Instead, they approach ethnic literature as both a potential passage to historical realities and as representative of symbolic forms of identity in which ethnicity is a form of performance. This dissertation shares the approach of these texts in that, as suggested above, it aims to work within this same tension between the contingent and performative nature of ethnic identity and the deep material and social implications that are the product of ethnic and racial group identifications and associations. Indeed, it is these dynamics—and the power of racial and ethnic discourses in American culture—which make the study of ethnic literature so vital and important today.

Regular Wild Irish departs from these recent studies if not in kind then in tone, in that both *Private Histories* and *Reading Irish-American Fiction* are occupied by what they identify as an incongruity between the past or present experiences of Irish Americans and the representation of that experience in Irish American cultural productions or American culture at large. That is, they set out to "understand the Irish American past" through reading and understanding Irish American fiction primarily

35 Ferraro, *Ethnic Passages*, 2. See Ferraro, Introduction, for an overview of the study of ethnic literature in the United States from the mid-1970s through the late twentieth century.

because they see ethnic fiction as either having “distort[ed]” the truth about the “lived experiences” of Irish American lives³⁶ or, they see Irish Americans as “victim[s] of cultural disintegration.”³⁷ This dissertation aligns itself with these recent critical works in that each proclaims itself to be a work of recovery and by implication each aims to recover something which is “lost”; however, *Regular Wild Irish* is not invested in recovering an essential Irish American experience that needs to be uncovered because of the ways past Irish-American writers distorted the representation of Irishness or because Irishness itself has been co-opted by late twentieth-century consumer culture. More simply, this dissertation is interested in recovering lost texts that have been dismissed because they have been seen as not representative enough or not representing a particular version of Irishness. In these ways, even though contemporary critical works on twentieth-century Irish American literature largely are consistent with critical perspectives in contemporary ethnic literature which allow for a more complex perspective than in the early days of the field’s emergence, they are still bound by earlier approaches largely shaped by the exile motif in Irish American culture.

Exemplifying the ways in which Irish American studies historically has been and continues to be tied to Irish studies, Sally Ebest’s and McInerney’s *Too Smart to Be Sentimental* is modeled on the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Literature: Irish Women’s Writing and Tradition*. The collection is organized by theme. Some of the areas covered include: religion, science, technology and ethics, feminism, culture, among others. While the link between Irish studies and the study of Irish American literature is, in and of itself, a positive thing, the title of this recent text betrays the ways this generally beneficial

36 Ron Ebest, *Private Histories*, 10.

37 Hallissy, *Reading Irish-American Fiction*, 6.

relationship has fostered a lack of attention to the broad critical history of American and American ethnic literatures in the study of Irish American literature. While the title is drawn from a quote by Maureen Howard, the fact that the editors assert the importance of contemporary Irish American women's writing by treating, explicitly and implicitly, the sentimental tradition (typically associated in U.S. literary studies with nineteenth-century women's writing) as anathema to contemporary women's writing reveals the depth of the influence of Kelleher and Fanning's critical assessments. Their title selection is surprising given that, as will be discussed in Chapter One, the Irish immigrant writer Mary Anne Sadlier is squarely and indisputably part of the sentimental tradition shared by other antebellum women writers and she was likely the most influential Irish Catholic writer of the nineteenth century and arguably the most important Irish American writer of that period. That the title of the very first critical collection dedicated to Irish American women's writing takes scornful aim at the sentimental tradition demonstrates the extent to which the study of Irish American writing is desperately in need of more substantive integration into questions central to ethnic American and nineteenth-century American literatures more generally. Greater critical scope and attention to pre-twentieth-century writing are necessary for the study of Irish American literature to be more widely relevant today. My hope is that *Regular Wild Irish* will be an initial step in making it so.

It seems to me that those of us working in the study of Irish American literature and culture need to be reminded of an early "suggestion" for those working in ethnic literature: "Your subject is part of a larger subject; your endeavors are part of American studies and comparative Literature. Never lose sight of these connections; and, as most American ethnic writers have done, keep in touch with non-ethnic and non-American

literature.”³⁸ Irish American studies is uniquely situated among ethnic literatures of the United States in that its historical ties to Irish studies (discourses of the “homeland”) mean that there is a well established framework for comparative analysis. Transnational studies, diaspora studies, and postcolonial studies are increasingly important in both the fields of American literature and Irish studies and the historical affiliation between Irish studies and Irish American studies suggests that scholars have been doing the kind of analysis which is popular today for quite some time. Further, it implies that they are certain to continue producing interesting work in conversation with these fields given the demand for such perspectives. With the growth of American studies programs abroad, it is also clear that a new generation of American studies scholars, trained in contemporary ethnic literatures of the United States, are bringing to bear the types of questions borne out of ethnic studies on twentieth-century Irish immigrant and Irish American literature more and more. This dissertation hopes to encourage scholars to continue to foster that relationship while also calling attention to the importance of an earlier body of work, and critical contexts traditionally associated with the study of American immigrant writing, which can only raise new and provocative questions for the fields of Irish American literature, nineteenth-century American literature, twentieth-century American literature, Irish studies, American studies, and diaspora studies.

This dissertation focuses on Irish American fiction written in the last decades of the nineteenth century; however, Irish Americans and Irish immigrants have been publishing in the United States since the Revolutionary period with a considerable number of Irish Americans publishing throughout the nineteenth-and twentieth-centuries.

38 Sollors, “Nine Suggestions for Historians of American Ethnic Literature,” 95.

Irish American literature written prior to 1900 has been divided into three periods: the satirical writers of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries; the didactic writers of the Famine generation, and the “romantic realists” of the late nineteenth century. The first known Irish American writer was Lawrence Sweeney who produced satirical broadsides and was a journalist in New York City in the 1760s. He also was known for “calling out gory headlines of the fighting during the French and Indian wars.”³⁹ Other figures of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Irish American literature include Matthew Carey, John McDermott Moore, James McHenry, and Charles Cannon. The Dublin-born Carey was a prosperous publisher and bookseller in Philadelphia who wrote satirical pamphlets. His writings supported Catholic emancipation in Ireland, national unity during the War of 1812, and proper treatment of Irish Americans.⁴⁰ Similarly, Moore was a satirist who poked fun at the treatment of the Irish in the United States as well as American stereotypes of the Irish. He published two books in the 1830s and 1840s, one of which was the first in the United States which used Irish folk materials in an original text. He also edited two newspapers oriented toward Irish and Irish American concerns: *Irishman and Foreigner’s Advocate* and the *European*.⁴¹ McHenry and Cannon were the first two Irish American writers who aimed to make careers as novelists. Neither McHenry nor Cannon embraced the satirical style of Sweeney, Carey, or Moore. McHenry wrote four historical novels set in the United States, Ireland, and, sometimes, both. Cannon was a playwright, poet, and novelist whose most famous play *The Oath of Office* (1850) recalled the tale of a fifteenth-century Galway tragedy in which the town mayor hangs his only son. The turn away from the satirical habits of late eighteenth-

39 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 7.

40 *Ibid.*, 18-26.

41 *Ibid.*, 28-38.

century writers in the works of McHenry and Cannon has been read as symbolic of the new tempo of Irish immigrant life ushered in by the Great Famine and the Famine immigration which began in the late 1840s.⁴²

The most prominent writer of the antebellum period, and into the 1870s, as previously noted, was Mary Anne Sadlier. An immigrant from Western Ireland, Sadlier was an ardent Catholic and domestic novelist well connected in the publishing industry whose didactic novels were influential for a generation of Irish American Catholics. Sadlier's fiction is the subject of Chapter One, but there were contemporaries of Sadlier who deserve mention. Two priests, John Boyce and John Quigley wrote novels during this period. Boyce, a Donegal native, wrote under the pseudonym Paul Peppergrass, and moved to the United States in 1845. He published three novels, the most famous of which is *Shanty Maguire, or Tricks upon Travellers* (1845). He also wrote criticism and shorter pieces for periodicals such as the *Metropolitan Magazine* of Baltimore and the *Pilot* of Boston. Quigley, like Sadlier, wrote didactic fiction aimed at instructing Irish immigrants how to keep the faith in the United States. A third figure, Fitz-James O'Brien, was an immigrant from Skibbereen, an area hit especially hard by the Famine. O'Brien was a journalist and bohemian figure associated with the Pfaff's crowd. He wrote a number of short stories, the most interesting of which are Gothic tales in the spirit of Poe and reflect images of starvation and death suggestive of the Great Hunger. O'Brien died relatively young as a Union soldier in the Civil War.⁴³

The third nineteenth-century generation of Irish American writers, the post-Famine writers who came of age in the late nineteenth century, have been read as

42 Ibid., 38-71.

43 Ibid., 87-88.

producing literature that “mirrors the [. . .] ambivalent culture that produced it.”⁴⁴ The dissertation focuses on writers of this group, Louise Guiney and her mentor, the famine immigrant and nationalist John Boyle O’Reilly (Chapter Two), the journalist and reformer, James W. Sullivan (Chapter Three), and the regionalist writer, Kate McPhelim Cleary (Chapter Four). The Irish American writers who stand out among many writers of this period, but are not the subject of this dissertation, are Finley Peter Dunne and James Eagan. Fanning has read the pair as representative of the “two opposing strains of the Irish voice in American literature” of this period found in the debate in literary circles over romance and realism.⁴⁵ Eagan was “the quintessential romantic writer whose dozen works of fiction mirror perfectly the genteel Irish American mind in its nascent state, and Dunne, a pioneering realist whose chronicles of the common life of working-class immigrants constitute the coming of age of Irish-American fiction.”⁴⁶ Dunne’s column about the fictional Irish immigrant bartender, Mr. Dooley, begun in 1893, was widely popular for Dooley’s quips and made Dunne famous in his time. Dunne collected some of these articles in *Mr. Dooley in Peace and War* (1898) and *Mr. Dooley in the Hearts of his Countrymen* (1899). Since then, Dunne has been praised for the skill with which he presented Irish immigrant dialect in the figure of Dooley and his band of densely accented customers from the Bridgeport section of Chicago who animated Dunne’s column of the *Chicago Evening Post* each week.

Irish American literature of the early twentieth century has largely been defined by the lack of attention to ethnic identity in the fiction of major figures of various generations such as Fitzgerald, O’Connor, and O’Hara. Those writers who did examine

44 Ibid., 156.

45 Ibid., 198; 156.

46 Ibid., 198.

ethnic identity in their early work tended to move on to other careers in the long run. The “cultural amnesia” of well-known figures who published in the early to mid-twentieth century was counterbalanced by the emergence of several autobiographical novels in the thirties and forties. These “regional realists,” Betty Smith, Edward McSorely, and Mary Doyle Curran, gained some prominence, but the most acclaimed writer of this period to consider Irish American life was James T. Farrell, whose early work will be the subject of the concluding section of this dissertation.⁴⁷

After World War II, with the help of the GI Bill and symbolized by the election of John F. Kennedy, Irish Americans moved securely into the middle class and new generation of writers emerged including: Edwin O’Connor, Elizabeth Cullinan, Maureen Howard, and William Kennedy.⁴⁸ O’Connor was a radio announcer and journalist who wrote five novels about priests and politicians and Irish American “public life” before his sudden death at forty-nine in 1968. *The Last Hurrah*, his most famous novel, is deemed the most popular Irish American novel since *Studs Lonigan*.⁴⁹ Elizabeth Cullinan’s first short stories, later collected as *Time of Adam*, first appeared in the *New Yorker* magazine where she worked as a secretary. Her realistic fiction narrates the domestic lives of Irish American women and conflicts between Irish and Irish American cultural identities. Maureen Howard has written seven novels, the most famous of which are *Bridgeport Bus* and *Natural History*. Like Cullinan, she focuses on Irish American female protagonists. She is often read for the ways she breaks conventional narrative modes and for her critique of the constrictive nature of Irish American ethnic neighborhoods. Finally, William Kennedy is probably one of the most successful Irish American authors writing

47 Ibid., 238.

48 Ibid., 312.

49 Ibid., 312-317.

today. A recipient of the MacArthur Foundation “genius” award, he is best known for his Albany series of novels. Among his Albany-set fictions is *Ironweed* (1983). A fascinating text of magic realism, *Ironweed* justifies Fanning’s claim that Kennedy is one of the best Irish American fiction writers of the contemporary period.⁵⁰

As the above review of key figures and trends in Irish American literature shows, Irish immigrants and Irish Americans have been publishing in the United States since the nation’s founding. While there were a variety of Irish American authors writing during the late nineteenth century, the period of central importance to this project, the Irish immigrant and Irish American writers whose works are examined in *Regular Wild Irish* were selected because they all actively engage with the cultural and literary discourses of their day. The dissertation begins with a reading of two novels by the most prominent Irish immigrant writer of the Famine generation. Chapter One, “Irishmen and Americans at the Same Time: Mary Anne Sadlier’s Domestic Fiction of the Famine Immigration” sets forth the historical contexts relevant to and themes prominent in Sadlier’s novels. These themes are also operative in the texts produced by writers of the next generation. The chapter examines the ways in which Sadlier uses the primary mode of women writers of the period, the domestic novel, to critique and revise contemporary representations of Irish Catholics. The first portion of the chapter focuses on her best-selling novel, *The Blakes and the Flanagans*. Authored during the rise of the nativist party of the antebellum years, this text voices Sadlier’s opposition to the anti-Catholic images circulating in both the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the American Party and within the genre of escaped nun’s tales that had resurgence in the 1850s. In the second half of the chapter,

⁵⁰ Ibid., Chapter 10.

I situate Sadlier's *Con O'Regan* in terms of its project to create an Irish-only community in the American West. I consider how Sadlier exploits the domestic ideologies prevalent at the time to problematize the projection of the "foreign" influences inherent in images of immigrant domestic servants, to counteract other women writers' "domestication" of the sensational anti-Catholic story, and to recalibrate the ways in which domestic discourses define national borders at the same time they define the home.

Chapters Two through Four encompass the primary study of this dissertation in which I examine the short fiction and novels of three Irish American writers of the late nineteenth century whose works are associated with three different literary modes: American Celticism, urban realism, and regionalism. Chapter two, "Regular Wild Irish: American Celticism, John Boyle O'Reilly, and Louise Imogen Guiney's 'Civil War' Martyrs" addresses Irish America's increasing identification with a romanticized Celtic past through the lens of Louise Imogen Guiney's work. During this period, there was, among Irish Americans, a growing interest in Irish and Gaelic cultural history and folk materials coincident with the both the Irish Literary Renaissance and the rise of U.S. imperialism. That is, at the same moment in which Irish nationalism was growing in the United States among Irish Americans, the U.S. government was fostering new, friendly relations with Great Britain as a result of wars with Spain. This chapter considers Guiney's stories and essays in terms of these literary and political contexts. Guiney began her writing career as a contributor to the period's most influential Irish American publication, the *Boston Pilot*. Chapter Two examines the ways in which Guiney transforms the "manly" representation of Irish race pride that she inherited from the influential Fenian exile, and editor of the *Pilot*, John Boyle O'Reilly, into a form of pan-

Catholicism. It argues that she uses the features of Celticism and the theme of “civil war” to recover shared racial affiliations among English Protestant and Irish Catholic cultures in the United States and abroad.

Chapter Three, “Revisiting Rum Alley: James W. Sullivan’s *Tenement Tales of New York*” analyzes Irish American fiction about urban immigrant life in the context of the most famous novel of the Irish American ghetto, Crane’s *Maggie*, and other late nineteenth-century stories, sketches, and cartoons about European immigrants. Recent criticism has shown the ways in which the age of realism emerged during the great “age of caricature” and that ethnic caricature performed an important role within the realist literary and political agenda. Against this critical context, Chapter Three examines the urban realism of the journalist and reformer James W. Sullivan. Sullivan’s stories of class passing among Irish tenement figures and mixed marriage among the middle-class Irish both challenge reform movements that perpetuate prejudicial assumptions about slum dwellers and demonstrate what is at stake in claims to Irish American upward mobility in a racially stratified society. Fundamentally, I argue that Sullivan, inspired by the economic philosophy of Henry George, creates a dual purpose Irishness to challenge the implications of type used in urban realist fiction, such as *Maggie*, popular cartoons, like the Yellow Kid comics, and reform tracts, such as *How the Other Half Lives*. He shows that the representation of immigrant figures in popular forms and urban local color inhibits democratization among immigrant populations. In sum, Sullivan employs the features of ethnic characterization common in late nineteenth-century culture to challenge the ubiquitous uses of ethnic caricature in the age of realism.

Chapter Four, “Servants, Help, and Hired Girls: Kate McPhelim Cleary’s

Regional Fictions of the Migrant Mid-West” examines Kate Cleary’s representation of white women’s lives on the Nebraska plains and her depiction of the shift toward a broadened cultural conception of an American white, as opposed to Anglo-Saxon, racial identity at the turn into the twentieth century. Current definitions of regionalism suggest it is a literary mode which incites dialogic conversation questioning traditional assumptions about the categories of gender, place, genre, and class, among others. Kate Cleary’s stories sit at the intersections of these categories. Cleary, who moved to Nebraska within a year of Willa Cather, portrays European immigrant communities on struggling farms of the West to raise questions about the dominance of urban values and depict the hardships of isolated lives on Western prairies. An immigrant from Western Ireland, Cleary’s stories critique discourses of white Anglo-Saxon cultural dominance in the early twentieth century while also marking regional places as spaces of exile and loss. This chapter analyzes Cleary’s Nebraska-set fictions and argues that she foregrounds gender and class inequalities while simultaneously making visible the ways in which racial discourses complicate these categories. Her stories depict: the privileges of white status, the limits of Western expansion, and the exilic identity prevalent among her generation of Irish immigrants. I argue that the haunting silence and “bitter whiteness” at the crux of Cleary’s regionalist novel express anxieties about the Africanist presence and the racial binaries around which an expanding definition of white identity increasingly is formed in the early days of Jim Crow. Finally, I demonstrate that her relation to region—as an immigrant writer—vexes contemporary readings of American women’s regionalism in important ways.

The final portion of this dissertation serves as an epilogue. “James T. Farrell’s

Studs Lonigan and the Origin Myth in Irish American Fiction” challenges critical approaches to Irish American fiction which have long been dominated by the conception that James T Farrell’s *Studs Lonigan* trilogy is the first significant work of fiction in Irish American letters. Farrell also held to the idea that he had little-to-no ethnic American literary inheritance, suggesting that all nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Irish American literature was preoccupied with sentimentalizing the ‘old country’ and romanticizing the struggles of the urban immigrant underclass. The Epilogue considers this myth of Farrell as the point of origin for Irish American fiction by situating his work in terms of the analyses of chapters one through four of this dissertation. This concluding section of the dissertation does not attempt to assign a new point of origin for Irish American fiction; rather, it is engaged in understanding how recent analyses of representations of race and ethnicity in Farrell’s trilogy are more broadly representative of the field. The Epilogue examines critical work on *Studs Lonigan* to discuss the limitations of available frameworks, within Irish American studies, for examining discourses of race and ethnicity in Irish American fiction. In the end, the Epilogue outlines the thematic elements that Farrell’s novels share with fiction by Sadlier, Guiney, Sullivan, and Cleary in order to exemplify the ways in which nineteenth-century Irish American fiction can raise new questions for thinking about canonical works such as *Studs Lonigan*.

Contemporary cultural theorists have shown that in the last decades of the twentieth century, at the height of Ireland’s economic success as the Celtic Tiger, a surge in popularity of “all things” Irish swept the culture of the United States. The contributors

to *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture* have demonstrated that the popularity of *Riverdance*, American enthusiasm for Irish music by Sinead O'Connor and U2, the flourishing of the Irish tourism industry, and the best-seller status of Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, to name a few examples, signaled a new consumption of and participation in Irish culture by Irish Americans and non-Irish Americans alike. This new "travelling" Irishness has an array of meanings, but the recent embrace of Irishness has particular significance for the representation of Irish American identity in the United States. Some of the most compelling criticism suggests that Irishness has become a "safe" form of white identity that allows Irish Americans, and other white Americans, to claim an ethnic identity and history of racial difference, and even oppression, without needing to recognize the ways that same ethnic identity simultaneously benefits from, and historically has benefitted from, white privilege.⁵¹

Regular Wild Irish wholly supports the underlying concerns of *The Irish in Us*. By historicizing Irish American literary production in the context of the tenuous racial position of Irish Americans and other European immigrant groups at the turn into the twentieth century, I do not want to suggest that the experiences of European Americans regarding racial ambiguities and status was equal to the institutionalized racial oppression imposed upon African Americans, Chinese Americans, or other marginalized groups. They were not. This project situates Irish American fiction in its historical framework in the hope of contributing to critical discourses that aim to understand the discursive practices and literary and cultural endeavors involved in ethnic and racial group formation. *Regular Wild Irish* argues that to fully consider the meanings of the circulation of Irishness in contemporary culture we also need to think more about the ways Irish and

51 Negra, *The Irish in Us*, Introduction and passim.

Irish American identity was employed or constructed by Irish Americans well before it became a transnationally profitable, unthreatening, and vogue form of ethnic “otherness.” If, at the turn into the twenty-first century, Irishness is a “politically insulated” form of ethnic identity fashionable at a moment when white identity seems to be “losing its social purchase,” then it is worth thinking seriously about how Irish American identity was represented at the turn into the twentieth century, when the terms “white” and “Irish” bore a different, if related, set of anxieties than they do today.⁵²

Placing *Regular Wild Irish* alongside *The Irish in Us* substantiates the broad relevance of this project and the descriptive term “wild” in the title of this dissertation is intended to suggest, among other things, the ways in which nineteenth-century depictions of Irishness continue to bear on contemporary culture. The title is drawn from a comment Louise Imogen Guiney made about the Irish patriot Theobald Wolfe Tone who died in the Irish rebellion of 1798. As previously mentioned, Guiney was raised in an Irish American community in Boston and was deeply influenced by the celebration of Celtic race pride popular among the Boston Irish in the late nineteenth century. In reviewing her future writing projects, Guiney stated: “I’d like to do a memoir of Wolfe Tone. There’s no standard one, and the tale is most romantic: regular wild Irish.”⁵³ Guiney’s reference to Wolfe Tone’s (and Ireland’s) essential “wildness” also speaks to the traditional centrality of Irish nationalism and Irish history and culture to representations and imaginings about Irish American identity and the blurry line—in popular productions of Irishness in the United States—between Irish national identity and a distinct Irish American ethnic identity. This title also signals the perpetuation of stereotypical notions of the “wild Irish”

52 Negra, 3; 2.

53 Guiney, *Letters of Louise Imogen Guiney*, Volume II, 224.

at work throughout the nineteenth century which is one of the key contexts relevant to the body of literature under consideration here. The other descriptive term of the title—“regular”—is meant somewhat ironically in *Regular Wild Irish*. It suggests the often inconsistent and ambivalent forms of Irish American identity constructed in the works of Sadlier, Guiney, Cleary, and Sullivan. It likewise represents the ways this project, as a whole, resists measuring these texts against a finite, predetermined definition of American Irishness. Finally, the juxtaposition of “regular” and “wild” nicely captures the challenge of talking about (Irish American) ethnicity in the United States as at once identifiable, recognizable, and defined and simultaneously slippery, mutable, and mobile.

In closing, *Regular Wild Irish* argues that greater critical engagement with earlier cultural moments is necessary to fully understand the complexities of white European American representation, the circulation of Irishness, and discourses of race and ethnicity in the United States today. This project intervenes in contemporary scholarship in nineteenth-century American literature, ethnic literature of the United States, critical race and ethnicity studies, and diaspora studies by considering the links between the representational strategies used by Irish American writers and broader domestic and international discourses of race and ethnicity in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. It demonstrates that Irish American writers mobilized key, if sometimes competing, cultural discourses to shape an identity for Irish Americans that offered an alternative to popular representations of Irishness and to theorize emergent forms of ethnic and racial identification in American culture at the turn into the twentieth century.

CHAPTER 1

IRISHMEN AND AMERICANS AT THE SAME TIME:

MARY ANNE SADLIER'S DOMESTIC FICTION AND IMMIGRANT IDENTITY

It would be hard to keep your model republics going without the countrymen and countrywomen of those two laborers. For who else would dig, and delve, and drudge, and do domestic work, and make canals and roads, and execute great lines of internal improvement! Irishmen both, and sorely puzzled too, to find what they seek. . . . They are brothers those men. One crossed the sea alone, and working very hard for one half year and, living harder, saved funds enough to bring the other out. . . . [And then] their sisters came, and then another brother, and lastly, their old mother. And now what? Why, the poor old crone is restless in a strange land, and yearns to lay her bones, she says, among her people in the old graveyard at home: and so they pay her passage back: and God help her and them, and every simple heart, and all who turn to the Jerusalem of their younger days, and have an altar-fire upon the cold hearth of their fathers.
—Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation*

With his horizon all his own, yet he, a poor man, born to be poor, with his inherited Irish poverty or poor life, his Adam's grandmother and boggy ways, not to rise in this world, he nor his posterity, till their wading, webbed, bog trodding feet get talaria to their heels.
—Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

I. Introduction

With “two heads of police” to ensure his safety, Charles Dickens visited the notorious Five Points neighborhood of New York City in 1845. The description of the Irishmen he encountered there aptly represents the basic facts of Irish American life in the antebellum years: the Irish were primarily day laborers and domestic servants who, in spite of working to bring family to North America, saw themselves as exiles forced into a strange land by settlement and poverty in Ireland.¹ Set alongside Thoreau's description of his Irish neighbor, David Field, it also hints toward the broader cultural perceptions about the Irish that would become more popular in the United States as the mid-nineteenth century progressed. These passages echo the standard elements associated

¹ See Kerby Miller's Introduction to *Emigrants and Exiles* for a discussion of the culture of origin of the famine immigrants and the exile motif.

with the Irish “Paddy”: a figure whose simple nature allowed him to be duped into an authoritarian religion and whose inherited poverty and propensity for violence made even the hardest working Irish seem out of place in, if not physically inimical to, the American landscape. The essentially generous appreciation for the struggle of the immigrant at the heart of Dickens’ travel notes and the prejudice explicit in Thoreau’s notebook suggest the contradictory history of the Irish in the United States throughout the antebellum period. Simply put, even though the Irish, as European immigrants, had the privileges of citizenship accorded them by the 1790 naturalization law, when the Catholic Irish began emigrating in greater numbers than the Protestant Irish, these immigrants were frequently depicted as a serious threat to mainstream American culture. It is these two historical realities, these contradictory attitudes, which shaped the American-set novels of the influential antebellum domestic novelist Mary Anne Madden Sadlier.

The 18 year-old Mary Anne Madden emigrated as an orphan from County Cavan, Ireland, to Montreal in 1844 where she married John Sadlier who, with his brother, would come to own the largest Catholic publishing house in North America by the mid-nineteenth century with offices in New York, Boston, and Montreal. Sadlier wrote her first American-set novel when Orestes Brownson, an ardent convert, called for a tale about a poor “Irish orphan” suitable for Catholic readers. She won first prize in the contest with *Willy Burke; or the Irish Orphan in America*, and launched her career as a writer of popular domestic fiction with its serial publication in the *Boston Pilot* in 1850. The publication of *Willy Burke* allowed Sadlier to establish herself as the most influential literary voice for the famine generation of Irish immigrants. The famine immigrants would be her primary reading audience over the next twenty years. Sadlier published

more than sixty volumes in her lifetime including ten historical novels, eight American-set novels, and translations from the French. Well connected in the publishing world and the Catholic intellectual community in New York she was friends with notable figures whose affiliations crossed the political spectrum, such as the powerful Bishop John Hughes and the rebel figure and publisher, Thomas D'Arcy McGee.²

Sadlier's domestic fiction has been read by Charles Fanning, the foremost scholar of Irish American literature, as fiercely anti-assimilationist and guided by "iron-clad certainties" about the dangers of Protestant American culture. Her strict didacticism, he argues, provided a needed source of support to the Irish immigrant audience in a time of anti-Catholic feeling.³ In a broader context, Priscilla Wald has situated Sadlier's novels alongside other American-set narratives by foreign born females, and reads her didactic prose as objecting to the unequal treatment of Irish immigrants.⁴ More recently, Marjorie Howes has complicated these readings by framing Sadlier's sentimental fiction in terms of her effort to create a new kind of Christian, specifically Catholic, popular form. Howes reads Sadlier as theorizing the transatlantic experience and responding to an historical context in which the growing power and institutionalization of Irish Catholic America is threatened by the "potentially uncooperative famine immigrants" and the hostility of the nativist Know Nothing party of the 1850s. For her, Sadlier's primary goal was to "promote a model of Irish Catholic America that was specifically middle class." In the process, Sadlier revised certain elements of sentimental fiction by partially refusing the "privatizing of authority" typically associated with sentimentalism in favor of the

2 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 114-118.

3 Ibid., 140.

4 Wald, "Immigration and Assimilation in Nineteenth-Century U.S. Women's Writing," 188.

externalized moral authority of the Catholic church.⁵

In this chapter, like Howes, I situate Sadlier's novels in terms of the popular narratives being written by other white middle-class women in the antebellum period, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe; however, I shift the critical lens from Howes's focus on didactic discipline and the sentimentalist rhetoric that aided the formation of a middle-class Catholic "group identity" to focus on how the anti-assimilationist elements of the text belie Sadlier's embrace of certain American ideals.⁶ I examine the ways in which Sadlier appropriates domestic discourses to reject antebellum nativist imagery and problematize American Protestant narratives of a threatening and foreign Irish immigrant identity. I consider how Sadlier's novels reframe nativist sentiment in ways that undercut Protestant American fears about Catholicism and simultaneously create the framework for the redefinition and defense of the Irish American's dualistic national affiliations. I follow Howes and Fanning in the sense that I am interested in the implications of her anti-assimilationist didacticism, but I balance that analysis with an examination of the assimilationist aspects of her texts to consider what those elements, together, suggest about Sadlier's rendering of Irish American identity in the antebellum United States. I argue, ultimately, that Sadlier exploits the nationalistic implications of domestic ideologies to construct a national identity for her immigrant readers that can be justifiably both Irish and American at the same time.

More clearly, the critical understanding of separate spheres ideology has recently been complicated by its association with discourses of Manifest Destiny. These readings point up the ways in which representations of the gendered home space are supported by

5 Howes, "Discipline, Sentiment, and the Irish-American Public" 142; 159; 153.

6 Ibid., 142.

and complicit with imperialist discourses of national expansion. This “traveling domesticity” is often, it has been argued, “dependent on racialized notions of the foreign” wherein the foreign itself is a shifting category.⁷ In this chapter, I argue that Sadlier’s immigrant fictions further complicate such understandings of antebellum writing by white women writers because even though the Irish were deemed “white” by U.S. laws, as the antebellum period progressed, they were increasingly depicted as racially threatening elements unfit for the responsibilities of republican government.⁸ As such, Irish immigrants themselves embodied the overlapping boundaries within the shifting notions of the foreign and Sadlier’s domestic fictions, the primary reading of Irish immigrants, create an identity for immigrant readers that confounds a racially unified notion of a “white” American national identity. As a didactic novelist Sadlier relies on the ideology of separate spheres in ways not wholly dissimilar to other white women writers of the period; however, as an Irish immigrant Catholic writing primarily for an audience of relatively poor and working class Irish, her relationship to the domestic discourses of the era complicates contemporary critical narratives about the relationship between white women’s domestic ideologies and the “foreign” and reveals the fraught nature of Irish American identity in a time of anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant nativism. As Howes has noted, Sadlier’s novels “enact[s] the difficulties and contradictions Catholic Irish America encountered in trying to craft a culture and community that would be both loyally American and transatlantic.”⁹ My aim in this chapter is to understand how Sadlier’s anti-assimilationist stance, undergirded by her strict Catholic moral voice, manages to promote the minimization of the contact zone between Irish Catholic America and

7 Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity,” 113.

8 Jacobson, *Whiteness*, Introduction and Chapter 1.

9 Howes, 159.

Protestant America while insisting on a transatlantic identity that plausibly could be of two nations at once.

My analysis of her bestselling book, *The Blakes and the Flanagans*, argues that Sadlier disproves the nativist rhetoric popular in the 1850s and justifies the embrace of a dualistic national identity by pointing up the limitations of U.S. political ideals as they relate to immigrant inhabitants. Identifying the novel as an early example of immigrant fiction, I examine her use of tropes that would become common to American immigrant literature in the twentieth century and situate her novel in terms of an American contact zone where the formation of a Catholic Irish American identity implies a negotiation between an often hostile dominant culture and less empowered immigrant one. In a discussion of *Con O'Regan*, I interpret her best known "propaganda" novel in terms of the domesticating project of missionary texts and their relationship to the ambivalent status of immigrant groups in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁰ In this analysis, I deepen my examination of the Irish as an immigrant ethnic group by considering the racialized underpinning of Sadlier's Catholic didacticism in conjunction with the transnational nature of Irish immigration in this period. The domestic ideal of *Con O'Regan* is an Irish Catholic rural community on the American frontier and a re-imagined homeland for Irish immigrants living in the United States and beyond. As the principle texts to address the immigrant laborers and domestic servants who arrived in the decades after the great famine, Sadlier's novels reveal, as noted above, the difficulty of managing Irish, Catholic, and American identities simultaneously and, as I argue, suggest that doing so entails pointing up the limits of American national ideals and exploiting those limits to the immigrant community's own ends.

¹⁰ Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 127.

II. Irishness in Antebellum American Culture

Representations of the Irish in antebellum American culture tended to focus on the Irish as hopelessly impoverished, prone to excessive drinking and violence, and given over to a superstitious authoritarian religion. Thoreau's description of the inherited poverty of the Irish was not uncommon in the 1840s among intellectuals. For example, Theodore Parker in the *Massachusetts Quarterly Review* called the Irish "an ignorant, idle, turbulent, and vicious population" who could hardly be expected to become "industrious, provident, moral, and intelligent."¹¹ As described in his American notebooks, Hawthorne depicts a vision of the Irish consistent with the stereotypes of the day when he records an encounter with Irish and Canadians on his vacation in Maine. Of a July evening in 1837 he writes: "an old Irishwoman sat in the door of another hut, under the influence of an extra dose of rum—she being an old lady of somewhat dissipated habits." He proceeds to call the woman a "virago" with a "very Amazonian attitude" who uses "blarney" and moves from rage to jest in trying to persuade her meek husband. Hawthorne assumes the husband and wife "came to blows, it being custom with the Irish . . . to settle disputes with blows."¹² Dale Knobel writes that "[d]uring the late 1840s and early 1850s, in magazines and melodrama, in school texts and novels, the alleged violence of Irish conduct and disposition was central to verbal portraiture."¹³

11 Knobel, *Paddy and the Republic*, 86. After 1840, Theodore Parker and other New England intellectuals increasingly expressed a belief in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race over other Caucasian groups and all ethnic groups not identified as Caucasian. For more on Northern and Southern intellectuals' and writers' attitudes toward Anglo-Saxonism, and its variations such as Anglo-Normanism or the belief in a distinct American branch of the Anglo-Saxon race, see Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, esp. Chapter 10. For a discussion of the influence of Irish Catholic immigration on discourses about Anglo-Saxon racial identity, see Horsman, 225.

12 Hawthorne, *Passages from the Notebooks of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 53-54.

13 Knobel, 84. For a discussion of Irish Americans and violence in the nineteenth century, see Kenny, "Race, Violence, and Anti-Irish Sentiment in the Nineteenth-Century." For a critique of Knobel's *Paddy and the Republic* and a discussion of the important differences between anti-Irish sentiment and

Additionally, ethnic character was closely linked to inheritance in this period. The image of the Irish as despicably poor, violent, and drunken was the standard one in the early antebellum years and became “not only more pejorative but also more rigidly cast in racial typology” with the arrival of the famine immigrants.¹⁴

The Irish famine immigration, dated from 1845 to 1855, coincided with a shift in the “unconflicted view of the presumed character and unambiguous boundaries of whiteness” implied in the 1790 naturalization law which gave rights of citizenship to all “free white persons.” Matthew Frye Jacobson has argued that beginning in the 1840s there was a “fracturing of whiteness into a hierarchy of plural and scientifically determined white races.” The formulation of a scientifically proven hierarchy of white races generated and fed questions regarding which racial groups could properly carry out the responsibilities of republican citizenship. After the 1840s “vigorous debate ensued” over which of the white races was truly “fit for self government.”¹⁵ These debates lasted into the twentieth century, but as the Irish were one of the largest European immigrant ethnic groups in the United States in the antebellum era, these controversies were of particular significance regarding their status in that period. The Irish were the poorest ethnic population in the United States, next to African Americans, at the time. As the number of poor or impoverished-looking immigrants increased with the famine, Irish immigrant poverty became more often associated with innate causes and the Irish immigrant’s ability to fulfill the duties of citizenship faced greater scrutiny.

The sense that the Irish nature was potentially harmful to American progress and antagonistic to American values often was coupled with the perceived threat Roman

institutionalized discrimination, see Jensen, “‘No Irish Need Apply’: A Myth of Victimization.”

14 Jacobson, *Whiteness*, 48.

15 *Ibid.*, 7.

Catholicism harbored to Protestantism's claims as the authentic religion of the American nation. On the one hand, the external authority associated with Catholicism was deemed antithetical to the American "democratic ethic" and the freedom of individual choice regarding religious worship embraced in the early nineteenth century.¹⁶ On the other hand, Catholicism's claims to priority, as the original religion of Christ, troubled the "teleology of Protestant history," which had to face the genealogical proximity of Protestantism to Catholicism. As a result, anti-Catholic novels enjoyed popularity throughout the antebellum years, especially in the 1830s and the 1850s when nativism was most powerful.¹⁷

During the early and late antebellum period, the reach of anti-Catholicism into political and popular discourses was broad and one particular genre of anti-Catholic novel, the escaped nun's tale, was widely popular. Rebecca Reed's *Six Months in a Convent* (1835) and Maria Monk's *Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery of Montreal* (1836) were bestsellers published after the famous burning of the Ursuline Convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts. Just two of an array of similar narratives, they disclosed the villainous nature of abusive priests and cruel mother superiors and the compromised position of captive Protestant girls in North American Catholic convents. The standard elements of these novels had a life beyond the lurid escaped nun's stories. They were employed by editor and author Sarah Josepha Hale in the sentimental essay "The Catholic Convert" to campaign for public education for Protestant girls in the

16 Reynolds, *Faith in Fiction*, 146.

17 Griffin, *Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 5; 2. Anti-Catholic narratives did not attack the Irish only, for German immigration also contributed to the spread of Catholicism in this period. Nor were these novels necessarily directed strictly at immigrant ethnic groups; yet, after the famine immigrants arrived in the United States, by 1850, Catholics were the largest denomination of Christians in the country and most of them were Irish.

1830s.¹⁸ In 1855, at the height of Know Nothing political power, this sensational genre had resurgence and contributed to anti-immigrant sentiment fostered by that nativist party.¹⁹

Furthermore, like Hale, other domestic writers of the period perceived a danger in the exposure of foreign influences embodied in Catholic and immigrant figures. While not couched in terms directed specifically at the ills of “Irishism,” or dangers of Romanism, Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe appealed to domestic values to control the ethnically foreign within the “borders of the home and the nation” during the mid-nineteenth century.²⁰ Susan Griffin has shown that the most popular form of anti-Catholic tract novel of the 1850s rehearsed a plot of competition for the affection and charge of female children between the “foreign” Catholic father and young Protestant American male.²¹ As such, the Beecher sisters’ public warnings about the infectious nature and foreign influence of the immigrant servant, articulated in language associated specifically with a domestic value system in the *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, were similar to the representations of the Irish in the more private renderings by Thoreau and Hawthorne as well as in the popular discourses of the 1850s which often marked Irish and Catholic men and women as racially or culturally foreign to American soil. While, then, the elements used to depict the Irish in America were often consistent across various

18 Ibid., 52.

19 Evidence of the extent to which anti-immigrant sentiment often converged with anti-Catholic feeling is Orestes Brownson’s July 1854 editorial “Native Americanism” in *Brownson’s Quarterly Review*. In it he clarifies the distinction between hostility to Catholicism (never “in the right”) and hostility toward his “foreign born Catholic friends” who hold too closely to their “Irish nationality” (where “American nationality is in the right”) (Joyce, *Editors and Ethnicity*, 124). Anbinder has shown that Know Nothing political power was strongest in the mid-1850s and that from the 1830s, anti-immigrant sentiment was usually at its height when religious controversies were involved. See Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, Chapter 1.

20 Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity,” 120.

21 Griffin, 95-96.

cultural forms, the strategies of representation that Sadlier used to revise these images were drawn from the domestic discourses shared by other white women writers of the period such as Hale and Catherine Beecher.

III. The Irish as Model Americans in *The Blakes and the Flanagans*

The frontispiece of Sadlier's *The Blakes and the Flanagans* centers on the image of three young girls, gathered round a short podium, gazing at an illustrated book of saints lives under the watchful eyes of two Catholic nuns and against the backdrop, in the highest reaches of the room, of two sunlit statues. Against a bright white wall, one statue is a winged figure, accompanied by a child, and the other a female saint, probably the Blessed Mother, who looks down upon the nuns and children below. In the foreground, a fourth young girl eagerly awaits her turn to see the book and, in the middle ground, various other female students hover against a background of lighted windows. "The Sisters School" illustration suggests the positive glow of Catholic education at a convent. Serialized in *McGee's American Celt* and published as a novel in 1855, *The Blakes and the Flanagans: A Tale, Illustrative of Irish Life in the United States* takes "the school question" as its central focus and is, more generally, a sentimental novel illustrating the negative effects a parents' poor choices can have on their children, their family, and the Irish American community at large. As one of Sadlier's bestselling novels, with five editions in the United States and two in Germany, *The Blakes and the Flanagans* remained in print throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, long after the contentious issue over public education first emerged in the early antebellum period.

The school question in New York was a debate instigated by the increase in the Catholic population of that state in the 1830s and early 1840s; Catholics complained

about Protestant proselytizing in public schools and requested state aid for parochial education. In 1842 the state legislature secularized the school system and replaced the educational structure that had been dominated by Protestants with a common school system. In *The Blakes and the Flanagans* Sadlier provides the Catholic perspective of this controversy and uses it to demonstrate the “right and wrong ways of being Irish and Catholic in America.” The device of contrast is a favorite of hers and Sadlier uses the Blakes as a foil for the successful and properly Catholic Flanagan family.²² Despite the popular antebellum discourses that suggested the Irish immigrants’ “contentment in squalor,” obtaining financial success and material comfort are not the challenges faced by the central families of this novel.²³ Two families related by marriage, their challenges reside in their different approaches to the upbringing of their children. The Flanagan children go to parochial schools and as a result live easy lives closely bound to their Irish community. In contrast, Miles Blake refuses to send his children to Catholic schools, even though he can afford it, because he doesn’t want to lose important business contacts. The Blake’s poor decision regarding the school question is the root of the eventual demise of the Blake family unit and the repudiation of their Irish background and Catholic faith by the Blake children, Henry and Eliza. Set in the 1830s, but written at the apex of power of the Know Nothing party, the novel foregrounds its instructional religious intent while simultaneously revising stereotypes of the Irish and creating a version of middle-class Irish American identity that ostensibly rejects mainstream American culture in favor of a closed Irish community in New York City. Specifically, Sadlier refutes the popular image of the violent and impoverished Irishman; rewrites

22 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 121-126.

23 Meagher, *The Columbia Guide to Irish American History*, 217.

popular narratives of the shamed woman of the Roman Catholic convent; and critiques and negotiates with American political and cultural values. In the process she offers a dualistic Irish American identity that claims equal, but conflicted, affiliations with both the immigrant community's nation of origin and the United States.

As the frontispiece suggests, the school controversy provides the thematic structure for the novel and Sadlier's demonstration of the ill effects of common schools is traditionally, and rightly, read as exemplary of her anti-assimilationist stance. Her rejection of dominant American culture is bound up with her revision of Irish stereotypes—if the Irish population is violent or horridly impoverished, it is Protestant prejudice and anti-Catholicism that contributes to immigrant degradation. She challenges the image of the Irishman as aggressive and impoverished with the model figure in the novel, Tim Flanagan. He is “hot-blooded, blustering, and loud spoken, yet kind and generous and true-hearted.” As a “leather-dresser” Tim “had gained, by his persevering industry, a position of ease and comfort.”²⁴ She contests the image of the violent Irishman in the figure of the young Henry Blake who has made a habit of fighting at the accusation of being a “dirty Irish” in school. Also suffering the effects of anti-Irish sentiment, Henry's friend and a fellow son of Irish immigrants, Hugh Dillon, turns the derogatory epithets used by non-Irish schoolmates back upon Henry. Hugh says that “fighting for religion, was ‘too Irish-like’ and only fit for ‘Paddies like [...] Blake.’” Sadlier's attack upon public school education is clearest in Hugh, of whom she writes, “Dillon, was also a Catholic, or rather the child of Catholic parents, but the boy had been going to the Common School now ever since he was five years old, and now, at fourteen, he was a Catholic in name, nothing more.” Through Dillon, the author emphasizes the

24 Sadlier, *The Blakes and the Flanagans*, 10.

challenges faced by the Irish to maintain their religion in a secular America. He urges Henry to choose his own religion, “as any free-born American ought to.”²⁵ As an adult, Dillon dies by a bullet while carousing with the b’hoys of the Bowery; he never fully recovers from exposure to his public school education.²⁶ In short, Sadlier challenges the view of the Irish as dangerously quarrelsome and prone to drinking by rooting these negative attributes in the American soil which, through its lack of acceptance of the Irish, overarching materialism, and “new” religions, breeds poverty and disreputable behavior.²⁷

Likewise, the Catholic mass is used as a site for subverting the claims of anti-Catholic sentiment. When, as an adult, Henry Blake goes to Catholic mass it is only to satisfy his curious Protestant in-laws who wanted to attend a “grand celebration” and hear the Bishop preach. Disrespectfully, Henry refers to the beginning of mass as the “opening ceremonies” and one of the Flanagan daughters is distracted by the ways in which Henry’s in-laws, the Pearsons, were “asking questions about everything they saw, just as if they were in a theatre.”²⁸ Worse, the Pearsons break the conventions of proper behavior by turning their backs to the altar during mass to face the music coming from the back of the church. In addition, Henry’s in-laws question the authoritarian manner of the Bishop’s speech, the superstitious nature of confession, and the necessity of Catholic baptism. The dialog that surrounds these matters, in which Tim Flanagan’s son, Edward, provides the proper Catholic responses, allows Sadlier to draw a picture of the critic of Irish Catholics as ignorant and unaware of the culture he deplores. Knobel argues that “[t]he word

25 Ibid., 27.

26 For an analysis of Sadlier’s portrayal of the “tough” and “rowdy” urban male youths, see Howes, 154-155.

27 Sadlier, *The Blakes and the Flanagans*, 10.

28 Ibid., 335.

portrait of the Irish from the mid-1840s through the 1850s was appropriate for use by people less interested in knowing the Irish than in spotting them, less committed to analysis than to identification.”²⁹ As such, Sadlier exposes the lack of knowledge about Catholicism and Irish culture associated with those who rely on stereotypes and identify the Irish as “bog trotting,” “ignorant,” or “superstitious.” She puns on the anti-immigrant political rhetoric of the period, characterizing the boorish, gawking Pearsons as “knowing nothing” of Irish culture or the Catholic faith.

Sadlier’s somewhat predictable rejection of types and defense of Catholic education are fundamental to the novel’s insistence on limiting Irish interaction with a materialistic and fatally individualistic American culture in favor of a steadfast Irish-only community orientation. Through common tropes of immigrant narratives, the representation of “second generation traitors” and intermarriage, Sadlier points up the dangers of unnecessary interaction with Protestant culture and the limitations of American political ideals. The generational conflicts in the novel are centered on the Blake family’s two children Henry and Eliza, both of whom, through poor guidance at public schools, marry into Protestant families. In *Beyond Ethnicity*, Werner Sollors refers to the threat intermarriage poses to “ethnic purity”— “mixed marriages of all sorts, especially of whites and Indians, or whites and Afro-Americans, often appeared dangerous in American literature, the offspring of such unions doomed.”³⁰ The mixed marriage version of Irish Catholic Americans and Protestant Americans leads to an equally hollow fate in *The Blakes and the Flanagans*. For example, Henry’s infant son dies after Henry refuses to give him a Catholic baptism. Eliza Blake dies a similarly

29 Knobel, 75.

30 Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, 224.

unhappy death when, as a fallen Catholic, she dies too quickly to be given last rites by the priest. To further emphasize the doom resulting from mixed marriages, Mrs. Blake also dies too young, heart sick at the sudden death of her daughter.

These generational conflicts also represent the mutual responsibility parents and children share to adhere to particular religious values. The novel's dedication foregrounds this theme. It reads: "To the memory of my father and mother, whose teachings and example were a rich inheritance to their children . . . to that ever-living remembrance, I dedicate this work." Sadlier sets her parent's moral legacy over any material inheritance they could have left to her. The subject of parenting dominates the novel and the contrast drawn between the two ways of being Irish Catholic parents demonstrated in the Flanagans and the Blakes, when it comes to the ultimate decision about the children's education, is mostly about ways of fathering. The "submissive" Mrs. Blake has little sway with her husband on issues of schooling and finances. Mrs. Flanagan needn't have similar worries since her husband Tim is the model figure/father in this story.

More clearly, through Miles Blake, Sadlier shows the negative effects a parent's bad choices can have on his children and, eventually, the immigrant community in general. Through the Blake children, she depicts what occurs when individuals shirk their responsibility to obey the fourth commandment, which instructs one to "obey thy father and mother." When Henry, long separated from his Irish heritage in practice, finally physically breaks from his parent's influence completely by moving out of his father's house, he refers to himself as a "slave" and his father as his "governor."³¹ This hyperbolic master-slave rhetoric clearly points up Sadlier's critique of the damage that will ensue if parents and children do not properly adhere to structures of authority in place in religious

31 Sadlier, *The Blakes and the Flanagans*, 192. "Governor" was a common term for "father" in this period.

law. Children will begin to see themselves as far too individualistic, and think of themselves as “slaves” for having to follow religious guidelines and commandments which, if raised properly, should be “natural” to them. Like Henry and Eliza, the character Hugh Dillon exemplifies the doom which befalls those who throw out their father’s religious doctrine in favor of the desires of their individual wills. Sadlier writes that Dillon: “could not confine himself to any regular employment. He grew everyday more idle and dissipated . . . religion he had none . . . the word honor was meaningless for him, and he knew no other law than that of his own will.”³² She suggests, again, that Dillon’s individualism would have been tempered by religion if the proper guidance had been provided for him as a youth. As the above examples suggest, and Howes has already shown, Sadlier rejects American individualism by insisting on the subordination of individual will to the authority of the Catholic church; however, Sadlier’s construction of an Irish middle-class identity is convincing as a repudiation of nativist stereotypes and a viable model of an American immigrant community only because it accepts some version of those qualities associated with American national identity.

Specifically, the generational conflicts in the novel, with Sadlier’s persistent rewriting of Irish types, underscore the position Sadlier takes toward the government’s failure to fulfill its responsibility to immigrants. Since the dominant U.S. culture, founded on the values of freedom of speech and religion, denigrates Irish Catholics, the immigrants have no choice, in Sadlier’s writing, but to create a tightly knit community that avoids all contact with the secular and Protestant dangers of the urban landscape. In this way, the novel’s illustration of a father’s and his children’s failure to fulfill the law offers a metaphor for the failings of the American government to provide for immigrant

³² Ibid., 185.

inhabitants. Moreover, Sadlier's management of the contact zone, her anti-assimilationist stance, is justified by her demonstration of the effects of poor fathering. She castigates Miles Blake for putting his aims for material prosperity over the necessity of religious training for his children and challenges the United States government for promising the equal rights of citizenship to Irish immigrants but failing to stifle the growing power of nativism that is a direct threat to those rights. Crucially, Sadlier justifies her anti-assimilationist rhetoric at precisely the same moment that she represents a middle-class model of Irish immigrant life. By doing so she necessarily creates the framework for an Irish American identity that relies on some features associated with American cultural and political values. It is to those assimilationist elements we now turn.

For one, Sadlier's narrative mode of choice, the sentimental novel, underscores the assimilationist underpinning of *The Blakes and the Flanagans*. Fanning has recognized the ways in which Sadlier's novels have projected Nancy Cott's "canon of domesticity" in their support for the divine nature of woman's role as "ruler of the home" and domestic spiritual guide.³³ We can see this illustrated in the exemplary middle-class female character of the novel, Nelly Flanagan; perhaps more meaningful is that Sadlier debunks the images of Irish and Catholic women recycled in the popular press and domestic and sensational fiction to suggest that Irish American women have a greater capacity to fulfill the domestic ideal than their Protestant countrywomen. Griffin has discussed the "cultural shorthand" of "anti-Catholic stereotypes and narrative structures" that were already traditional to Protestant culture by the nineteenth century.³⁴ She argues that Sarah Josepha Hale, among many writers, used the standard elements of these novels

33 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 139; 159.

34 Griffin, 17.

to address a wide range of issues in contemporary culture as the plots and characters were well-known to their audiences. The “malleable” nature of anti-Catholic fiction was not lost on Sadlier. Like Hale, who used the fear of Catholicism to promote female education, Sadlier seizes the captivity theme of the “nativist novels of the 1850s” to rewrite Protestant narratives about disgraced Catholic womanhood.³⁵ In contrast to the nativist novels which described young women as held captive by their “foreign” Catholic fathers and priests, Eliza Blake, spoiled by education at a fashionable boarding school, is depicted as feigning a sense of imprisonment in her parent’s house so that her romantic interest will have no choice but to rescue her. Sadlier writes, “In short, [Eliza] made out such a case in her favor, and against her parents, that Zachary, who really loved her, felt a chivalrous desire to set her free from the bondage in which she was held by her naughty ma and pa.” Furthermore, the teacher from the Sister’s School in *The Blakes and the Flanagans* is not only completely unlike the cruel mother superiors of the escaped nun’s tales but also a model figure whose role in society is decidedly unlike the one Hale adopted for herself:

“Had [Sister Magdalen] been a Protestant, she would have been a ‘strong-minded woman,’ beyond all doubt; she might have taken the lead at public meetings, edited a newspaper in some of our great cities, delivered public lectures, ... But being a Catholic, and born in Ireland, . . . her mind was early imbued with old-fashioned Catholic notions regarding feminine modesty and Christian humility.”³⁶

By incorporating familiar characters and plot points into *The Blakes and the Flanagans*, Sadlier “domesticates” popular anti-Catholic tales just as Hale did, to opposite ends, in the 1830s. By problematizing the public roles of Protestant women, Sadlier suggests that

35 Griffin devotes an entire chapter to these “nativist novels”: see Chapter 3.

36 Sadlier, *The Blakes and the Flanagans*, 228; 108.

Irish American women, through their association with the church, are more qualified to fulfill the duties of the proper middle-class woman. Significantly, Sadlier's female characters discredit the negative representations of Irish immigrant women and Catholic nuns only to reproduce the domestic ideal offered by the very culture whose negative images she contests and the literary women whose public roles she condemns.

Secondly, as suggested by the fate of her female characters, Sadlier supports the logic of separate spheres which sets forth the woman's separation from the world of work and political power and links her, instead, to the "affective power" obtained through her reign in the home.³⁷ Sadlier promotes sentimentalism's way of "ordering all of life" around the domestic ideal over and against "the ethos of money and exploitation" that dominates American society.³⁸ For example, as a lawyer, Freemason, and aspiring politician, Henry relies on his Irish heritage—calling for the Repeal of the Act of Union—to gain votes for a place in the legislature. The Catholic Church, Irish American nationalism, and the Democratic Party were in competition for Irish immigrant loyalty in the antebellum period and editors of Irish American periodicals frequently debated the value of nationalist politics to the broader interests of Irish immigrants.³⁹ Henry's passing as a "Repealer," and his self-proclaimed "slave" status, mentioned earlier, show that he is really a pawn in a corrupt political system that fails to offer any genuine concern for or practical aid to the urban and working-class Irish. Sadlier's rejection of the Democratic Party and Irish nationalism as institutions that could positively aid the assimilation of immigrants suggests a general distrust of political culture to adequately perform the tasks that would be better handled within the woman's private sphere and under the guidance

37 Samuels, *The Culture of Sentiment*, 4.

38 Wexler, "Tender Violence," 15-16. Wexler's definition of "sentimentalism" is drawn from Nina Baym.

39 See Miller, 328-344 and Joyce, *Editors and Ethnicity*, Chapter 3.

of the church, namely, the education of Irish children. The materialism that led Miles to send Henry to public school is central to the culture of “exploitation” to which Henry is truly slave. Had the school question in the Blake household been settled by Mary Blake and as an issue unrelated to economic interests, the son of the Irish immigrant would be a model citizen rather than a disingenuous, self-serving politician or, in the case of Hugh Dillon, a Bowery b’hoy. Mary Blake’s failure in the novel is that in her passivity she neglects to use her rightful “affective powers” in the home to have Miles send the children to Catholic school. Sadlier makes the relationship between proper republican citizenship and education explicit in her discussion of the parochial school the Flanagan children attend: “Many and many a valued citizen did it bring up for the State, and not a few of the boys . . . have since attained a good position in society by their industry and good conduct, not to speak of the sound business education there received.”⁴⁰ As such, she appropriates domestic discourses that value separate spheres ideology to refute the claims of anti-Catholic narratives and signal a natural affiliation between American cultural ideals and Irish immigrant cultural and religious values.

This natural affiliation is most fully expressed in the figure of Tim Flanagan; he is the clearest embodiment of the ideal Irish American citizen. Hard work and independence are merged in the image of head patriarch of the novel who earns his living honestly in a small family business and without compromising his Catholic beliefs. While we have seen that Sadlier rejects an American individualism that challenges church authority, she does support Irish immigrant “independence” as exemplified in the figure of Tim Flanagan. Kerby Miller has analyzed Irish attitudes toward immigration in the 1830s and shown there was a desire for independence among Protestant and Catholic Irish. For

40 Sadlier, *The Blakes and the Flanagans*, 15.

most Protestants, “independence” meant “acquisitiveness” and upward mobility. Conversely, for Catholics, it meant, as one immigrant put it, “opportunity unfettered by Protestant prejudice” and, more generally, to many middle-class Catholic Irish, an “intensely familial” style of commercial enterprise that grew out of a traditional Gaelic culture which was more “communal than individualistic, more dependent than independent.” This sense of independence as “comfortable self-sufficiency” aptly describes Sadlier’s version of the “independent” middle-class status achieved and demonstrated in Tim Flanagan and his family.⁴¹ Sadlier’s representation of Tim’s independence is an assimilationist gesture and, again, a mark of the capacity of the Irish for self-government. In this less critical image of American culture, even Dillon is a valuable figure on “election days, when no man is worthless in the great Republic.”⁴² Sadlier’s repeated references to the “great Republic” and her demonstration of Tim’s independent nature allow her to construct a version of American national identity that is both deeply bound to Irish culture and celebrates American citizenship.

While Sadlier is successful in illustrating a kinship between American and Irish cultural values, and justifying the double nature of Irish immigrant identity, her articulation of that dualistic national identity in *The Blakes and the Flanagans* is, finally, ambivalent. This is due to the ways in which the didactic moral underpinning of the novel works against her “innocent vision” of the Irish immigrant community in the end.⁴³ As we have already seen, Sadlier defends the Irish immigrant against the slanderous assumptions about the Irish circulating in popular culture. Equally important, the novel marks the Irish immigrant as not challenging the dominant culture in any way that will

41 Miller, 228; 202; 113; 107; 202.

42 Sadlier, *The Blakes and the Flanagans*, 185.

43 Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 39.

damage the broader structures of American society. If it was a common assumption that, as Henry's father-in-law tells him, "Those inveterate Irish Papists are the heaviest clog in our national progress— they really are," Sadlier proves otherwise with the Flanagan family.⁴⁴ In fact, neither the Blakes nor the Flanagans pose a significant threat to the larger culture. Henry Blake answers to the whims of his wife's family, repressing any residual elements of his Irish background. The Flanagans prefer to live out their lives in the quiet of their own immigrant community. They have little social interaction with those outside of their ethnic group. Further, the only time when this innocent image of immigrant utopia is corrupted, the corruption is primarily meaningful to those within the immigrant community. Even intermarriage is as good as death or conversion for the Irish, so that threat is virtually meaningless to the dominant culture; however, because intermarriage is as good as death or conversion for the Irish, and given the didactic moral underpinning of the novel, guilt, the implied opposite of innocence, is squarely attributed.

Despite the anti-assimilationist implications of the reversal of stereotypes and vision of the limitations of American political ideals, Sadlier's strict didacticism makes clear that the guilt, ultimately, lies with the erring (sinning) individuals in the Blake family. In this construction, the dominant secular culture is represented as complicit in their crimes, but the greatest guilt is rested upon them. This accusation of guilt betrays the ways in which the moral foundation of Sadlier's text aligns itself with the dominant culture; both depict the Irish immigrants as guilty, at the very least, of threatening the sustainability of (either a Catholic or Protestant) white, middle-class culture. Howes has argued that Sadlier perceived the Irish immigrants as a threat to the growing power of the Catholic Church. Likewise, even though most famine immigrants identified as Catholic,

44 Sadlier, *The Blakes and the Flanagans*, 333.

the type of Catholicism they practiced was not necessarily identical to the institutionalized Roman Catholicism Sadlier preaches. Irish peasant Catholicism at the time was mixed with elements of traditional Gaelic folkways and it wasn't until the Devotional Revolution occurred in Ireland and the United States, beginning in the 1850s, that a new form of Catholicism began to be practiced and encouraged by the church hierarchy. Sadlier offered a version of Catholicism that was, at least for a portion of famine immigrants, more focused on "the enforcement of regular devotional practices and the eradication of residual cultural forms" than they were accustomed to.⁴⁵ By using a Catholic domestic value system to reveal the guilt of the bad actors in the Blake family, Sadlier ends up, ironically, aligning herself with the Beecher sisters who, as Amy Kaplan has shown, also perceived immigrants to be a "threatening foreignness," that needed to be controlled, that is, "domesticated" by the "empire of mother."⁴⁶ While Sadlier's novel consistently depicts an innocent vision of immigrant culture and works against the claims of Irish "foreignness," her sentimentalist's illustration of the Blake family's moral failures reveals, conversely, that some Irish immigrants are, indeed, in need of "domestication" under the watchful eye of the Catholic Church.

Moreover, this analysis shows that the representation of Irish American identity in Sadlier's novel is complicated by the desire to prioritize the authority of the Catholic church and somewhat vexed by its appropriation of American cultural ideals and domestic discourses used to signify a properly middle-class Irish American household and community. On the one hand, it is the tension between the anti-assimilationist and

45 Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 159. For more on the Devotional Revolution in Ireland and the nature of Catholicism in Ireland in the famine era, see Miller, 124-129. See also, Larkin, "The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850-1875."

46 Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," 120.

assimilationist elements of the text that allows Sadlier to create a dualistic sense of national identity. If the ideology of separate spheres is now acknowledged as implicated in the creation of both the boundaries of the home and the nation, Sadlier uses the rhetoric of domesticity to exploit the already unstable relationship between race and national identity in the antebellum period. In spite of the fact that *The Blakes and the Flanagans* primarily is occupied with setting limits around Irish interaction with mainstream culture, Sadlier's embrace and reliance on a domestic value system allows her to simultaneously expand the boundaries around which national identity is formed. Precisely because Irish immigrants often are treated as foreign and threatening elements in American culture, she can mobilize the virtues associated with separate spheres ideology to affirm an American immigrant identity that maintains its allegiance to Ireland without being any less "American." On the other hand, Sadlier's reliance on a Catholic version of separate spheres ideology and representation of the properly middle-class Irish American family reveals that her domestic novel, her didacticism, is invested in managing the contact zone between the Irish and a threatening Protestant American culture as a way of managing the threat the masses of poor immigrants posed to the viability of the Irish Catholic community to maintain the status and rights accorded them as "free white persons" but under threat by nativism.

No moment in *The Blakes and the Flanagans* conveys this contradictory sense of Irish immigrant identity more than a scene in which Miles Blake and Edward Flanagan have a disagreement over how "American" an Irishman can be. Miles says: "My idea is, that men can't be Irishmen and Americans at the same time; they must be either one or the other." Ever the dutiful son of Tim, Edward replies:

I myself am living proof that your position is a false one . . . I am Irish in heart—Catholic, I hope, in faith and practice, and yet I am fully prepared to stand by this great republic, the land of my birth, even to shedding the last drop of my blood, if necessary. I love America, as it were, the land of my adoption, as well as of my birth, but I cannot, or will not, forget Ireland . . . Yes, my dear uncle, I am both Irish and American.⁴⁷

Edward's discourse on his "position" is telling. He avoids referring to either Ireland or America as his homeland. He pledges to die for the United States but can't seem to locate himself there spiritually or emotionally. Sadlier figures Edward as far from the impoverished muddied Irishman of the bogs. He is not the object of interest in the "theatre" of the Catholic mass, but, even as a model citizen, he remains in a conflicted space. While he speaks with assuredness, he cannot define his position in simple terms. In spite of Sadlier's success in justifying dualistic national affiliations in *The Blakes and the Flanagans*, Edward's own articulation of his national identity is uncertain.

Finally, even though Sadlier effectively challenges stereotypical representations of the Irish by depicting a proper middle-class Irish Catholic family in *The Blakes and the Flanagans*, that projection is deeply troubled by the debt owed to identification with Ireland that is coupled with an "adopted" sense of an American national identity. While Sadlier uses the rhetoric of domesticity to successfully challenge claims for the racially unified—Anglo-Saxon—nature of American national identity and justify the immigrant group's dualistic national affiliations, she ultimately is ambivalent about that dualistic national identity when it is finally voiced by Edward Flanagan. With the 1856 publication of *Con O'Regan*, in which a group of poor Irish immigrants in Boston colonize a vast and open frontier in Dubuque, Iowa, Sadlier further complicates her representation of immigrants who are "Irishmen and Americans at the same time" by engaging with an

47 Sadlier, *The Blakes and the Flanagans*, 164.

even broader sense of Irish American identity—one in which the international scope of Irish immigration comes to the fore.

IV. *Con O'Regan* and a Regained Irish Homeland in the American West

The 1856 Irish Emigrant Aid convention of Buffalo New York set forth a plan for resettlement of Irish Americans from Northeast American urban centers to the Western frontier.⁴⁸ Sadlier's support for the aspirations of the Buffalo Convention is apparent in *Con O'Regan; or, Emigrant Life in the New World* which was serialized in connection with the movement. *Con O'Regan* is typically read as an obvious piece of propaganda fiction in support of the Buffalo Convention and "home" and "homelessness" are the central themes of the narrative. From the outset, Sadlier creates a contrast between the home of the immigrant's past in Ireland, the feeling of homelessness in Boston, and the rewards of Irish immigration further west to Iowa where an idealized rural community can be formed. The lives of the protagonists Winny and Con O'Regan and their friends, the Bergens, demonstrate the near impossibility of an immigrant finding a suitable home in Boston of the 1830s. Both the contaminating environment of the city and the immigrant's debased living spaces are an expression of the pervasive feeling of homelessness.

Throughout the novel, Sadlier emphasizes the dangers of life in northeast American cities. These include poverty, lack of economic mobility, the temptations of alcohol and gambling, and anti-Catholic, anti-Irish nativism in the workplace. These threats have physical manifestations. For example, the 24-year-old Winny O'Regan is described as a "woe-begone" and "scantly clothed" young girl who "had seen better

⁴⁸ The plan never gained financial or institutional backing but was an important precursor to the more successful Irish Catholic Colonization Society of 1879.

days.” As a house servant, her hands are “much discolored and intersected in every direction by those unseemly hacks in the skin which denote labor of the hardest kind.”⁴⁹ When her brother, Con, arrives in Boston to stake out a living so his wife and children can follow, he shudders over his sister’s impoverished look. Furthermore, the Bergens live in a one-room cellar. Nora Bergen doesn’t have enough coal to warm her three children and she hardly has enough food to offer Con tea upon his first visit to their quarters. In addition to the ills of poverty and alcoholism, the immigrant’s religion is degraded in a discriminating urban America where nativism is rampant. It is only in the concluding chapters of the novel, set in early antebellum Dubuque, that food and resources are plenty. On western farms the immigrant’s physical and religious health is restored and economic worries are forgotten.

Many of the representational strategies Sadlier uses in *The Blakes and the Flanagans* are present in *Con O’Regan*. For example, she relies on the device of contrast: Paul Bergen and Tom Derragh are foils for the more respectable Con O’Regan and the immigrant’s impoverished living conditions in Boston are a stark contrast to the serenity and plenty of the American frontier settlement. Secondly, Sadlier figures the negative influences of the dominant culture as contaminating the immigrant’s domestic space and moral livelihood causing poverty, alcoholism, and, ultimately, a corruption of the living space equivalent to homelessness and near apostasy. Finally, as in *The Blakes and the Flanagans*, she promotes the larger goal of the novel by foregrounding anti-assimilationist rhetoric and utilizing domestic discourses to show the similarities between a select set of American cultural values and Irish ones. She focuses on the domestic space of the familial household to communicate both a value system and to create narrative

⁴⁹ Sadlier, *Con O’Regan*, 6.

tension; the force of the story's main theme of homelessness is bound up with the degradation of the woman's role and relies on the assumed value of proper domestic order and the woman's capacity to be a moral exemplar and household manager.

Karen Sanchez-Eppler has discussed the ways in which late nineteenth-century Sunday School tracts dwelt upon how to properly educate "half-civilized" immigrant children in New York City and thereby reveal the "partial nature of national identity in a nation built by expansion and immigration." She argues that in the Sunday School stories the immigrant children of New York are depicted as "ambivalently American" because of an "absence of homes" and the lack of the "familial enclosure the Beecher sisters celebrated." Mission schools are promoted as an antidote to this homelessness—a means of civilizing the foreign, homeless, and alien elements of a New York swarming with immigrants.⁵⁰

We have already seen that Sadlier relies on this "partial" sense of national identity to narrate the possibilities of a racially dualistic American national identity in *The Blakes and the Flanagans*. A subplot about the young Patsey Bergen underscores the relationship between the missionary quality of *Con O'Regan* and its theme of homelessness in the manner that Sanchez-Eppler outlines. Patsey, an "urchin" of the Hope Street slums, is described as "black as the devil" with a "stirrin', resolute turn" who can hardly be kept "in bounds" because he has suffered from exposure to a foreign culture where poverty keeps him from proper parental and religious influence.⁵¹ For example, he skips mass to play with his "Yankee" friends; he tries to change his name to "Jeff" or "Wash" after American presidents in rejection of his own namesake, Ireland's patron saint, Patrick; and

50 Sanchez-Eppler, "Raising Empires like Children," 404.

51 Sadlier, *Con O'Regan*, 325. For an analysis of Sadlier's use of racialized language and Irish white identity, see Eagan, "'White,' If 'Not Quite.'"

he spends his days watching “darkies” fighting and, to his parents’ outrage, imitates them when he returns home to their dirty cellar. His father’s alcoholism has led to the family’s poverty and has meant not only hunger but religious neglect. When the Bergens’ older son dies after a street fight, Paul Bergen quits drinking, embraces his religious duties and finally brings the entire family out to Dubuque where they settle happily nearby the O’Regans. Once adjusted to farm life, Patsey Bergen prefers agricultural work and Catholic education to his past life on the streets and embraces his Irish heritage by cultivating “roots of Irish shamrock” in the garden.⁵²

These rather predictable plot points echo the didacticism of *The Blakes and the Flanagans* and reflect Sanchez-Eppler’s analysis of Sunday School stories. Patsey and the entire Bergen family are depicted as ambivalently American and homeless because they have been exposed to the alien influence of an environment that promotes secularism and breeds ill-will toward Catholics. As we saw in *The Blakes and the Flanagans*, Sadlier inverts the relationship of the binaries “foreign” and “domestic” to suggest that by holding fast to Irish cultural identity—one that Sadlier identifies with institutional Roman Catholicism—immigrants can transcend the “partiality” of American national identity. More interesting is that, in *Con O’Regan*, Sadlier uses Catholicism, also the backbone of her didacticism in *The Blakes and the Flanagans*, to domesticate an immigrant population not only deemed questionably “American” in popular discourses but who also identify *themselves* as ambivalent about American life and the potential for immigrant acculturation in the United States.

The Irish immigrants in *Con O’Regan* are explicitly ambivalent about the experience of immigration. The characters repeatedly discuss the nature of letters home

52 Sadlier, *Con O’Regan*, 370.

that falsely represent immigrant life. They point to the lack of parity between the promises of immigration and the reality of immigrant squalor and the ways misrepresentations of life in the United States perpetuate “the tide of emigration” from the “Old Land.”⁵³ The characters complain that they had been told that in America “there was no difference made . . . between Catholic and Protestant, or Irishman and Englishman. . . . we thought . . . all [were] welcome here.” They are disappointed instead to find “the way they have here of treating Irishmen like dogs.”⁵⁴ While Sadlier scolds those immigrants who come to North America in hopes of making a fortune only to find themselves “ashamed to own to it” when they are faced with their lack of success and poverty, she also recognizes the inevitability of immigration and the near impossibility of immigrant return to Ireland. In the preface, she refers to those immigrants “hurrying too fast from the Old Land which we all love, but which many of us, alas! shall see never more.” The fictional portrait of the benefits of the Buffalo Convention is meant to offer the “old race” the possibility of redemption from the “overcrowded cities” and be affirmative of the possibilities of Irish success abroad.

Moreover, the transcendence of this self-identified ambivalence is linked to the fulfillment of particular religious imperatives that are, for Sadlier, inherited qualities. The immigrant’s happiness in Dubuque is predicated on the fulfillment a Catholic ideal that is racially bound. There are an array of minor characters with “old Celtic names” who are deemed racially Irish Catholic but are now “sham Catholics” because they have given up their religion in America.⁵⁵ At the workplace, Con prefers friendship with “full-blooded Americans” to the “Irish Yankees” who have betrayed their cultural and racial lineage in

53 Ibid., Preface.

54 Ibid., 48; 47.

55 Ibid., 256; 267.

the New World.⁵⁶ Nora Bergen's greatest fear is that, in her weak state of health, she and her husband might die and the children would be left to some "cursed school" or "House of Refuge" where they would become "black Protestants."⁵⁷ Nora quivers, with a distinctly "pale cheek," at the thought of her orphaned children in Protestant care. This emphasis on religious differences as racial distinctions suggests that American religious pluralism is suitable as long as secular or Protestant attitudes do not infringe upon the inherited Catholicism of the Celtic race in North America.

The Irish colony in Dubuque is the fullest expression of Sadlier's idealized Irish-only community in the United States. Fanning recognizes that "the Iowa these immigrants find" is an "Irish-American version of the pastoral myth of the virgin land."⁵⁸ The plenty in cattle, pigs, land, and resources the O'Regans and Bergens obtain in their agricultural settlement is enjoyed in a homogeneous environment with a local priest and Irish school teacher. At the conclusion of the novel, Winny is happily married and Con O'Regan and Paul Bergen celebrate their liberation from the "thralls" of the city and their independence—they can finally work for themselves and "not for others."⁵⁹ The immigrants' delight in their newly secured distance from their lives as members of the urban underclass is a fulfillment of a specifically Catholic Irish identity that was both at risk and discriminated against in the "Puritan city."⁶⁰ Expectedly, those characters who don't make it to Dubuque are the ones who were unable to resist the temptations of secularism and gambling in Boston. In these ways, Roman Catholicism is both a mark of and *a process through which* Sadlier's characters fulfill the promises of immigration and

56 Ibid., 263.

57 Ibid., 180-181.

58 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 128.

59 Sadlier, *Con O'Regan*, 277; 335.

60 Ibid., 119.

transcend the ambivalent nature of famine era Irish American identity.

Jason King has analyzed the implications of colonial settlement in *Con O'Regan*. He reads the novel, in conjunction with Sadlier's only Canadian-set novel, *Elinor Preston* (1866), as a "romance of immigration" that creates a feminized alternative to the violence which he identifies as implicit in Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis. King argues that Sadlier's novels offer a vision of a North American Irish "peaceable kingdom" representative of the Canadian national myth of origin.⁶¹ Indeed, in the novel, Sadlier ignores the recent removal of Native Americans from the American mid-West and insists that "there are only buffaloes and Irishmen" in Iowa.⁶² Likewise, she explicitly links the Irish immigrant's plight to the origins of the American Republic. She compares the Irish to the Puritans, both of whom left English oppression in search for religious freedom in the New World. The Irish dream of the city-upon-the-hill is stunted in Boston and Irish settlement in Dubuque, like American claims to Manifest Destiny, is predicated upon a sense of religious necessity and supported by the story of Puritan success. While King's analysis of *Con O'Regan* is important, Sadlier's identification of the Irish and the Puritans, like King's own reading of Sadlier in a Canadian context, suggests something meaningful about Sadlier's shaping of Irish American identity in *Con O'Regan*. Put simply, Sadlier negotiates an Irish identity which has broadly international affiliations and responds to a history of settlement and poverty in Ireland.

For example, the theme of homelessness is situated in the context of an international geography that has coordinates stretching around the world with Ireland, Boston, and Dubuque as the primary points of reference. Sadlier maps an expansive

61 King, "The Feminization of the Canadian Frontier," 46-49.

62 Sadlier, *Con O'Regan*, 254.

terrain of cities, countries, and continents in relation to the O'Regan's adopted city of Boston. For instance, she refers to the immigrant's current dwelling on "the western shores of the Atlantic." This indicates her clear mapping of Ireland as across the ocean from Boston in one direction and the "smiling prairies" of the frontier to the west in the other. To the north is Buffalo which she refers to as a "border city" on the "confines of British America." Africa is represented as the most culturally foreign of the geographical markers. When Nora Bergen doesn't recognize Con upon first seeing him in Boston, Winny says: "why I thought you'd know him if you met him in Africa, let alone here."⁶³ Finally, Botany Bay is referred to as a more suitable destination for immigrants as it lacks the nativism of northeastern cities of the United States. By rendering these geographical points of reference, Sadlier figures Boston as a central point in a geography which is international in scope. It is a middle ground: not nearly akin to the familiar landscape of western Ireland, not as ripe for settlement as Iowa, but not as foreign as Africa either.

Similarly, the image of immigrant life in Boston and its relief in Dubuque is meaningful within the context of Protestant-Catholic group relations in Ireland and for the evocation of the potato famine that was particularly relevant to Sadlier's generation of immigrant readers. For example, Sadlier represents urban industrial labor as similar to the "slave labor" the Irish faced back home whereby immigrants in the United States are still "Irish serfs" driven by masters who care nothing for them. When a Boston bank collapses and there is no hope for regaining the lost savings, the "victims of wholesale robbery" lament that "[b]lack poverty is on us again" and are depicted as little better than they were when they arrived.⁶⁴ The temptations of the city and lack of employment

63 Sadlier, *Con O'Regan*, 12.

64 Sadlier, *Con O'Regan*, 274.

opportunities beyond piecemeal industrial labor contracts (as opposed to agricultural work more natural to the Irish) lead to a hunger and poverty which Sadlier associates with the famine. She describes one formerly Catholic Irish immigrant who is a nativist saying, “he hates Catholics like he hates—hunger!” The meaning of his racial betrayal hinges on the history of Protestant proselytizing in poverty-stricken Catholic areas during the potato blight. The rural Irish were given soup in exchange for conversion during the famine.⁶⁵ Her suggestion that this immigrant exchanged the religious imperatives of his birth for ‘a mess pottage’ in the United States underscores the ways in which Sadlier figures the politics of poverty in America as related to those of the Great Hunger. Likewise, the excitement and fulfillment generated by the Irish settlement in Iowa is largely a celebration of having a “little estate” of one’s own “that neither landlord, nor proctor, nor cess-man, nor tax-gatherer can ever lay claim to.” The greatest joy Con has when admiring his “new possessions” in Dubuque is the land’s resemblance to Ireland where the spring prairie is described as “green and soft as that which carpets the Emerald Isle.”⁶⁶ It is not simply the promises of immigration that are redeemed, or the construction of Irish American identity that is solidified, through frontier colonization, but the Celtic, agricultural, and Catholic nature of the “old race” in Ireland that is renewed as well.

For Sanchez-Eppler, the Sunday School stories that promote mission work insist on an American national identity that is white and Christian but constantly facing internal

65 Sadlier, *Con O'Regan*, 267; Miller, 286-287. According to Fanning, Sadlier’s 1853 historical novel, *New Lights; or, Life in Galway* is set during the worst years of the famine. In it, she “exposes” Protestant proselytizers who promise soup to starving Catholics in exchange for conversion (*Irish Voice*, 116-117).

66 *Ibid.*, 332; 333.

others and therefore insist that “these others both assimilate *and* leave.”⁶⁷ Sadlier’s novel foregrounds its Catholic mission and insists that her own readers assimilate just enough so that they *can* leave. Con’s boss, the secular Mr. Coulter, embraces the good natured O’Regans and facilitates the loan for their resettlement. The fruits of Mr. Coulter’s collaboration with the Irish, rather than resistance to them, show that given the opportunity the Irish happily will both assimilate and leave.

In closing, the ambivalence implicit in Edward Flanagan’s discussion of his Irish American identity in *The Blakes and the Flanagans* is made explicit in *Con O’Regan*. In the latter, Sadlier resolves the contradictions of immigrant identity by offering her fullest expression of the possibilities open to a transnational community of exiled Irish. The American pastoral is combined with Roman Catholicism to remedy the dangers of immigrant life for day laborers and domestic servants who feel estranged in and are seen as “foreign” to American soil. Her emphasis on the racial underpinning of Catholic Irish identity, set in an international framework, creates an Irish American identity that is self-consciously meaningful for a widespread community of Irish immigrants thereby deepening the meaning of “traveling domesticity” in antebellum fiction by white women. Ultimately, both of Sadlier’s “anti-assimilationist” novels challenge and broaden the racial categories associated with American national identity while simultaneously implying that by upholding a set of racially bound religious values the famine generation immigrants can demonstrate their dualistic American national identity, and their ability to fulfill the duties of American citizenship, most clearly.

The following chapters of *Regular Wild Irish* map nicely onto the geographical settings prominent in Sadlier’s novels while also engaging with many of the themes put

67 Sanchez-Eppler, 407 (italics in original).

forth by Sadlier in *The Blakes and the Flanagans* and *Con O'Regan*. John Boyle O'Reilly and Louise Imogen Guiney are part of the Boston Irish American community and their texts construct an image of the Irish which, like Sadlier's, is drawn from a sense of Irish racial distinctiveness deeply tied to Catholicism. James W. Sullivan's tales, set in New York City, extend Sadlier's concerns over the ways in which urban spaces shape Irishness. His *Tenement Tales of New York* foregrounds the complexities of the class and cultural hierarchies of American cities and their roles in Irish American in group and out group relations. Finally, Kate McPhelim Cleary, an Irish immigrant writer whose texts compare most naturally with Sadlier's, wrote stories and novels set on the growing frontier towns of the mid-West which revise the image of immigrant utopia imagined by Sadlier in *Con O'Regan*.

CHAPTER 2
REGULAR WILD IRISH:
AMERICAN CELTICISM, JOHN BOYLE O'REILLY, AND
LOUISE IMOGEN GUINEY'S "CIVIL WAR" MARTYRS

I. Introduction

The celebration of Gaelic cultural history and Irish folk culture became increasingly popular, among the American Irish, in the late nineteenth century. The popularity of American Celticism coincided with: a rise in Irish nationalism in the United States; the improved, if still contradictory, status of Irish Americans; and shifting U.S. political alignments in international relations during this period. The American-born children of Irish immigrants experienced, on the whole, better conditions in the United States than the Famine generation immigrants, as their political, economic, and cultural opportunities expanded in the decades after the Civil War. Additionally, there were a series of tensions within the Irish American community between those established Irish Americans who were moving up the ranks of the economic ladder and those newly arrived Irish immigrants who struggled financially and lived in poorer and working-class neighborhoods in northeastern cities of the United States. The internal divisions within Irish America—between the “lace curtain” Irish and the “shanty” Irish—were often mitigated by the rhetoric of Irish nationalism and Irish “race pride” expressed through Celticism. Simultaneously, in this period, the United States was participating in international politics and warfare in a manner which brought anti-Catholic and colonialist discourses to the forefront of American politics and culture in new ways. These social

changes and political discourses directly affected Irish immigrant and Irish American attitudes toward their American and Irish national affiliations and contributed to the popularity of Celticism in the late nineteenth century. This chapter examines the writings of two important figures, John Boyle O'Reilly and Louise Imogen Guiney, who were associated with the Celticism celebrated by Irish Americans in the final decades of the nineteenth century. O'Reilly was a former fugitive and Irish nationalist who settled in Boston after spending several months in the Penal Colony in Australia for conspiring against the English in Ireland. Once settled in the United States, he became an influential editor of the Boston *Pilot*, one of the longest running Irish nationalist periodicals in the United States. He also became a figure well regarded by the Boston elites and was held up as a model Irish American citizen. From that post, he mentored various Irish American writers, including the young Louise Guiney, the daughter of Irish immigrants, who began her writing career as a contributor to the *Pilot*.

Though her work is rarely read today, Guiney was influenced by and participated in Irish American, Boston Brahmin, and transatlantic literary cultures of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. A poet, essayist, devout Catholic, scholar, and animal-lover, Louise Guiney was born in Roxbury, Massachusetts in 1861 and attended a convent school in Rhode Island. Her father, Patrick R. Guiney, was a celebrated Civil War hero whose injuries in The Wilderness campaign led to his death in 1876. The writer's earliest memory, one that would leave a lasting impression on her, was of visiting her wounded father at camp in Virginia. Guiney published her first poem—on the Massachusetts Senator and Radical Republican Charles Sumner—at 19 and quickly became part of Boston's Anglo-Protestant literary culture. Her work appeared in the

Atlantic, *Harper's New Monthly*, and *Scribner's*, among other leading periodicals. Annie Fields introduced her to noted local figures including Oliver Wendell Holmes, to whom she dedicated her first collection of essays. When Guiney's writing was not enough to sustain her and her dependent mother, she took a three-year position at the Auburndale post office. Later, when she needed additional income, Sarah Orne Jewett helped her obtain employment at the Boston Public Library. In 1901, Guiney expatriated to England where she died, at Oxford, in 1920. Prior to her move abroad she had published five volumes of poetry, a book of short fiction, and two essay collections among other non-fictional texts. From the time of her employment at Auburndale her production of creative work slowed and, once in England, she primarily concentrated on writing non-fictional works and recovering the lives and works of: seventeenth-century English Catholics, Recusant poets, and Irish patriots and writers.¹ Her attention to "people who [were] not of the slightest bit of interest to [her] generation" after her expatriation contributed to years of financial stress which went unabated until her death.²

An early essay written by Guiney, called "Irish," captures many of the features of American Celticism embraced by both Guiney and her mentor, O'Reilly. "Irish" is a study of the character of Ireland in the 1890s that both celebrates its "inherited" Celtic features and insists upon its distinct history and culture. In the essay, she praises Ireland's "pauper's pride of blood" and characterizes its fight for autonomy as full of "charming futile bravado." The essay's suggestion that a Celtic racial hopelessness underpins

1 See Fairbanks, Alice Brown, and Fanning, *The Irish Voice in America*, 166-173, for Guiney's biography. These figures included King Charles II, the Jesuit priest and martyr Edmund Campion, the Anglican priest Hurrell Froude, and the Welsh poet Henry Vaughan, among others. Recusant poets were those English Catholics who, from 1570 to 1791, refused to participate in services of the church of England and, as such, "committed statutory offense" (www.m-w.com).

2 Guiney, *Letters*, Volume II, 133.

contemporary Irish identity is consistent with the conventions of American Celticism. Her reliance on American Celticism in the essay was inspired by a trip to Ireland where she befriended Dora Sigerson and others associated with the nascent Irish Literary Renaissance as well as by the discourses of racial manliness O'Reilly expressed in his prose.³ As this chapter will show, Guiney's particular treatment of the features of American Celticism in "Irish," and other works, and O'Reilly's embrace of Irish race pride, are indicative of a web of tensions around the shifting political, cultural, and ethnic affiliations within an increasingly diverse Irish America resulting from the generational transitions and from the shifts in U.S. political alignments in the 1880s and 1890s. In short, Guiney's work, in relation to O'Reilly's fiction and nonfiction, has implications for the ways in which scholars understand changing attitudes toward racial and religious categories of identity and forms of kinship among Irish Americans in the late nineteenth century.

In spite of Guiney's relationship with the Boston literary elites and her self-proclaimed, and often-quoted, identity as "organically European," she contributed to the American Catholic press, and maintained an affinity with the ideals of American Celticism, throughout her life. As such, an analysis of her essay on the Irish and her reliance on American Celticism offers an opportunity to examine the changing nature of discourses shaping Irish American fiction in the late nineteenth century. Her texts have particular relevance for the articulation of Irish "race pride" emblematic of the Irish nationalism supported by Irish immigrant Union soldiers and their American-born

3 Guiney, *Patrins*, 154. Guiney had a lifelong friendship and correspondence with Dora Shorter (née Sigerson) and her husband, Clement Shorter, the English writer and magazine editor.

children.⁴ As we will see, Guiney's ideas about race "cut both ways" and are largely bound by "the prevailing view of 'race' as essentially masculine."⁵ To elucidate Guiney's contradictory attitudes about race, this chapter considers "Irish," and other essays included in the volume *Patrins* (1897), as well as her collection of short fiction, *Lovers' Saint Ruth's and Three Other Tales* (1894) in terms of O'Reilly's "manly" image of the Celtic ideal represented in his treatise on boxing, *Athletics and Manly Sport*, and his only novel, *Moondyne*. This chapter demonstrates that the specifically masculine nature of O'Reilly's Celtic race pride, and the race sciences pervasive in American culture in the period, shaped Guiney's work in significant ways. It reveals that, through the figure of the male martyr, and by adapting the features of American Celticism, she attempted to circumvent the restrictions of late nineteenth-century racial discourses. Finally, when an analysis of the representation of "civil war" in her short fiction is examined in terms of her expatriation and her interest in English Catholic subjects it can be shown that Guiney recodes racial affiliations as religious ones thereby broadening Catholic Irish and Irish-American history and identity in a time of Anglo Rapprochement in the United States.⁶

II. Guiney's American Celticism and "On the Ethics of Descent"

The foremost critic of nineteenth-century Irish American literature, Charles Fanning, argues that Guiney's work exemplifies the ideals of American Celticism shared by her generation of writers. As noted above, from the eighteenth-century, there had been an interest in Irish folk materials which became increasingly popular in the late nineteenth century, coincident with the Irish Renaissance in Ireland. Central to the

4 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 162.

5 Gaines, "Black Americans' Racial Uplift Ideology as 'Civilizing Mission,'" 434.

6 Anglo Rapprochement refers to the growth in friendly relations between the United States and Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

American Celticism of this period is its reliance on and celebration of the Celtic ideal. This ideal characterized the Celt as full of “piercing regret [,] passion, . . . [and] magic.”⁷ This version of Celtic identity has been linked with the features described by Matthew Arnold in *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867). Arnold’s idea of the “Celtic genius” has “sentiment as its main basis, with love of beauty, charm, and spirituality for its excellence, ineffectualness and self-will for its defect.”⁸ As John V. Kelleher, the founder of Celtic Studies in the United States, put it, “There is penetrating passion and melancholy bred into Celts by [in Arnold’s terms] their ‘sensuous nature, their manifold striving, their adverse destiny, their immense calamities.’”⁹ While recognizing that there were some positive effects of American Celticism, Fanning insists that, finally, the reliance on the Celtic ideal “inflicted” unmistakable “blows to Irish-American letters.” He argues that Guiney’s work epitomizes the ways in which the romantic inclinations of American Celticism hindered the growth of realist expression in Irish American writing.¹⁰

It is true that there is a Celtic “mist” which sometimes overlays Guiney’s depictions of the Irish. For example, her study of the Irish rebel Robert Emmet tends to romanticize his tragic hopelessness. Emmet was a member of the United Irishman, an Irish nationalist organization active in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries. In 1803, he led a failed rebellion against English rule and was hanged in Dublin for his crimes. In Guiney’s *Robert Emmet: A Survey of His Rebellion and of His Romance* (1904) he is described as a “victim and martyr” whose mind was “naturally melancholy

7 Arnold qtd. in Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 169.

8 Arnold qtd. in Kelleher, 13.

9 Kelleher, 14.

10 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 173.

and romantic.”¹¹ The fascination for the martyr at the heart of American Celticism is expressed as well:

But to die prodigally at twenty-five, and to be enshrined with unwithered and unique passion in Irish hearts; to go down prematurely in dust and blood, and yet to be understood, felt, seen, forever, in the sphere where ‘only the great things last,’ is perhaps as enviable a privilege as young men often attain. His is one of several historic instances in which those who have wrought little else seem to have wrought an exquisite and quite enduring image of themselves in human tradition.¹²

The romanticized vision of Ireland which accompanies her discussion of Emmet’s life and death underscores the “mystical” treatment of both her subject and his nation of origin:

A knot of peasants gathered around a peat fire in the long evenings, pipe in hand, are the busy hereditary factors of apocryphal tales beginning “Once Robert Emmet (God love him),” &c.; and a certain coloured print, very green as to raiment, very melodramatic as to gesture, hangs to-day in the best room of their very cabin, and stands to them for all that was of old, and is not, and still should be.¹³

Thus, Emmet is remembered as one who died too young in a failed effort for Irish independence and freedom but has an influence that transcends the small Irish “cabin” in its significance for human history and tradition. Her image of Emmet as a timeless hero and of the Irish peasants telling tales over a fire exemplifies the romanticized notions of Ireland Fanning identifies as central to American Celticism.

Similarly, Guiney’s only fictional text set in Ireland, “The Provider,” dramatizes the struggles of an impoverished twelve-year-old Hughey O’Kinsella and imagines him as a striving Celtic hero. The short story is set in Dublin in the late nineteenth century and tells the tale of his failed efforts to make enough money to buy the necessary medicine

11 Guiney cited Thomas Moore’s description of Emmet. See Guiney, *Robert Emmet*, 13-14.

12 Guiney, *Patrins*, 10-11.

13 *Ibid.*, 11.

for his ailing mother and food for his younger siblings. Hughey, and his family, fell into poverty after Hughey's father's death, leaving his mother, Moira O'Kinsella, to move her children from her thatched roof cottage with a "pleasant farm" to a cramped house over a beer shop. The protagonist gets an honest job but is swindled by a savings bank which promises large sums in interest only to flee Dublin when Hughey wants to withdraw his savings. Hughey's role as the Celtic hero of the story manifests itself most clearly at the conclusion when he drowns himself, innocently believing that his mother might gain insurance money from the bank as a result of his death. In spite of his ultimate failure as the provider, Hughey is depicted as a "knight" who met a tragic death.

While Guiney's texts often do reflect the romanticized image of the Irish described by Arnold and characterized as problematic by Fanning, some of her writings diverge from Arnold's description of the Celtic ideal in interesting ways. For example, for Arnold, there was no question that the Celtic genius was wholly in the past.¹⁴ In contrast, in "Irish," Guiney gauges the associations between the Celtic past of Ireland and the role of this essential past in shaping contemporary Irish culture. Specifically, the essay considers the popular notion that "the Celt is passing away" and insists that while he [the Celt] may represent the ideals of yesterday, such as "legendry," "ritual," and "the heroic and indignant joy of life," the Celtic nations are ancient civilizations with deep importance to modern life.¹⁵ While mourning the "great gulf" between the Ireland of yesterday and of the present, she insists upon the vitality and wide-ranging importance of the Irish Celtic tradition by making the distinction of a specific type of Celticism in Ireland. Of all the Celtic countries "Ireland has the richest background" and has been a

14 Kelleher, 6.

15 Guiney, *Patrins*, 153.

“watershed” of European knowledge and art shaping the cultures of Spain, England, Scotland, and France. She argues that English rule has shattered the traditional ranks and classes among people and imposed ignorance and neglect upon them and, therefore, has obscured the links between the ancient glory of Celtic Ireland and the poverty of contemporary Ireland. “Irish” emphasizes the country’s “incalculable” influence across the Atlantic and insists that the nation has been wrecked by English colonialism.¹⁶ As such, her description of Ireland is articulated in “traditionally nationalistic terms” in which British oppression is identified as the root of Irish poverty, famines, and evictions.¹⁷ In these ways, Guiney’s image of the Irish adheres to the features of late nineteenth-century American Celticism in that, consistent with the ideology of Irish American nationalism, it takes Arnold’s representation of the Celtic genius as a model but expands on that image by asserting the relevance and vitality of Irish history and culture in the contemporary period.

As the above examples suggest, and as most scholars agree, Guiney readily supported American Celticism’s version of Irish racial identity in “Irish” and other texts. It is less frequently noted that Guiney’s writings also offer a more complex representation of identity based on ethnic markers than is suggested by a cursory review of her Irish-themed materials. For instance, she forthrightly problematizes descent notions of identity in “On the Ethics of Descent.” The essay on descent is Guiney’s clearest statement of her ideas about race and was published in *Patrins*, the same collection of essays in which “Irish” appears. “On the Ethics of Descent” expresses her suspicions about the biographer’s treatment of “his hero’s genealogy.” She troubles her contemporary culture’s

16 Ibid., 154.

17 Miller, 511.

faith in the race sciences:

[t]here is more of superstition than of science in this mode of reckoning: it has no great philosophic bearing, and it is very illiberal. The truth is, we belong, from the beginning, to many masters, and are unspeakably beholden to the forming hands of the phenomena of the universe, rather than to the ties of blood.¹⁸

Her rejection of “the science of heraldry” which “exists but to commemorate some personal contact with marvels, and a generative occasion without which the race would not be itself” complicates the standard critical interpretation of the reliance on the Celtic hero in her work.¹⁹ When evaluating Guiney’s “Irish” materials, recent scholarship has made no mention of her discussion of the insufficiency of claims of identity entirely based on racial histories in “On the Ethics of Descent” nor has the essay been addressed in critical work that attends to her non-Irish themed writings.

In fact, Fanning and other scholars have been critical of Guiney’s reliance on the conventions of American Celticism in her non-Irish themed materials as well as in her more obviously “Irish” ones. For example, Guiney’s single collection of short stories, *Lovers’ Saint Ruth’s and Three Other Tales*, contains narratives set in places as various as contemporary Maine, Civil War America, and seventeenth-century England. These tales are linked thematically—by the touching sacrifice of the chivalrous hero. Fanning sees the depiction of “heroic sacrifice” in her Irish materials and the extension of those ideals of “martyrdoms and lost causes” to non-Irish stories and essays as representative of Guiney’s inability to extensively approach the “pressing problems facing the real Irish in Ireland or America in her time.”²⁰ Critics similarly have been dismissive of her interest in seventeenth-century English poets prompting one to say she was interested in “any

18 Guiney, *Patrins*, 29-30.

19 *Ibid.*, 32.

20 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 172.

century” but her own.²¹ Scholarship that has examined her work outside the scope of her Irish American identity, and reliance on the features of American Celticism, also has identified a preoccupation with the chivalrous male hero (or “martial ideal”) in her writing. Jackson Lears has identified the persistent tone of the male camaraderie voiced in her early letters and subsequent romantic illustrations of battle and male sacrifice as symptomatic of an anti-modernism experienced by other writers and intellectuals in the period. For Lears, this led her to embrace a masculine identity as a retreat from the suffocating discontent of “a feminine world of empty formalities.”²² In short, Guiney’s lifelong reliance on the Celtic ideal, her repeated uses of the image of the fighting hero, and the attention to seventeenth-century English Catholics in her later work are commonly identified as escapism. Her move to Oxford has been characterized as a “logical extension of the imaginative escape that she had already made in her writing.”²³

While none of these interpretations of Guiney’s work is outright wrong, per se, the common reading of Guiney as an escapist and an Anglophile who was naively wed to romantic notions of the Celtic hero or the chivalrous male martyr overlooks her manner of challenging the conventions of American Celticism in ways that are suggested by, but more complex than, her discussion of race in “On the Ethics of Descent.” The standard interpretations of Guiney’s work oversimplify the links between religious and racial representations in her fiction and nonfiction. That is, her engagement with and deviation from the figure of the male martyr, whether understood as linked to the Celtic ideal or to the martial ideal, was indeed a form of engagement with her own cultural moment that

21 Kane, “*The Pulpit of the Hearthstone*,” 355.

22 Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 125.

23 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 171. One of her biographers, Fairbanks, rejects the notion that she was an escapist.

should be understood as more meaningful than a simple escape. As this chapter demonstrates, Guiney's fictional male heroes typically appear in texts that thematize "civil war." An examination of her short stories which treat various forms of civil war shows that through this recurrent theme Guiney reframes and poses questions about descent notions of identity and the links between racial and religious hierarchies prevalent at the time.

III. John Boyle O'Reilly's "Manly" Irish Race Pride

To fully consider the significance of Guiney's reliance on, and departure from, the representations of American Celticism and theories of the race sciences, it is necessary to first understand the specifically masculine nature that Irish race pride took in the prose of John Boyle O'Reilly. O'Reilly was the most influential *Pilot* writer of the nineteenth century who came to be understood as a respected "middle man" between Yankee and Irish American cultures in Boston in the 1880s. While he is best known for the Celticism of his poetry, the masculine articulation of O'Reilly's racial identity is evident in his non-fictional instruction manual, *Athletics and Manly Sport* (1890), and his only novel, *Moondyne* (1879). In the former, he uses discourses of masculinity popular in the period to shape an image of Irish racial history consistent with race ideals of the time and to assert the primacy of Celtic, and therefore, Irish and Irish American, claims to civilized manhood. In the latter, he promotes the reform of English land and prison systems while shaping an image of the appropriately "manly" Irish laborer.

Fanning rightly has noted that O'Reilly's biography "reads like a romantic novel from the Famine generation." Born in County Meath in the 1840s, O'Reilly became a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (also known as the "Fenians") at a young

age and apprenticed at a printing shop in England before returning to Ireland in 1863. There, he joined the British army and recruited Irish rebels within its ranks until he was convicted as a Fenian conspirator and sentenced to serve time in several British prisons. Among these were the notorious Dartmoor and the penal colony in Bunbury, Western Australia. After nine months in the penal colony he escaped on a whaling ship to Philadelphia in 1869. Settling in Boston, he apprenticed at the *Pilot* under another Irish exile and former radical, Patrick Donahoe, before taking on full editorship of the paper.²⁴ Founded by Donahoe, the *Pilot* was similar to other Irish American newspapers in that, from its inception, it had ties to Irish weeklies and the nationalist press in Ireland. The Catholic Irish American press formed in the post-Famine years when many, such as Donahoe, were exiled to the United States after the failure of the Young Irelanders uprising in 1848.²⁵ O'Reilly arrived after the dissolution of the Fenian Americans, and his editorship at the *Pilot* coincided with the revived interest in Irish nationalism after 1880.²⁶ His nationalist strategies mellowed from the embrace of violent action as a young man to support for more moderate home rule though “parliamentary moral force” as editor, but he remained a powerful voice of Irish nationalism and was an “unofficial leader” of one faction of Irish American nationalists in the United States. During his reign at the *Pilot*, he supported what historians have identified as the conservative side of Irish nationalism and acted as an “apostle of uplift” for Irish Americans.²⁷

Moreover, as a former Fenian, editor of the *Pilot*, and conservative Irish-

24 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 161. After the Fenian Brotherhood in America unsuccessfully entered Canada (on numerous occasions) from 1866-1871 to disrupt British rule, there was dissolution of Fenian membership in the United States until 1880.

25 McMahon, “Ireland and the Birth of the Irish-American Press,” 5 and 9. The Young Irelander Rebellion was an Irish nationalist uprising which took place on July 29, 1848 in County Tipperary.

26 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 162.

27 Miller, 546.

American nationalist, O'Reilly was "his generation's leading cultural figure."²⁸ He self-identified as a voice for "the calm, rational, and respectable Irish Catholics of America." This middle man addressed a largely middle-class audience, encouraging the American Irish of all ranks to aim for "progress and self-improvement."²⁹ While the tenor of his politics toward Irish nationalism shifted with age, his conservative nationalism did not prevent him from consistently advocating the celebration of "pride in the literary and cultural productions of the Irish American writers" associated with the *Pilot*. He encouraged Guiney and others in an anti-realist stance and in the celebration of Celtic folk culture and myths which had been a touchstone of Irish American culture for generations but gained more prominence in the last decades of the nineteenth century.³⁰

The specifically masculine articulations of O'Reilly's race pride are expressed in his treatise on boxing and exercise, *Athletics and Manly Sport*, and his only novel, *Moondyne*. *Manly Sport* is an illustrated guide to the history of boxing, a training manual, and a treatise on the benefits of boxing, canoeing, and other sports. The primary goal of the book is to assert the necessity of athletic training for all Americans, including children: "[k]nowing how to fight makes common men self-reliant and independent. A people are preparing for their own subjection to a class, or a tyranny, where a generation is allowed to grow up without physical training and emulation."³¹ *Manly Sport* is divided

28 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 161. O'Reilly was well respected across Boston. He became president of the Boston Press Club in 1879 and was commissioned to write the poem dedicating the Pilgrim monument at Plymouth Rock ten years later (Ashton, "O'Reilly and the *Moondyne*," 40-42).

29 Miller, 538.

30 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 162. The Roman Catholic church campaigned against literary realism and naturalism and this anti-realism was "an article of faith in Catholic cultural circles" and supported by O'Reilly (Fanning, 162).

31 O'Reilly, 38. *Athletics and Manly Sport* was first published in 1888 and entitled: *The Ethics of Boxing and Manly Sport*. The charismatic O'Reilly often appeared in public sporting events and even fought the "Boston Strong Boy," John L Sullivan (1858-1918), who was from Roxbury, MA, the same Boston suburb (now part of the city) as Guiney.

into four sections. The first two are dedicated to the history of boxing and best way for individuals to train for a healthy lifestyle. These sections contain chapters entitled, for example, “Improvements in Modern Boxing,” “The Athletics of Ancient Greece,” “Feudalism Suppressed Popular Athletic Exercises,” “The Food of Athletes in Training,” and “The Evils of Improper Training.” The final section is a collection of essays about O’Reilly’s recent canoeing trips on the Connecticut, Susquehanna, and Delaware Rivers. The illustrations contained in these chapters are both instructive (“The Usual and Wrong Way to Strike a Blow”) and inspirational (“Down the Susquehanna in a Canoe”). A third section, and the largest portion of the book, is dedicated to “Ancient Irish Athletic Games, Exercises, and Weapons.” O’Reilly discusses ancient Celtic weapons, the feats of Cuchullin, and hurling as the “chief game of ancient Ireland.”³² He analyzes illustrations of Celtic weapons from the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy and makes a sustained plea for further study of the power of Ireland’s past and the racial fitness of ancient Ireland.

O’Reilly’s text on athleticism, clearly rooted in the celebration of Irish folk culture associated with American Celticism, is also drawn from discourses about exercise, boxing, and sports that were prevalent in the late nineteenth century. A preoccupation with manly athleticism in this period has been linked to racialized discourses that increasingly looked toward the “strenuous life” as a key marker of the proper form of citizenship and indicative of the highest form of white male identity. Gale Bederman has shown that from 1880 to 1910 middle-class men actively sought to

32 O’Reilly, *The Ethics of Boxing and Manly Sport*, 195. Cuchullin is an Irish mythological figure and O’Reilly draws on Irish myths in this portion of the text. Irish nationalists embraced Cuchullin as a Celtic hero. For example, Irish Renaissance writer Lady Gregory collected and retold many of the legends in her *Culchulain of Muirthemne* (1902).

“remake” manhood. She argues that at this time the term “manly” emerged as a signifier of “the highest conception of what is noble in men” and that ideas about manliness were linked to “ideologies of civilization.”³³ O’Reilly’s extensive study of Celtic weaponry and the athleticism of ancient Ireland, placed at the center of a guide book dedicated to instructing the “common man” about how to obtain physical, intellectual, and moral “manly self-confidence,” suggests that O’Reilly’s Celtic ideal was very much aligned with contemporary conceptions about racial superiority as defined by a particular version of gender identity.

His focus on the great ancient civilization of the Celt in *Manly Sport* allowed him, like his contemporaries, to use the term “civilization” to “legitimize[d] [all manner of] claims to power.”³⁴ As previously mentioned, the Irish had made gains in political and economic standing in the United States in O’Reilly’s time, but the subordinate status of the Catholic Irish in Ireland was understood as an essential failing of a race which could not govern itself. By aligning the Celt with ancient athletics, O’Reilly marshals contemporary discourses that linked civilized status to a particular form of gender identity to attest to Irish, and Irish-American, manly fitness for the demands of civilized life and government. As an Irish nationalist, O’Reilly also uses “civilization” to undercut claims of racial superiority by other groups, specifically, the English. For example, in *Manly Sport*, in the process of narrating the history of boxing in ancient Greece, England, and Ireland, he draws a parallel between the Norman conquest of England and English conquest of Ireland, showing that each ruling nation created supplicants of their subjects by making sporting illegal. While the primary aim of this discussion, for O’Reilly, is to

33 Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 17; 27; 17.

34 *Ibid.*, 23.

illustrate the links between manly activity and freedom, independence, and self-reliance, it also serves to represent Irish history as not significantly different than that of the Anglo-Saxon. He, like Guiney in “Irish”—and consistent with the rhetoric of Irish American nationalism—implies that even though the Irish are in a state of destitution and foreign rule at the present, this is not justification for an image of them as innately incapable of self-rule. Overall, in *Manly Sport*, O’Reilly demonstrates the laudable and ancient nature of Celtic Ireland and, in doing so, attests to the civilized nature of contemporary Irish and Irish Americans.

Moondyne elaborates on the links between manliness and civilization O’Reilly sets forth more subtly in *Manly Sport*. *Moondyne* is an uneasy combination of romance and reform tract which advocates prison reform in Australia and England and is based on O’Reilly’s experiences in the penal colony.³⁵ The hero and title character is a prisoner in the Vasse region of Western Australia who is deeply loved by the natives of the Vasse who anoint him with his name “Moondyne” and later aid his escape from prison. After Moondyne’s escape, the setting shifts to London and the novel is occupied with a romantic subplot involving secondary characters until the wealthy and cosmopolitan Mr. Wyville intervenes in both the romantic entanglements and the British prison systems. At the conclusion, the reader is informed that “Wyville” is the name Moondyne adopts after his departure from Australia. O’Reilly never explains Moondyne’s transition to Wyville and the entire plot may have been more plausible if O’Reilly had disclosed this information to the reader earlier in the narrative. This is one of the features of the novel which gives it an unfinished quality. Nonetheless, Moondyne/Wyville remains a

35 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 163. See also: Ashton, “John Boyle O’Reilly and *Moondyne*.” There is some speculation that the novel partially was based on the life of a former prisoner and well-known ranger called “Moondyne Joe” whose exploits O’Reilly could have heard about while in Australia.

convincing hero. He is instrumental in reforming the prison system while also dividing the penal colony land between the indigenous people of the Vasse and the sandalwood company which mines the tribal lands.

This novel exemplifies the contradictory elements which contributed to emerging ideas about manliness and underscores the ways in which manliness functioned, for O'Reilly, as a means to both question the superior status of Anglo-Saxon civilization and express Irish race pride. The hero of the novel represents the ideal manly figure described by Bederman. As such, he also embodies many of the contradictory attributes of the late nineteenth-century middle-class man's refashioned version of "manhood." At the heart of the notion of "manliness" in this period was both ambivalence toward the "primitive" man and an adoption of certain associations with working-class and immigrant manhood. The white man placed himself in contrast to the non-Western "primitive" races while simultaneously claiming to share a "primordial" masculinity with those same "lower" races. Likewise, white middle-class men were also drawn to the primal practices of immigrant working-classes which formerly had been deemed "antithetical" to middle-class Victorian notions of manhood.³⁶ O'Reilly mobilizes these contradictory elements to define his hero and Irish racial identity as "manly" and, therefore, naturally fulfilling the ideal of civilized white masculinity.

Moondyne exemplifies this fascination with the primitive prowess of nonwhite races through the hero's affiliation with the Vasse natives. Not only do several of the Vasse tribal peoples join Moondyne/Wyville in England, working as his servants, but they have a kinship-like affection for him. Similarly, the hero is described in terms which suggest he is the purest embodiment of virtuous strength which is drawn from the

³⁶ Bederman, 22; 17.

classical and “dark” races: “His face was bronzed to the darkness of a Greek’s . . . [he had a] striking face and physique.” Likewise, he is described as an intellectual, moral, and physical model of manhood who has Herculean strength and a “massiveness and beauty” so impressive that when he enters a room “each [individual] fe[els] the same strange presence of a power and a principle to be respected.”³⁷ By embodying both the physically striking hero and the intellectual reformer, Moondyne/Wyville is also the image of the “perfect man” who is the right combination of primitive strength and cultured moral courage.³⁸

In *Manly Sport*, O’Reilly took aim at English claims to superior status and sought to legitimize Irish racial superiority, and *Moondyne* raises objections to contemporary notions of “civilization” as well. Throughout the novel O’Reilly suggests that English culture should not be the primary measure of what civilized habits, dress, and practices are. For example, after two natives of the Vasse accompany Moondyne/Wyville to London and, to the surprise of some local visitors, live more or less as they do at home, the protagonist states, “We assume that to be savage which is contrary to our habit; but this is no proof of inferiority. Degraded civilization is brutal, indeed; but the natural or savage life is not.”³⁹ In an ironic twist at the conclusion, the narrator insists that Moondyne’s/Wyville’s primary goal in enacting prison reform has been a process of “civilizing”—not the natives of the Vasse—but the corrupt British penal system.⁴⁰ O’Reilly’s attempts to challenge notions of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority are further exemplified in his attempts to represent the Irish race as “manly.”

37 O’Reilly, *Moondyne*, 110.

38 Bederman, 27. Bederman explains that “manliness” connoted the “moral achievements” of “civilized men” (27).

39 O’Reilly, *Moondyne*, 111.

40 *Ibid.*, 268.

For instance, the few Irish characters in the novel are represented as having the natural “manliness” of the working classes. O’Reilly dedicates one chapter to describing a family of Irish teamsters, the Maguire family of workers. These men are on the right side of labor and are known as the “Dardanup Irish” even though they live in Australia:

There was a colony of Irish settlers at Dardanup, free men, who had emigrated 40 years before, when the Western colony was free from criminal taint . . . the men of the whole settlement, who had been born and reared in the bush, were famous throughout the colony for strength, horsemanship, good-fellowship, and hard fighting qualities.⁴¹

The masculine ideal described here and O’Reilly’s defense of a “‘rough’ code of manhood” is an allusion to the Molly Maguire labor episode which came to its height in a series of sensationalized trials and hangings just two years before *Moondyne* was published.⁴² By claiming the rightness and manliness of the Australian Maguires, O’Reilly takes aim at the popular representation of the American Molly Maguires as savage primitives.⁴³ He suggests the labor strife at the heart of that sensational trial was the reasonable action of manly laborers. In sum, as middle-class men reinvented manhood in the late nineteenth century they drew from a contradictory sense of manhood that they associated with the primitive other as well as white working-class men. In both *Manly Sport* and *Moondyne*, O’Reilly employs these discourses of manliness to depict Irish and Irish American men as naturally, that is, racially, equipped to fulfill the white male ideal of the period.

41 Ibid., 73.

42 Bederman, 17. *Moondyne* ran serially in the *Pilot* in 1878. The well publicized trial culminated in the hanging of twenty Irish Americans, most of them were first and second generation immigrants from Western Ireland.

43 See Kenny, “The Molly Maguires in Popular Culture,” for an analysis of fictional representations of the Molly Maguires in the 1870s. He argues that the dominant narrative of the Mollies was that they were “a band of Irish cutthroats, engaging in violence for its own sake, for money, or for revenge” and that the “killings were explained in terms of a natural Irish propensity toward violence and savagery” (2). It is also of note that O’Reilly was aided in his escape by an Irish settler named James McGuire (Ashton, 39).

The fact that *Moondyne* never fully comes together as a narrative and that the novel never explains Moondyne's transition to Wyville in a comprehensive way, may be indicative of critical analyses of O'Reilly's other texts which point up his ambivalence in his success and role as Irish spokesman in Boston. In spite of O'Reilly's assimilationist ideals for Irish Americans, and his own material and social success, critics have argued that he "never overcame deep-seated feelings of inferiority and insecurity." He "poured forth his private alienation in poems denouncing a society which held that 'the meaning of life is to barter and to buy.'"⁴⁴ The fact that O'Reilly creates a fictional hero who embodies competing and ambivalent elements of the highest form of white male identity, but avoids giving the reader even a brief account of how the man passed from poor fugitive to wealthy and intellectually superior reformer also might be representative of the limits, and potential dangers, of American Celticism for Irish American status in the face of an increasingly diverse Irish American community. Even though Irish Americans, on the whole, had greater opportunities and material success in the late nineteenth century, Irish American lives, like O'Reilly's, were still fraught with financial, cultural, and economic insecurities which had the potential to undercut the intended race pride of American Celticism. In other words, O'Reilly's inability to convincingly portray a fictional character who embodies the contradictory ideals of white manhood in the period may be analogous to his inability to use Celtic race pride to fully bridge, or resolve, the contradictions between being an Irish immigrant and a middle-class Bostonian.

More clearly, as previously stated, in the years between 1870 and 1921, the Irish in America had moved past the "ubiquitous poverty and crippling prejudice of the Famine decades" and achieved success and influence within labor unions and urban politics. The

44 Miller, 498-499.

moderate economic success among the newly middle-class Irish combined with the less skilled and still poorer recent immigrant populations to represent a relatively mature, but still fragile, culture among Irish American communities. In spite of improvements in class status, the move out of the underclass was slow and “fraught with considerable pain and anxiety” for first generation immigrants from Western rural areas of Ireland as well as for Irish Americans whose families had been in the United States since the Famine. The sense of “exile” among Irish Americans in the late nineteenth century, according to Kerby Miller, was strong among Irish immigrants who collectively seemed to suffer from an “almost institutionalized homesickness.” Irish Americans of all generations felt “urban-industrial America’s moral and human inadequacies [for people] shaped by customs and values attuned to older, less overtly competitive lifestyles.” The conflicts resulting from in-group diversity and cultural and social marginality experienced via interaction with dominant groups have been understood as potentially more intense for middle-class Irish Americans, like O’Reilly, who mixed in white Protestant cultures in urban centers, such as Boston, on a daily basis. Moreover, there was tension both within the Irish American community due to its diversity as the “lace curtain” Irish aimed to keep a safe distance from the “shanty” Irish of the tenements and between Irish America and American culture more broadly.⁴⁵

As a result of this diversity, it was often only Irish nationalism which had the power to unite joint action among Irish America’s varied groups, but the rhetoric of Irish nationalism, and the related celebration of the Celtic ideal, was often “anachronistic” and, worse, “its emphasis heightened questions of identity and exposed its adherents to nativist charges of having divided loyalties. [Irish nationalists] made sincere but tortuous

45 Miller, 494; 493; 495.

efforts to reconcile competing allegiances and identify Irish freedom with native American traditions and interests.”⁴⁶ O’Reilly’s texts analyzed above shape an image of the Irish consistent with emerging ideas about manhood in American culture, and, as implied by *Manly Sport*, as compatible with traditionally “American” values such as self-reliance and independence. In this context, it is clear that American Celticism may be judged as a relatively beneficial strategy for Irish Americans interested in asserting Irish fitness for self-government, but also, as problematic, leaving Irish Americans vulnerable to anti-American loyalties and sentiments which had the potential to exacerbate existing conflicts within and outside Irish American communities. The “unassimilated” (to use Fanning’s term) nature of O’Reilly’s novel might be read, then, as marking the competing and contradictory purposes to which Irish race pride was put by O’Reilly in these texts.⁴⁷ The rhetoric of O’Reilly’s conservative nationalism and race pride, demonstrated by American Celticism, itself becomes attenuated as it is meant to do a number of things: to represent Irish racial fitness for self-government; to demonstrate Irish and Irish American manliness; to refute Anglo-Saxonism as the primary measure of the “civilized”; and to be consistent with American core values beyond the racial ideal of white manhood. The unfinished form of O’Reilly’s novel is symbolic of the ways in which American Celticism was fraught by its competing purposes. These tensions, which complicated O’Reilly’s celebration of Irish race pride, continued after O’Reilly’s reign at the *Pilot* ended with his sudden death in 1890.⁴⁸ The diversity of Irish American culture would

46 Ibid., 494-495.

47 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 163.

48 O’Reilly died by accidental overdose of his wife’s sleeping medicine. Ashton explains that “scholars have seen his death as the result of the tremendous tensions he was under to constantly appease, explain, and negotiate among various groups.” His death “shocked Boston” and “memorial services were held in cities and townships around the world. The New York Metropolitan Opera House was filled to capacity for a civic ceremony of remembrance” (42). After his death *Harper’s Weekly* claimed

only increase as Guiney's generation came of age and the instability of race pride based on the Celtic ideal would become more fraught for Irish Americans as anti-Catholicism surged during the wars with Spain at the turn of the century.

IV. *Lover's Saint Ruth's and Guiney's "Civil War" Martyrs*

As previously discussed, Guiney's uses of American Celticism in her Irish-themed materials such as the short story "The Provider" and the biographical sketch *Robert Emmet* are fairly straightforward. Each figure is depicted as having a nearly mystical presence and both the protagonist Hughey and the historical figure Emmet are characterized by their ill-destined, ardent pursuit of an ideal ever out of reach. The intensity of their strivings is what marks them as heroes and martyrs, for Guiney, and her representation of their heroic actions resonates not only with American Celticism, or the martial ideal, but with a Roman Catholic worship of saints and martyrs which was encouraged by the church. The heroic nature of each figure's actions is similar to O'Reilly's use of Celticism in that she creates a masculine hero of a certain moral prowess who can be linked to the Celtic ideal in his ineffectualness and dedication to "lost causes."⁴⁹ Like O'Reilly's *Manly Sport*, Guiney's "Irish" texts, centered on individual heroic figures, serve to substantiate the importance of the Irish past and its inherent worth to contemporary culture. More interesting, in her non-Irish-themed short stories, through the image of the male martyr, Guiney employs a version of the virtuous manhood central to O'Reilly's race pride to examine racial affiliations through the theme of civil war.

The short story collection *Lovers' Saint Ruth's and Three Other Tales* contains

he was "easily the most distinguished Irishman in America" (qtd. in Ashton, 41).
49 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 172.

only one story set in Ireland, “The Provider,” discussed above. The other stories: “Lovers’ Saint Ruth’s,” “Our Lady of the Union,” and “An Event on the River,” have varying settings, plots, and characters but, as noted earlier, are related thematically. All three depict a male protagonist who is a gallant knight challenged in a literal or figurative fight to the death for a worthy cause. Unremarked by critics is that all three narratives also thematize a tension between various formulations of “family” and the threat of division to those forms of kinship by unfamiliar, “darker” sources. Embodied by these short stories are the contradictory attitudes toward race suggested by “Irish” and “On the Ethics of Descent.” More clearly, in *Lovers’ Saint Ruth’s*, Guiney, on the one hand, depends on a sense of identity based on racial histories for characterization and to create narrative tension while, on the other hand, she creates conflicts in these tales which suggest that racial or ethnic purity is an insufficient marker of family and kinship. Like O’Reilly’s manly hero in *Moondyne*, and contemporary racial discourses more broadly, Guiney’s male protagonists are characterized by their associations with “dark” primitives; however, her depictions of the links between *Lover’s Saint Ruth’s* heroes and the primitive complicates O’Reilly’s representation of the white male ideal. Whereas O’Reilly’s manliness looked to exploit an essential well of manhood shared by middle-class white men and working-class or primitive men, Guiney’s martyrs prove their moral prowess in the way they respond to the threat posed by dark outsiders. Ultimately, when an analysis of the representation of “civil war” in her short fiction is examined in terms of her expatriation and her interest in seventeenth-century Catholic subjects it can be shown that Guiney recodes racial affiliations as religious ones to shape an image of an internationally expansive Irish and Irish-American identity.

“Lovers’ Saint Ruth’s” is an interpolated tale set in contemporary England. The first-person narrator, Holden, is an American visiting an old friend, the expatriated Cyril Nasmith who takes Holden on a walk through the countryside outside of an English “Saxon city” where they encounter the ruins of an Old Church, Saint Ruth’s, formerly a monastic chapel. At the ruins, Nasmith recounts a story of two seventeenth-century aristocrats who were married and buried by the old church. In the tale, the young lovers, Richard and Eleanor, meet secretly by Saint Ruth’s and, one night, when Richard fails to meet Eleanor on time, she is raped by a gypsy marauder. The chivalrous hero Richard immediately marries her to uphold her virtuous reputation. Eleanor gives birth to a child fathered by the gypsy and is subsequently terrorized by her dark-headed son. The “alien child’s presence” is “torture”; the infant is “a noisy, bounding rogue with black eyes, whom his young mother hate[s].” Eleanor’s misery infects her marriage and threatens to disable her permanently. The primary conflict in the story is the dilemma Richard faces. He recognizes that the child who will inherit all his estates is an “interloper” and that letting his inheritance pass to the gypsy’s son would be wrong. He also sees that to disown the child would be a “moral crime.”⁵⁰ The conflict over the sanctity of Richard’s lineage, and his marriage to Eleanor, is resolved by a *deus ex machina* when the gypsy child, Ralph, is thrown from a horse to his death. As a result, Eleanor recovers her wits and lives happily with Richard. After her death, Richard continues the knightly behavior of his youth to fight on the side of King Charles and the Catholics in the English Civil War; he dies a war hero.

“Our Lady of the Union” also depicts the romance of a chivalrous soldier and a virtuous woman. This time, the setting is Virginia during the American Civil War. The

50 Guiney, *Lovers’ Saint Ruth’s*, 1; 14; 16; 17.

hero, Sergeant Robert Blanchard, is the flag bearer and an ardent patriot who valiantly dies in battle after expressing his love for the independent, equally patriotic, and saint-like American girl, Cecily. Similar to “Lovers’ Saint Ruth’s,” which is set in contemporary times but occupied with the period prior to the English Civil War, this narrative makes a symbolic connection between the English Civil War and the story’s setting. Cecily is described as being from a race of warriors who fought on the Catholic side during the English war: “Before she knew herself an abolitionist, the day of Sumter swept over her like a flood, and diverted all the little idle streams of her being. . . . Unlike Robert, Cecily came of a soldier race, and from swords drawn, in its generation, at Naseby, at Brandywine, at Monterey.”⁵¹ Additionally, as in the former story in which the rape of a fair heroine by the dark primitive nearly fractures the happiness and stability of Eleanor’s union in marriage to Richard, “Our Lady of the Union” symbolically represents a threat to national union by its setting of a Virginia camp during the 1860s. Blanchard’s death at the conclusion is described as a valiant and necessary sacrifice in the recovery of their national family. Cecily and Blanchard agree on their primary devotion to the United States, as the dying Blanchard says, “we are born not for ourselves, but for the Republic.”⁵² Blanchard, like Richard of “Saint Ruth’s,” dies a martyr protecting a form of national union.

Furthermore, the recovery of family lineage, in spite of the threat posed by the dark outsider, at the conclusion of “Lovers’ Saint Ruth’s,” is reflected in the American-set tale as well. In “Our Lady of the Union” Guiney asserts, consistent with the rhetoric of

51 The Battle at Naseby was during the English Civil War in 1645; the Battle of Brandywine was an American Revolutionary War battle in 1777; the Battle at Monterey occurred in 1846 during the Mexican-American War.

52 Guiney, *Lovers’ Saint Ruth’s*, 40; 44.

the post-Reconstruction era, the symbolic reconciliation of the North and South. While the Union army is at camp, a Confederate general, who lives near its premises, acts kindly toward the Union generals, signaling a fictional recuperation of the breakdown of the national family prior to the de facto resolution of sectional differences after the war. Equally significant, while, in the quote about Cecily cited above, abolition is deemed secondary to her primary racial instinct to support a war for national union, there is a gesture toward the dissolution of racial hierarchies in the figure of Sergeant Blanchard. By name the sergeant is defined as “white,” but, because of his patriotism, is referred to by fellow soldiers as “colored”:

In this lad of 22 there burned a formal loyalty so intense, so rooted in every fiber of his grave character, that his comrades, for whom military routine had lost much of its glamour, loved him for it, envied him, and consistently nagged the life out of him with the nickname of Our Colored Brother, and other nicknames based on other puns more or less felicitous.⁵³

In these ways, both “Saint Ruth’s” and “Our Lady of the Union” thematize civil war to narrate both the breakdown and recovery of “family” units.

In spite of these similarities, in which each text uses forms of racial identity and difference to create narrative tension and eventually recover familial or national unities, these stories diverge in at least one important way. In “Lovers’ Saint Ruth’s” the menacing presence of the gypsy son, Ralph, exposes the insufficiency of racial categories of identity to account for the complexities of hereditary associations. The dilemma faced by Richard exemplifies the incapacity of claims to racial purity to define family lineage; however, the narrative also allows essential racial differences to remain intact by the recovery of those potentially fractured linkages in Ralph’s death. “Our Lady of the Union,” alternatively, narrates the power of racial background as explanatory of character

53 Ibid., 32-33.

in the figure of Cecily only to recover the nation through the acceptance of the notion of racial difference, or at least mild acceptance of amalgamation, in the figure of Blanchard whose patriotism marks him as the “dark” hero. The “colored brother” and white male hero are merged in the figure of the dying patriot. Unlike the death of Richard, which simply underscores his gallant character, the death of Sergeant Blanchard in battle symbolizes not only his own chivalrous nature but also, more important, the potential of the figure of the striving soldier to reconcile antagonistic family members in an American context. As these divergent endings suggest, for Guiney, the American Civil War resolves family differences and discord in ways the English Civil War does not.

The final tale in the collection under consideration here is set in contemporary Maine and is the story of an American man’s encounter with his illegitimate Italian-immigrant son whom he fathered while living in Italy many years before. The well respected and moneyed Langdon Openshaw, wrongly accused of theft and murder (and out-on-bail), visits Portsmouth as he contemplates the case against him. Openshaw meets the immigrant, Ralph, on the river, and quickly realizes that he has been falsely accused due to mistaken identity. The two share similar physical features: “both [are] tall, aquiline, [and] clean-shaven.”⁵⁴ Before discovering that he is looking at his son, Openshaw hires Ralph as an oarsman for the day and plans to get Ralph to admit his guilt and, thus, eventually exonerate Openshaw. Once Openshaw realizes he is the immigrant’s father he is faced with either turning in his son or sacrificing his own life so that Ralph may marry his American bride, return to Italy, and live happily. Openshaw accepts the blame for his son’s theft in order to appease his own guilt at leaving Ralph’s mother and to give his son life a second time.

54 Ibid., 70.

This story, like the others under consideration here, thematizes family unrest and depicts the problem of racial or ethnic otherness as the source of narrative tension. As in the symbolic mixing of racial differences in the patriotic Blanchard in “Our Lady of the Union,” the Italian immigrant contains both elements of his Italian “gypsy” inheritance and his father’s American features. Guiney describes Ralph (Rodolfo) by using both the type cast version of the Italian immigrant thief and the romantic characterization of a “simple-hearted” and “vagabond breed.”⁵⁵ Ralph asserts his own mixed background stating that he has “the blood of New England also.”⁵⁶ The aristocratic, English lineage of Richard and Eleanor of “Saint Ruth’s” and Cecily of “Our Lady of the Union” is identified in “An Event on the River” through Ralph’s “large, slender hand toil had hardly scarred . . . [which is] like the Openshaw hand, plain in the old Lely portrait, plainer yet in the Stuarts, on the melancholy walls of [Openshaw’s] own home!” Furthermore, the immigrant Ralph shares the name of “Saint Ruth’s” gypsy son, and he, like Eleanor’s menacing child, unnerves his parent. For instance, as Openshaw slowly discovers his relationship to the “un-Americanized stranger,” he hears the “hammer-strokes of a coffin in the making.”⁵⁷ Likewise, he thinks that his resemblance to Ralph is a “violent” one. The identification of ethnic difference and kinship in Ralph deeply distresses his New England father but that family resemblance, the inherited physical features of race, becomes a vehicle of reconciliation at the conclusion. Openshaw’s decision to take the blame for a crime he did not commit as penance for another one exemplifies the ways in which, in each of these stories, the hero faces what Guiney defines as a moral conflict

55 Ibid., 80; 70; 73; 71.

56 Ibid., 73.

57 Ibid., 74; 79.

based around racial identity and national or family union.⁵⁸ As in the other tales, racial otherness poses a threat to familial affiliations but also allows the male martyr to assert his heroic nature. The resolution of ethnic difference, in “An Event on the River,” demonstrates that, for Guiney, chivalry is enacted most fully when the purity of the white “family,” and therefore white male identity, is at risk and the protagonist is willing to absorb the “dark” other—in some form—as a confirmation of his heroic nature.

By thematizing civil war, the stories in *Lovers’ Saint Ruth’s* all depict the potential breakdown of “family” wherein the action of the hero is largely motivated by his response to conflicts of race and its effects on various forms of kinship affiliations. Like her mentor O’Reilly, and consistent with racial discourses of the day, Guiney characterizes her heroic protagonists by, at least superficially, drawing from the ideology of essential racial differences supported by the race sciences. More interesting, Guiney complicates those associations by measuring the nature of the hero in terms of how he responds to the potential inclusion of the dark or primitive other into the national or family unit. To put it another way, O’Reilly’s critique of contemporary racial discourses in his prose were primarily concerned with challenging notions of the Anglo-Saxon as having superior claims to the “civilized” and asserting Irish racial superiority. In contrast, Guiney’s “non-Irish” stories use “dark” figures to expose the insufficiency of “the science of heraldry” which she appears to steadfastly embrace, like other American Celticists, in “Irish,” *Robert Emmet*, and “The Provider.” Furthermore, O’Reilly, and others in the period, drew on imagery of the “dark” primitive as generative of racial prowess and, by association, illustrative of the ideal form of white male identity. Guiney illustrates both

58 Guiney’s essay “Willful Sadness in Literature” (in *Patrins*) takes aim at literary realism for its inability to offer moral instruction to the reader.

the threatening and generative power of “dark” others to somewhat different ends. As noted earlier, “On the Ethics of Descent” states Guiney’s belief that the race sciences are used to mark “generative occasion[s] without which the race would not be itself.” Ironically, even though in her Irish-themed texts Guiney is very much involved in representing a particular version of “Irishness,” in *Lovers’ Saint Ruth’s*, she uses the image of the martyr foundational to the Celtic ideal and deviates from that image to raise questions about the racial logic which undergirds both the “race” pride of American Celticism and the race sciences popular in the period. In sum, these tales all deal with some version of ethnic mixing which rely on discourses of racial or familial lineage as markers of identity; however, by thematizing “civil war” they suggest that the potential breakdown—or instability—of descent notions of identity are not insurmountable hurdles, but generative occasions of sectional, national, racial, or ethnic unity in an American context.

V. The Recovery of Religious Lineages in *Saint Ruth’s* and Guiney’s Later Work

Elizabeth Young has demonstrated that women writers used the American Civil War as a “multivalent cultural symbol” as well as a setting in their fiction and nonfiction in texts written during the War years and thereafter.⁵⁹ Young’s analysis is relevant for Guiney’s writing because Guiney not only thematizes various types of civil war to problematize claims to racial purity, as shown above, but she also recognizes the power of “civil war” as a “connective mode of representation.” Her thematizing of civil war allows her to treat national wars over racial and ethnic identities and freedom in an American context in a similar manner to wars over religious identities and freedom in a British one. Her references to the English Civil War, in which Catholic and Protestant

⁵⁹ Young, *Disarming the Nation*, 17.

factions were at issue, in “Lovers’ Saint Ruth’s” and “Our Lady of the Union,” are particularly relevant given her expressed interest in recovering Recusant poets and other seventeenth-century Catholic figures after her expatriation. While detailed textual analysis of her writings on English Catholic figures falls beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth considering the ways in which the *Saint Ruth’s* stories enact an interesting slippage in identity categories—race and religion—which are traditionally treated, in an American framework, as solidly distinct entities.⁶⁰ The overlap of racial and religious categories of identity in these stories demonstrates that Guiney understood both religion and race as equally constitutive forms of familial affiliation. An examination of the similarities between the use of “civil war” in her stories and the subject matter of her later works shows that her writings are not an escape from but rather an engagement with her cultural moment. The relevance of the interplay between identity categories in these texts is best understood when contextualized by the two moments in Guiney’s life which are normally read as essential for understanding her life and work: the visit she made to her father at camp in Virginia during the Civil War and her three-year appointment as post mistress at the Auburndale, Massachusetts post office.

The first event is often used to explain the affectionate relationship she had with her father (whom she called her “playfellow” in a girlhood letter) and her lifelong attraction to the image of the fighting hero.⁶¹ Indeed, Patrick Guiney’s personal history as Irish immigrant-turned celebrated veteran easily can be linked to her recurrent uses of the male martyr in her fiction. Her grandfather, an Irishman, was from a family who

60 This steadfast distinction between “race” and “religion” is relevant for a discussion of Roman Catholicism in this period, not for all religious groups in the United States at this time.

61 According to Guiney, there is a Virginia town named after her father. His letters from the Civil War have been collected in *Commanding Boston’s Irish Ninth*.

supported the return of the Catholic Stuart monarchy to the British throne—and there are echoes of his personal life in her tales as well. Equally important, while her father’s service in the Civil War led to his status as one of Boston’s most famous soldiers, it also resulted in his early death. Patrick Guiney’s death had an even greater influence on the course of Guiney’s life than her childhood visit to his Virginia camp did. The Guiney’s were an upwardly mobile family in Louise Guiney’s youth. Her father studied law as a young man and, after the war, in spite of his injuries, was elected to assistant district attorney. He even made an unsuccessful run for Congress; however, his passing left the family financially unstable. As previously noted, there was a good deal of tension within Irish American communities at this time between the upwardly mobile middle-class Irish and the working-class Irish. After Patrick Guiney’s death, the Guiney family’s middle-class status was insecure. Louise Guiney’s class anxieties are apparent, though usually treated with humor, in her letters. For example, in several letters, she adopts the Irish working-class slang of Finley Peter Dunne’s famous fictional Chicago bartender, Mr. Dooley. After suffering from the flu she declares: “I’m under a deadly homesickness for Liberty and Litterytire.”⁶² Likewise, she frequently refers to her own home, and her family vacation rentals, as “Shanty Guiney” and even links that class status to a form of primitivism when she invites a friend to “taste how primitive life can be in that shanty.”⁶³ Moreover, Patrick Guiney’s life as a soldier offered his daughter an image of the heroic civil war general which she would admire throughout her life, but his death forced her to become the breadwinner and eventual “provider” to her mother, aunt, and, later in life,

62 Guiney, *Letters*, Volume I, 14-15. Her own home and vacation home were not “shanties” as such, but her comic treatment of these by a term often associated with the dwellings of lower class Irish Americans exposes her own sensitivity to her proximity (through her ethnic background) to the working class Irish.

63 *Ibid.*, 227; 277; 252.

two younger female cousins. The job at the post office was her first effort to relieve the financial problems which resulted from her father's death but these financial difficulties would plague her throughout her life.

Guiney began her appointment as postmistress at the Auburndale P.O. in 1894, the same year *Lovers' Saint Ruth's* was published. Her placement in this job set off a public firestorm when the local branch of the American Protective Association (APA) boycotted the site due to Guiney's Catholicism.⁶⁴ Her Boston friends came to her rescue by going to Auburndale for their stamps until the APA protests quelled. This was a position she took, as stated above, of financial necessity, but never wanted. Before she began her employment there she wrote a friend, "I move in among the letters, and behind the bars, next month" and, as she told another toward the end of her contract in 1897, she considered "cut[ting] loose from [the] sentence of 'four years hard'; not wholly expired."⁶⁵ The difficulty of the initial scandal is described clearly in an early letter to Dora Sigerson, and worth quoting at length:

The fuss about my office, I regret to say, absurd as it seems, was no myth, and gave me great worry. Auburndale is a town populated with retired missionaries, and bigots of small intellectual caliber. We have lived happily here for eight years, . . . [and] were scarcely known by sight except by one family of old friends and neighbors when I was proposed for Postmaster by an old friend of my father's, "one having authority," who knew something of the way our small finances were disappearing, a year or so ago. Well, I had some rather rough sailing, thanks purely to my being a Catholic: i.e., one likely at any moment to give over the government mail, and the safe keys, to the Pope! And the salary ran down in consequence, and so I was so like a fish swimming in the wind, with the stress . . . and the utter impossibility of getting the mood or the time for the one thing I had been doing all my life, that it was queer exceedingly. I am somewhat broken in, now, and somewhat broken up, too! . . . Please don't say anything of the matter; it

64 There was a precedent for public protests against the appointment of Roman Catholics to post office positions. In 1853, President Franklin Pierce appointed James Campbell to the position of U.S. Postmaster General to some political backlash (Anbinder, 30-31).

65 Guiney *Letters*, Volume I, 58; 199.

is incidental and must pass.⁶⁶

Guiney wanted to put the controversy past her, but she never recovered from the “publicity” of the initial event. In fact, critics have implied that the anti-Catholicism she experienced at the P.O. was crucial to her decision to move abroad. As Lears has argued, it appears to be the case that she associated modernity with Protestantism and the incident at the P.O. only exacerbated her feelings of Catholic “difference” that, as she put it, “comes from living in air tainted by Puritan Colonization.”⁶⁷

Her letters show that there were a variety of other factors which influenced her decision to expatriate. For one, even two years after her position at Auburndale ended, she complained of her lack of productivity in terms of new creative work and linked a move abroad with the possibility of doing writing she deemed meaningful. She described this in a letter to Sigerson:

Alas, my Muse is an absentee landlady!: too busy day laboring to write. Nothing to offer for publication. Nevertheless, I have my snug dream of a long life, say in Red Lion Square or some such chaste and elegant purlieu, . . . where I shall have nothing on earth to do but to dig in the seventeenth century, and edit and edit, and live in odo[u]r of folios.⁶⁸

Secondly, the moments when she expressed her desire to leave Boston were often those when she admitted her uneasiness with U. S. imperialism. In a letter from autumn of 1899 she recounts her dislike of imperialism and connects it to her desire to move abroad:

Our Admiral Dewey has been here, and the whole town stood on its head, and went magnificently mad. I fear it was less for the perfect sailor-man, than for joy at the whole Imperial-American business, which seems to me the wickedest thing I know. Some day, when I am free (i.e. moth-eaten and tame with years) I am going to emigrate to a hamlet that smells strong of the Middle Ages, and put cotton-wool in my ears, and swing out clear from this very smart century

66 Ibid., 66-67.

67 Ibid., 56.

68 Ibid., 255.

altogether.⁶⁹

While sensitive to the way Boston newspapers represented Catholic Spain, she was much more consistently outspoken, in letters, about her dislike of imperialist practices than of any discomfort with anti-Catholic sentiment. As late as the following year she describes her continued distaste for American imperialist practices: “My Americanism is in a bad way, since this abominable bettering of the Brown Man began. I believe I have confided to you, obliquely, ‘where I am at’ on the imperialistic question.”⁷⁰ Her sardonic treatment of imperialism through reference to the “abominable bettering of the Brown Man” underscores her disagreement with U.S. interventions abroad. As such, it was not a single instance of anti-Catholicism which led to her expatriation. Her response to imperialism and the financial necessity that led her to work at the post office (and, later, at the Boston Public Library) combined to instigate her move abroad and to foster the dream of producing greater literary and scholarly output. Additionally, the allusion to her “Americanism” in the letter quoted above has implications for her attitudes toward shifting factions within the American Catholic church. The changes within the Catholic community reveal another dimension of the cultural context which contributed to her expatriation and, more importantly, her attitude toward religious and racial categories of identity as expressed in her prose.

At the time, the Catholic church was divided into three groups: the radicals, the liberals, and the conservatives. The liberals, or “Americanists,” embraced individualistic, democratic American values and believed in America’s mission to bring progress,

⁶⁹ Ibid., 199.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 252. See Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, for a discussion of the differing attitudes toward race among anti-imperialists. While many rejected imperialism for fear of the “mongrelization” of American culture, many Irish nationalists in the United States rejected it for the racialized practices they deemed inherent in discourses of imperialism. Guiney seems to have been in the latter camp.

democracy, and “bourgeois civilization” to the rest of the world.⁷¹ The conservatives saw U.S. culture as materialistic and encouraging apostasy; they also “opposed jingoistic imperialism, especially when directed against Catholic Spain.” As the APA became increasingly vocal and active in the 1890s, and shifts in American political alignments initiated greater kinship between the United States and Great Britain, called the Anglo Rapprochement, the liberal’s accommodationist approach became “discredited.”⁷² Simultaneously, the conservative and increasingly powerful side of the Catholic church began to define “Irishness” as essentially Catholic. This interpretation of Irish racial identity in religious terms coincided with and was partially motivated by the growth of the APA, the Anglo Rapprochement, and relatedly, U.S. imperialism.

Guiney’s reference to her waning “Americanism,” then, suggests a possible shift in her own group alignments within the Irish Catholic community and within U.S. political discourses more broadly. While it is difficult to absolutely be sure of where she stood politically, situating her expatriation and personal experience of anti-Catholic sentiment at the P.O. within in a fuller historical context clarifies the various factors which contributed to her decision to move abroad. It suggests, more precisely, that her expatriation is best seen as based upon not simply one specific event, but the confluence of: Guiney’s own financial worries, the APA’s brief surge in influence, the growth of American imperialism, and shifts in Catholic group identities. Together these elements created a fertile ground for her desire to move to Oxford. More important, they are suggestive for more directly considering the connections between her *Saint Ruth’s* tales

71 Miller, 528; 529. The radicals supporting working-class emancipation from an exploitive political machine at Tammany Hall and Gilded Age capitalism who wanted the church to be at the forefront of radical social change (Miller, 528).

72 Ibid., 530; 529.

and her later work.

Specifically, Guiney's recovery of Recusant poets and other English Catholic subjects, after her expatriation, underscores that which is already at work in her fictional texts of the 1890s. Guiney saw the English Civil War over national and religious differences as linked to the American Civil War over national and racial ones as events which could be compared. Her figurative uses of civil war are underpinned by the simple fact that she identified a close connection between the two civil wars. For example, in a letter to one English correspondent and friend she referred to "our Civil War" exemplifying her sense of the English Civil War as relevant and alive in historical memory.⁷³ The combination of her own familial associations to the cause of English Catholics (through her grandfather) and the Union army (through her father) show that in her personal life the two civil wars were related. Furthermore, each story in *Lovers' Saint Ruth's* contains key characters whose backgrounds explicitly are linked to English Catholicism. Not only is this the case for Cecily in "Our Lady of the Union" or Openshaw of "An Event on the River" but also of the contemporary figures in "Lovers' Saint Ruth's" whose dialogue frames the narrative. Nasmith, the figure who tells Richard and Eleanor's tale, is an American with English parents and he, the reader learns at the conclusion, only knows the story because it was passed down to him through family documents. Guiney's persistent use of the male martyr in these stories, a feature of American Celticism, is coupled with the persistent representation of key figures whose religious identity is implicitly or explicitly as crucial as race for defining character. In these ways, Guiney's treatment of civil war as a connective mode of representation

73 Guiney, *Letters*, Volume I, 197, emphasis added. She also refers to "our Civil War" in a later letter regarding the outbreak of WWI (*Letters*, Volume II, 201-202).

demonstrates that she understood religion as an equally salient marker as race for forms of kinship and identity. Her representation of the role of religion as a powerful marker of identity was given greater institutional support once the church began to shift its own views on the relationship between racial and religious categories of identity at the turn of the century.

This analysis, the suggestion that a writer who is a self-proclaimed ardent Catholic is interested in Catholic subjects, is perhaps not surprising, but it does complicate standard readings of her work. Recognition of her engagement with and investment in various forms of civil war contradicts the scholarship that identifies her short fiction and her later work strictly as an expression of escapism.

As previously noted, historians have long recognized that Guiney's generation of Irish Americans adopted, consistent with church policy in Ireland and in the United States, a more "Catholic" sense of self over a strictly "Celtic" or "Irish" racial one. Guiney's stories and her later work suggest that her religious identity was not simply a replacement for a racial one but a means of reconciling racial differences in a period of Anglo Rapprochement and popular consumption of and belief in the language and thinking of hierarchically rated racial groups. To put it in contemporary terms, it is not that Guiney replaces one element of her ethnic identity (race) with another (religion) but that she uses a religious identity and a shared Catholic past to lay claim to a "family" history enjoyed by Irish, Irish American, and other European peoples. O'Reilly, a former Fenian ambivalent about his success as a middle-man in the largely Protestant Boston, took aim at Anglo-Saxon claims to racial superiority to reproduce the underlying conceit of the race sciences which dictated that there were essential differences between racial

groups. Guiney, among the next generation of Irish Americans, used the inconsistencies foundational to her more contradictory attitudes toward race to thematize civil war and thereby recover the “lost” family lines of English and Irish Catholic groups.

Finally, while Guiney seems to have taken the cue from, and, more accurately, even anticipated, the American Catholic church’s decision to “interpret[ed] Irishness in predominantly religious terms,” hers was not an interpretation of identity which then lent itself to ethnically mixed but religiously homogeneous (Catholic) communities in American cities⁷⁴ but to a broad set of international affiliations and attachment to a deep English history which she identified with as it was a Catholic history. The international dimension of her vision of Catholicism is evident in that she sustained a lifelong attention to both English Catholic subjects and Irish figures, the latter of which she continued to conceive of in terms traditional to American Celticism. In 1898 she wrote: “I’d like to do a memoir of Wolfe Tone. There’s no standard one, and the tale is most romantic: regular wild Irish.”⁷⁵ In 1904, she published the book on Emmet and a second edition of Irish poet James Clarence Mangan’s work. The Mangan volume is dedicated to Irish nationalist and immigrant to Australia, Sir Charles Gavan Duffy. Gavan Duffy gained political prominence in Western Australia to much controversy due to his Catholic and Irish backgrounds. Her dedication to Duffy from “one of many who revere you” is consistent with her traditionally romantic attitude toward Irish political activists.⁷⁶ It also recalls O’Reilly’s experience in and writing of Australia, in which the Catholic Irish had a significant presence. Even though her ideas about race diverged from O’Reilly’s, like his,

74 The eventual result of church attitudes was, among European immigrant groups from various countries of origin, a sense of a white American Catholic group identity which outweighed a sense of identity based on nation of origin, language, or the like.

75 Guiney, *Letters*, Volume II, 224.

76 Guiney, *James Clarence Mangan*, dedication.

and the Famine immigrant writer Mary Anne Sadlier's, Guiney's sense of Irish Catholic identity was one which was international in scope because the Famine diaspora was, itself, international in scope. Her fictional and non-fictional texts on English Catholic subjects and Irish figures suggest that she saw Catholicism and Irish racial identity as a constituted by and representative of international affiliations.

VI. Conclusion

As someone who began her career at John Boyle O'Reilly's Irish nationalist Boston *Pilot*, Guiney maintained a lifelong attachment to the Irish race pride central to American Celticism. Even though she held a romantic view of Irish racial identity throughout her life, in essays and short fiction, this post-Famine generation Irish American questioned the ideas of racial purity fundamental to the race sciences. Guiney's representations of male martyrs in her short stories suggest that, for her, the truly heroic American male figure is the one who defends some version of ethnic or racial inclusiveness in a national or family unit. Furthermore, in her treatment of "civil war" as a connective mode of representation, she recodes racial identities as religious ones and thereby engages with and imaginatively responds to the restrictive nature of racial discourses of the day. While Guiney never radically departs from the logic of the race sciences in a way that would be understood as at the vanguard of progressive politics today, her contradictory attitudes toward race—and the shifting political and social contexts within and outside the Irish American Catholic community in the late nineteenth century—created a framework through which she could problematize that logic and assert the power of other forms of affiliation to unite nationally or internationally disparate groups. In other words, she seizes upon what she sees as the flawed logic of

“the science of heraldry” to reframe, recover, and reclaim a broad Catholic, and therefore, Irish and Irish American, family lineage.

Finally, critical attention to what has been deemed a naive reliance on the Celtic ideal, a preoccupation with premodern Catholic subjects, and a final act of escapism—her expatriation—masks the circumstances which would continue to shape Guiney’s life and decisions until her death. She was economically insecure, and financial pressure influenced much of what she did from the time she took the Auburndale appointment until her death. As much as Guiney correctly can be understood as escaping any number of things: modernity, anti-Catholicism, imperialism, or restrictive women’s roles, it is clear that she thought she could live more cheaply and more quietly in England. Lears has interpreted her disappointment later in life, and her depression, voiced in her letters, as expressions of neurasthenia; however, linking Guiney to that middle-class disease misrepresents the economic conditions her family faced and which she had to manage, as breadwinner, for much of her life.⁷⁷ A good deal of the unhappiness she experienced at the end of her life, compounded by illness, was due to her failure to make any significant income from her writing.⁷⁸ In this sense, in spite of her varied and international literary associations, Louise Guiney’s personal story is, in many ways, a tale of self-consciousness, shame, and isolation due to the failed promises of upward mobility. An examination of the forms of identity which shaped the upwardly mobile American Irish in this period is the subject of Chapter Three.

⁷⁷ Lears, 126.

⁷⁸ See, for example, a series of letters to Clement Shorter, from March 1907 through April 1912, and to her niece, Grace Guiney, December 1918 (*Letters*, Volume II, 131-243, *passim*).

CHAPTER 3

REVISITING RUM ALLEY: JAMES W. SULLIVAN'S

TENEMENT TALES OF NEW YORK

I. Introduction

From 1880 to 1920 mass immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe vastly altered the ethnic population of the United States and it, along with Jim Crow legislation, was an important backdrop to the shifting and increasingly heterogeneous socio-economic status and cultural practices of Irish Americans. The Irish immigration which began after the Famine, and ebbed during the 1870s, increased in this period inciting economic and political tensions within urban Irish Catholic communities. Large numbers of immigrants from the poorest regions of Ireland arrived unskilled, with few resources, and as primarily Gaelic speaking or bilingual.¹ While the newer Irish—"second wave"—immigrants took lower paying jobs, the more established Irish Americans obtained higher paying working-class positions or moved into middle-class occupations altogether. The "lace curtain" Irish tried to mix with the Anglo-American-dominated middle classes; however, the internal conflict was so influential within Irish America that it was difficult for the upwardly mobile to ignore the harsh realities of working-class and ghetto life. In politics, Irish Catholics made significant inroads in municipal and state offices, but the political mobilizations of Irish Americans contributed to the "intracommunal" strife because the intense political divisions within the Irish American community often were bound up with church policies and practices. That is, the Catholic church, whose leadership in the United States was largely Irish, was, itself, torn between aiding the

¹ Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 492-512.

impoverished immigrant parishioners and encouraging others to maintain a hold on middle-class rewards.²

The arrival of masses of “new” European immigrants also coincided with the emergence of the “new” realism in which the influential William Dean Howells, and other literary figures, strove for “the truthful treatment of material” in American literature. One outgrowth of this approach was the unprecedented appearance of the immigrant figure in novels and short stories. Realist writers created urban immigrant characters whose sordid living conditions, foreign customs, and “broken” English were aimed at offering a true portrait of American life in “an American idiom.” Likewise, characters from the lowest depths of society made their appearance in fictional texts through naturalism. Writers such as Stephen Crane and Frank Norris created fictionalized representations of the ways in which environmental and biological determinism shaped the lives of African Americans and European and Asian immigrants. Local color fiction, frequently understood as a subset of realism, was also popular for its regional subjects of the American South or burgeoning U.S. frontier towns. Immigrant authors often found access to publishing through local color and urban realism—in, for example, tales of New York City ghettos by Abraham Cahan and Anzia Yezierska or stories of West Coast Chinatowns by Sui Sin Far. Moreover, fiction by immigrant and non-immigrant writers alike was occupied by Russian, Italian, Chinese, German, and Irish immigrants and African Americans in this period in a manner heretofore uncommon in American literary history.

In this historical and literary context, Chapter Three examines the late nineteenth-century urban realism of James W. Sullivan’s *Tenement Tales of New York* (1895). The

2 Ibid., 494

Tenement Tales of New York is a collection of fictional sketches of Irish, Italian, Russian, and German immigrants set in the slums of New York City during the late nineteenth century. In this chapter, I examine several of these stories to analyze Sullivan's representations of Irish American and European immigrant life. I consider the ways in which he constructs Irish American and immigrant subjectivity in realist literary modes that have a somewhat "vexed" relationship with American literary realism's own purported democratic goals. Recent criticism has pointed up the ways in which the age of realism emerged during the "great age of caricature" and, in this chapter, I identify the ways in which Sullivan employs caricature to deepen the democratic possibilities of realism and to engage with other textual modes prevalent at the time.³

More specifically, this chapter looks at the ways in which the *Tenement Tales of New York* troubles the reliance on caricature in urban realism while it also borrows from, and responds to, the use of ethnic type in other popular textual and visual forms. I put Sullivan's stories in conversation with fiction by Stephen Crane, reformist literature by Jacob Riis, and popular cartoons by Richard Outcault. I argue that, by drawing upon the uses of caricature in and the narrative themes of a variety of textual and visual materials, Sullivan complicates the reliance on type ubiquitous in the late nineteenth century: he challenges the implications of ethnic type which uncritically link the figure of the immigrant with the poverty of the slums. Ultimately, I show that, inspired by the political philosophy of Henry George, Sullivan's response to the pervasive use of caricature in the broader culture allows him to create a "dual purpose" Irishness through which his stories both insist on the agency of the New York Irish and offer a direct refutation of ethnic and

3 Wonham, *Playing the Races*, 8.

class bias among lace curtain Irish Americans in New York City.⁴

II. “Slob Murphy” and Irishness in Late Nineteenth-Century Literature and

Culture

In yet earlier spring walks through Dublin, I found a depth of mud appalling . . . the streets were passable only by pedestrians skilled in shifting themselves along the sides of fences and alert to take advantage of every projecting doorstep. There were no dry places, except in front of the groceries, where the ground was beaten hard by the broad feet of loafing geese and the coming and going of admirably small children making purchases there. The number of the little ones was quite as remarkable as their size, and ought to have been even more interesting, if, as sometimes appears probable, such increase shall—together with the well-known ambition of Dubliners to rule the land—one day make an end of us poor Yankees as a dominant plurality.

—“A Pedestrian Tour,” W.D. Howells’s *Suburban Sketches*

The girl, Maggie, blossomed in a mud puddle. She grew to be a most rare and wonderful production of the tenement district, a pretty girl. . . None of the dirt of Rum Alley was in her veins. The philosophers, upstairs, downstairs, and on the same floor, puzzled over it. . . . When a child playing and fighting with gamins in the street, dirt disguised her. Attired in tatters and grime, she went unseen.

—Stephen Crane’s *Maggie*

Dirty, ragged, bad Slob had had a goodness in him which ought to have had a chance. I wondered if his dying wishes would inspire Mick Murphy to keep the oath of sobriety he had taken at his dead boy’s coffin.

—“Slob Murphy,” James W. Sullivan’s *Tenement Tales of New York*

Raised in the Irish American community of Carlisle, Pennsylvania during the antebellum period, James W. Sullivan apprenticed as a printer in Philadelphia before moving to New York City in 1882. A journalist and life-long labor advocate, he was the managing editor of *Twentieth Century* from 1889 to 1892, wrote for the *New York Times* and the *New York World*, and edited various publications for unions such as the official journal of the United Garment Workers of America. Sullivan published two collections of short fiction in the 1890s: *Tenement Tales of New York* in 1895 and *So the World Goes* three years later. A “leading figure” in the International Typographical Union, he was a

4 I revise a term from Negra here. She calls “Irishness” in the late twentieth century the “ideal all purpose identity credential” (Negra, *The Irish in Us*, 2).

member of the Knights of Labor and a participant in the New York Society for Ethical Culture.⁵ Notably, Sullivan was also a close ally of two important figures associated with working-class reform movements in the Progressive Era, Henry George and Samuel Gompers. He worked on the former's mayoral campaign in the 1880s and assisted Gompers on a labor commission under the Council of National Defense during World War I. While he wrote journalistic articles related to labor reform throughout his life, he did not publish any fiction after the 1890s and became increasingly involved, through his association with Gompers, in government work until his death on the eve of World War II.⁶

A representative story in the *Tenement Tales*, "Slob Murphy," focuses on a young boy who has grown up in the slums on Manhattan's Lower East Side and tells the story of his brief life of mischief on the street and untimely death. Slob's father, Mick, is a widower and father of fourteen children, all gone or deceased but for Slob. Mick is a brutish Irishman and day laborer who is neglectful and violent toward his son until Slob is thrown from a carriage and trampled by horses. Mick's propensity for alcohol, the various tenement neighbors' frequent utterance of the question: "Did ya send fir the prait?" in response to Slob's injury, and an elaborate wake represent the ways in which Sullivan's tale contains many of the standard elements associated with the Irish in late nineteenth-century U.S. fiction.⁷

The typical, if rather innocuous, fictional and visual treatments of Irish immigrants in late nineteenth-century U.S. culture generally included: the drunk and violent parental figure; the many dirty, raggedly dressed children; the endless supply of

5 The Samuel Gompers Papers, www.history.umd.edu/Gompers/glossary/htm.

6 Ibid.

7 Sullivan, *Tenement Tales of New York*, 13

Irish relatives; the strange Catholic habits or Irish cultural rituals, such as priest-worship and keening; and, not least, the irrepressible, seemingly-inherited poverty symbolized by unsightly living conditions. Likewise, periodicals and illustrated weeklies, such as *Puck*, featured stereotypical images of Irish Bridgets and Paddies throughout the mid- to late nineteenth century. Richard Outcault's Hogan's Alley cartoons, first published in the *New York World*, became an immediate sensation with copycat comics of Irish American and other ethnic street kids from the tenement district appearing in other papers shortly after the Hogan's Alley gang first appeared in 1894.⁸ In sum, newspaper stories, illustrations in magazines, cartoons, collections of short fiction, and novels by authors such as Richard Harding Davis, Edward W. Townsend, Brander Matthews, Finley Peter Dunne, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Harold Frederic all included Irish American figures and "materials," often relying on ethnic caricature and occasionally breaking from conventional representations.⁹

Stephen Crane's *Maggie* is probably the most memorable character of the Irish American ghetto and his title character is perhaps one of the best known Irish American fictional figures of late nineteenth-century literature. The daughter of immigrants, Maggie is described as having none of the dirt of the slums "in her veins," but, as Crane's story bears out, not even she is impervious to the corruption that accompanies life in New York's tenement district. The title character of Norris's *McTeague* can be read as the classic Irish American parvenu: the child of a mining family, he aims for middle-class,

8 Zurier, *Picturing the City*, 220-225.

9 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 176-177. See Knobel for an analysis of representations of the Irish in antebellum culture and Jensen for a response to Knobel's argument. See Appel for a detailed analysis of how representations of the Irish shifted in *Puck* over the course of 35 years and Kenny for a detailed discussion of the historical and cultural contexts of the links between nativism, caricature, and the Irish. I am focusing on Irish American caricature here, but, of course, other ethnic and immigrant groups were the object of caricatured portraits in the late nineteenth century as well.

professional status as a dentist and ultimately fails to achieve it. William Dean Howells's 1871 *Suburban Sketches* contains his most famous Irish character. Mrs. Clannahan only makes a brief appearance in "A Pedestrian Tour," but is a memorable figure as Howells's portrayal of her mud-soaked neighborhood, "Dublin," recalls Thoreau's description of David Field. More importantly, Mrs. Clannahan is significant as she—far more than the meager Field—embodies the threat the "Celtic Army" poses to the sanctity, cleanliness, and ethnic homogeneity of Boston.

Moreover, most representations of the American Irish in late nineteenth-century literature and culture were typifications; authors frequently relied on recycled attributes that had been circulating for decades to describe immigrant characters of any number, if not all, ethnic backgrounds. The reliance on type is representative of not only outright nativist sentiment (which was sometimes the case) but also of questions regarding the nature of American identity in the period. In his landmark work, *Beyond Ethnicity*, Werner Sollors characterizes late-nineteenth century America as a culture in which a debate over consent and descent notions of identity were circulating and contested. Henry Wonham has identified the age of realism as the "age of caricature" arguing for the "paradoxical interplay" between democratic realist ideals and the reliance on conventional ethnic types in the canonical novels of the period. Building on Sollors's scholarship, he revisits the question of how "the concepts of the self-made man and of Jim Crow had their origins in the same culture at about the same time."¹⁰ Wonham argues that ethnic caricature appealed to realist writers for its potential to "instigate a radical decentering of identity" and, as such, exemplifies "another of the era's awkward, contradictory, and even duplicitous attempts" to marry the opposing consent and descent

¹⁰ Sollors, qtd. in Wonham, 37.

notions of identity into a single, unified definition of American national identity.¹¹

Wonham has explained the links between ethnic caricature and realist representation in the following way: caricature “inscribes ethnic markers as inflexible features of identity, which only become more pronounced with every comical step.” Ethnic caricature effectively “reifies [the] categories [of type] so thoroughly that an alternative model of identity inevitably emerges as a dimension of the caricatured image.”¹² Wonham’s argument hinges on the importance of the notion of “character” in Howellsian realism. He says that one of the goals of realism is to “affirm the solidarity of mankind through the delineation of character” and that the notion of a shared human consciousness was central to the realist literary agenda. The implications for character produced by caricature (i.e., that some individuals do not share in that universal human consciousness) is more threatening to Howells than the terror invoked by, for instance, the encroachment of Irish or other immigrants onto American soil.¹³ For Wonham, it is within this metaphorical space, the space between caricature’s insistence on static but exaggerated features of the ethnic subject and the underlying belief in the notion of an essential, universal human character, that type, anti-intuitively, authenticates the very idea of character so important to the democratic underpinning of realist literary practice.

Wonham’s argument about the precise function of caricature in American literary realism is not entirely convincing; however, it is of note for several reasons. For one, it highlights the relevance of “character” to American literary realism and character is used by Sullivan to critique realist representation in one of the more significant stories under review in this chapter. More importantly, Wonham’s analysis is relevant because it

11 Wonham, 39.

12 Ibid., 38.

13 Ibid., 44, 54.

stresses the persistent uses of caricature in both the works of well-known figures associated with American realism as well as in late nineteenth-century visual culture. It confirms the similarities between the representations of ethnic figures in popular visual and textual mediums produced in the late nineteenth century and in fictional texts associated with American literary realism and naturalism. Likewise, Wonham's analysis serves as a reminder of the fact that caricature—in a more straightforward way, unrelated to the intricacies of his argument—can be understood as enacting “antithetical gestures” in spite of all appearances to the contrary.¹⁴

For example, regarding the latter point, in “Slob Murphy” Sullivan complicates clichéd notions about the life of the urban poor in the late nineteenth century by, like other American writers before and after him, using typifications to revise standard literary representations of his own ethnic group. Through caricature Sullivan makes the Irish character seem more amenable to American national identity. He brings together a series of Irish types in the tale of Slob Murphy and then challenges those representations by suggesting that it is the conditions of slum life, rather than inheritance, which sustain Irish American poverty. Like the other *Tenement Tales* which aim to dissociate ethnic immigrant status of Russian or Italian protagonists from the corruption of the slums, “Slob Murphy” points up the ways in which the living and working conditions of ghetto life breed crime, poverty, and a sense of disillusionment that, more often than not, abort the “chance” of the good life in an urban ghetto. In “Slob Murphy,” as in other tales such as “Luigi Barbieri” and “Cohen’s Figure,” Sullivan uses ethnic caricature to demonstrate that it is not the immigrant backgrounds (the descent characteristics) of slum dwellers that create ghetto conditions but economic exploitation and social prejudice that account

¹⁴ Ibid., 39.

for the degradation of the tenement district. Sullivan's use of caricature in "Slob Murphy" does not reflect Wonham's claims about the particular function of caricature in American literary realism. In fact, this chapter shows that Sullivan rejects the persistent uses of caricature in realist and other texts; however, "Slob Murphy" does mobilize the features of caricature to produce an "antithetical gesture." It challenges the essentialist assumptions of type.

More important for the analysis of this chapter, aside from "Slob Murphy," Sullivan's fictional treatments of Irish Americans tend to submerge ethnic identity in favor of subtle ethnic signifiers. Most of his Irish American characters are naturalized as non-ethnically marked white Americans even though, and largely because, they are presented in a framework (in a collection of stories) in which there are non-Irish, European immigrant characters whose ethnic backgrounds are explicitly identified. Furthermore, Sullivan draws on late nineteenth-century types to represent non-Irish American characters and foreground class analysis. As a result, he normalizes Irish American status to a degree quite distinct from the typifications he employs in "Slob Murphy" or on view in *Maggie* or popular illustrated weeklies. As I argue in this chapter, undergirding Sullivan's representation of Irishness in the *Tales* is a set of anxieties around Irish American identity during a time in which the lace curtain Irish were ambivalent about their proximity to the squalor of the Lower Manhattan slums and in which the plight of the urban poor was gaining greater attention in both the popular press and in American literary circles.

In fact, as the literary critic Sabine Haennt has noted, urban local color fiction gained new currency around the same time that Progressive Era tenement reform

movements emerged. Likewise, it was the publication of Howells's *A Hazard of New Fortunes* in 1890—in which the protagonist, Basil March, is fascinated by ghetto figures—that urban local color became “a legitimate source of realist fiction.” She argues that the existence of immigrant ghettos “spurred” the development of the Settlement House movement while that reform culture simultaneously promoted the ghetto and its inhabitants as “a site of strange fascination.”¹⁵ Sullivan was a social reformer, a journalist, and a realist writer and the tension between tenement reform and ethnic caricature in realist writing adopts a particularly interesting cast in his stories wherein he foregrounds the dulling effects of tenement and working-class life but also attempts to reject descent notions of identity—evident in both reform tracts and realist writing—that uncritically link the immigrant figure with the poverty of the slums. As such, not only are Crane's *Maggie* and other naturalist or realist texts an important context for the *Tenement Tales* but the broad array of late nineteenth-century visual and textual materials which relied on caricature to depict tenement immigrants are as well.

This chapter's exploration of the *Tenement Tales*, then, will consider the ways in which Sullivan's stories respond to various representations of tenement immigrants in late nineteenth-century American literary and popular culture. While his stories have characters of a range of ages and ethnic backgrounds, I focus on the *Tenement Tales* that are most representative of his construction of Irish American identity: “Minnie Kelsey's Wedding,” “Threw Himself Away,” “Leather's Banishment,” and “A Young Desperado.” I read the first pair of *Tenement Tales* in terms of two themes common to ethnic literature: passing and mixed marriage. The first of these stories, “Minnie Kelsey's Wedding,” is an unconventional passing narrative in dialogue with the representation of Irish tenement

15 Haennt, “Visual Culture, Tenement Fiction, and the Immigrant Subject in Abraham Cahan's *Yekl*,” 494.

dwellers of the sort depicted in *Maggie*. “Threw Himself Away,” a story of mixed marriage among the middle-class Irish, is representative of Sullivan’s approach to what is at stake in claims to Irish American upward mobility in a racially stratified society. The second pair of stories under consideration here, “Leather’s Banishment” and “A Young Desperado,” depicts the lives of Lower East Side street kids. My analysis situates these tales in terms of both the image of independent ethnic youths that became popular with the publication of the Richard Outcault’s Hogan’s Alley cartoons and the increasing social attention to child welfare in the period as represented in Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives*.¹⁶ In the end, I bring the thematic concerns and visual and textual engagements of individual stories in the *Tenement Tales of New York* together to demonstrate that Sullivan’s *Tales* can variously be defined as urban realist or naturalist stories. I show that, overall, his collection suggests that the representations of immigrant figures in various popular and literary forms often serve to mask the economic exploitation which perpetuates urban poverty and, therefore, disables democratization among immigrant populations. Finally, I argue that the *Tenement Tales of New York* responds to political debates within Irish American circles to represent the working-class and upwardly mobile Irish American communities of New York City as deeply bound to—and necessary agents of change in—the densely populated immigrant areas of Lower Manhattan.

III. Passing in “Minnie Kelsey’s Wedding” and Mixed Marriage in “Threw Himself Away”

The protagonist of Sullivan’s “Minnie Kelsey’s Wedding” is an orphan from the countryside who migrates to the New York tenement district to live with an aunt and

¹⁶ Zurier, 221-224.

uncle. Minnie has difficulty adjusting to city life and is over-worked by her aunt. She daydreams about her more pastoral youth and suffers the boredom of her factory job which promises a bleak future. The primary events of the story center on a dance that Minnie attends while wearing an expensive gown lent to her by a co-worker.

Unbeknownst to her, the gown was purchased for Minnie's use by a local gambler, Tom King. After she learns of her debt to him she runs home only to be discovered by her outraged, alcoholic uncle who assumes that she has exchanged her morals for the dress and disclaims her "disgrace [to] an honest family." Fearing for her safety she runs away from the house, is pursued by her uncle, and considers jumping into the river to save herself. Just as her uncle is about to strike her, saying "I'll break every bone of your body," King arrives and declares he will marry her.¹⁷ Minnie's rescue is without relief or joy. She has no resources, no home, and no choice but to comply in the marriage.

The story can be compared with Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (A Story of New York)* first published in 1893. Crane lived in lower Manhattan from 1892 to 1894 and throughout that period wrote and published a series of short stories and sketches about life in the tenements, many, but not all, of his characters were Irish Americans. *Maggie* tells the tale of Maggie Johnson's unhappy home life; her naive trust in her suitor, Pete; her fall into prostitution; and her eventual death by suicide in the East River. Crane has been praised for the "incisive brevity" he brings to his prose and it has been suggested that he "works against the conventions of realism" in the novel even while he creates "a persuasive model of the actual world."¹⁸ The stylistic features of the text are partially what have made *Maggie* a canonical novel; however, the novel's melodramatic

17 Sullivan, 63; 62-63.

18 Ziff, Introduction, xiii.

depiction of Bowery life is also often linked to naturalism. Crane's *Maggie* has been held up as an exemplary fictional expression of environmental determinism.

"Minnie Kelsey's Wedding" and *Maggie* share similar plots and each story demonstrates that its heroine's downfall is not due to the essential nature of the protagonist but to the degradation of her environment. In both "Minnie Kelsey's Wedding" and *Maggie* a girl from the slums is exposed to a set of values and goods that are out of her impoverished reach but attractive to her nonetheless. The ostensible message of Sullivan's tale is that, as Minnie puts it, she had "been made victim of [her] own vanity" and was "caught in . . . a trap" by wearing the dress, but Sullivan makes clear that the trap is not of Minnie's own making.¹⁹ Like Maggie, who wonders if "the culture and refinement she had seen [at the theater] . . . could be acquired by a girl who lived in a tenement house and worked in a shirt factory," Minnie is drawn to the dance because she imagines that to "dance in a ballroom would be enchanting."²⁰ Just as Maggie is naive about what her association with Pete means for her prospects of a respectable life in the long run, Sullivan depicts Minnie as being drawn to the dance by forces beyond her control: "She had been carried along by events until she could hardly decide not to go to the ball." Similarly, Minnie's consideration of suicide by the river and eventual marriage to a gambler suggests that if Minnie refused marriage her only alternative would be Maggie's path of prostitution. It implies that a marriage borne out of such circumstances is not unlike prostitution; during the scene by the river, King warns the police not to interfere in the fight with Minnie's uncle because "[y]ou know me, officer. The lady is now in my charge." Moreover, both narratives aim to problematize

19 Ibid., 61.

20 Crane, *Maggie*, 38; Sullivan, 55.

associations between poverty, immorality, and inheritance.

In spite of these similarities, the ethnic identity that contributes to Maggie's compelling nature in Crane's story is absent in "Minnie Kelsey's Wedding." That is, Sullivan's story offers a critique, that, in the end, is consistent with Crane's in *Maggie*, but, instead of using caricature to make his point, he draws from a theme common to ethnic literature: passing. In the *Tenement Tales of New York* Sullivan describes various forms of passing, cross dressing, and disguise and his references to passing in "Minnie Kelsey's Wedding" are indicative of an important difference between Sullivan's story and Crane's novel. For instance, an initial, brief episode of passing in "Minnie Kelsey's Wedding" occurs during a scene mentioned above, in which Minnie's outraged uncle chases her down the street. It reads:

Gaining the street, Minnie ran around the block. By chance her uncle ran around the same block the other way, and thus they met midway around. He was swearing to himself. He stared at her; she was about to scream; but he passed on. When he was a few steps beyond her she began running. In a moment he was after her. "To think I didn't know her in her guilty finery!" he roared.²¹

While Minnie's "passing" as a well dressed, middle-class woman in front of her uncle is unintentional and short-lived (and even comic), Sullivan's suggestion that her uncle is unable to immediately recognize her allows him to point up the superficiality of markers of class status and raise questions about the fate of one's identity if she lives in the slums.

More important, this scene supports an earlier allusion to passing in the story. When, at length, the narrator describes Minnie's disillusionment with factory work, Minnie is described as "her own chameleon" who has adopted "morbidness, colorlessness, and dullness" having become a part of the "steel machinery" in the tedious and repetitive motion she makes all day long. The factory work itself produces a kind of

21 Sullivan, 63.

enforced passing: it drains her to the degree that she is no longer the “sprightly” figure she once was.²² This form of passing can be understood, to borrow from Jacquelyn McLendon, as a “pretense” that “results in a loss” of a particular identity.²³ Minnie is transformed from being a “buoyant” child from the country to one who has lost the “roses from her cheeks” and the “force from her mentality.”²⁴

While it would be incorrect to call Minnie’s story a “narrative of passing” in a traditional sense, Sullivan illustrates the ways in which the circumstances of slum life promote performance, pretense, or the outright loss of identity, and also, more often than not, preclude genuine class mobility. More clearly, the loss of identity precipitated by factory work creates the condition for the pretense Minnie later adopts at the dance—the same one that briefly disguises her in front of her uncle. In Minnie’s case, adapting to poor living and working conditions requires a “surrender” of her previous identity and motivates her pursuit of an alternative to the one in which she is a girl who, to paraphrase Crane, lives in a tenement and works in a factory. Passing, in some form, Sullivan suggests, is a condition of life in the slums.

Significantly, unlike Crane’s protagonist, Minnie Kelsey is not from a family which bears the obvious marks of Irishness. As previously noted Maggie Johnson’s family epitomizes the image of the violent, drunk, and impoverished Irish popular in the late nineteenth century. The novel opens with Maggie’s brother, Jimmie, as a young boy, standing atop a “heap of gravel” in a back alley street. He is described as “insane, [a]

22 Ibid., 50.

23 McLendon’s definition of “passing” is “a form of pretense or disguise that results in a loss or surrender of, or failure to satisfy a desire for, identity, whether racial, cultural, social or sexual” (McLendon, *The Politics of Color in the Fiction of Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen*, 7). See Belluscio for an overview of the various ways in which “passing” has been defined by literary critics in recent scholarship.

24 Sullivan, 50.

demon” and as the fierce “champion of Rum Alley.” He and his fellow street urchins howl and swear in “barbaric trebles” and delight in fighting like “savages.” Mr. Johnson is a menial laborer who threatens to “belt” the children at every turn, passes his time at the saloon, and fights incessantly with his wife, Mary Johnson. One of the neighbors succinctly articulates the way Irish women repeatedly were represented in masculine terms when, in the tenement stairwell, and against the backdrop of violent noise from the Johnson apartment, she asks Jimmie: “Eh, Gawd, child, what is it dis time? Is yer fader beatin’ yer mudder, or yer mudder beatin’ yer fader?”²⁵ Together, the Johnsons embody nearly every stereotype of the Irish circulating in late nineteenth-century U.S. culture.

The exception to this is, of course, Maggie. Crane’s protagonist is interesting largely because she differs so from the rest of her family: she has none of the dirt of the slums “in her veins.” In spite of her family’s excessive “Irish” traits, Maggie doesn’t immediately fulfill the caricatured definition of the Irish Catholic immigrant and this is what makes her a sympathetic figure in Crane’s text. Much of the dramatic force—the melodrama—of Crane’s story is related to the exaggeration of type found in his representation of the Johnson family. In *Maggie*, the exaggerated type embodied by each member of the family sets up the crucial contrast between Maggie and her family. It is this contrast which affirms Maggie’s essential goodness and allows Crane to portray her as the victim of her situation rather than the cause of it.

Alternatively, even though Minnie’s uncle is reminiscent of Mr. Johnson in his brute-like treatment of Minnie and his weekly drinking binges, Minnie’s ethnic identity is not central to her characterization. Minnie is a compelling and sympathetic figure, for Sullivan, because of the loss of identity that accompanies her work in the factory and her

²⁵ Crane, 11.

life in the slums. Furthermore, the fine clothes that make Minnie look “so well” at the dance suggest that she has the capacity (and the desire) to look like a woman from the middle class, but, in Minnie’s case, it is strictly the economic and social limitations of tenement life, not her ethnic background, that make it impossible for her to escape the “trap” of the ghetto. In this way, Sullivan’s story draws attention to the conditions and effects of working-class life without, like many urban realist texts, Crane’s *Maggie*, or his own “Slob Murphy,” foregrounding the ethnic background of the tenement character.

The critique of realist representations of Irish American figures suggested by “Minnie Kelsey’s Wedding” is given fuller expression in the second of Sullivan’s stories under consideration here: “Threw Himself Away.” In this tale, members of an Irish American social club, the East Side Chaucer Literary Society, lament the marriage of one of their members, Legrand Brighton, to a Jewish immigrant, Rebecca Steinberg. The Chaucer Society members identify this as a “mixed” marriage for a variety of reasons: it crosses class, religious, and racial boundaries. This story also can be read as an exploration of the tenuous relationship between a group of newly middle-class New York Irish and other immigrant populations in the nearby ghettos. The critique of Irish American middle-class pretensions about “character” can be extended to a more general response, by Sullivan, to the features of immigrant caricature in Howellsian realism.

“Threw Himself Away” is structured around the central contrast between the opening scenes of the sketch in which the Society members voice their initial responses to Legrand’s “unfortunate marital venture” and a visit the narrator, the central

consciousness of the story, makes to Legrand's home some five years later.²⁶ The circumstances he encounters at Legrand's home "close to the slums" contradict the group's assumptions about Rebecca's inherited status and reveal that the Society's sense of "gentlemanly" is questionable.²⁷ In short, the narrator discovers the instability of the racial, class, and religious markers of difference that were identified as so important by the Chaucer Society. This story concludes with the narrator's intention to bring the "unclassed" figure into the group; he pledges to introduce Rebecca to Legrand's "uptown" friends.

More specifically, the moderator of the club's primary objection to the marriage is the belief that Legrand has "contravene[d]" unchangeable "social laws" by marrying someone of an "ostracized race." Once the narrator visits Legrand at his home he learns that, in fact, Rebecca is a "Hardworking, successful business woman . . . [and] a lady, too." Legrand, on the other hand, drinks frequently and rarely works a steady job. While the contrast between the expectations of the Chaucer Society and the facts of Legrand's life are rather predictable, and the description of Legrand and Rebecca reflect caricatured portraits of the Irish drunk and the avaricious Jewish woman, what is interesting is that it is Rebecca's mother, Mrs. Steinberg, who articulates Legrand's failings as a husband, and, more importantly, the implied superficiality of the Society's trust in social laws which identify Legrand as having "gentlemanly instincts" but Rebecca as one from an "inferior strata."²⁸

Mrs. Steinberg is described as a "swarthy old Jewess." It is through her that the narrator discovers the falsity of the Society's belief in their own exclusive, higher nature

26 Sullivan, 92.

27 Ibid., 101.

28 Ibid., 112; 94.

and the insufficiency of the markers used to signify—among the Irish American literary society members and in fictional scenes of urban local color—racial or class difference.

Sullivan writes:

Through [Mrs. Steinberg's] uncouth words shone a conscience and a true heart in the right place. Her thought and her manner were the last remove from vulgarity. I lost sight of her broken English and followed her reflections, sound as they were; and her moral feelings, unperverted as they were; and the play of her emotions, controlled, as they were, by a natural and becoming pride.²⁹

Whereas “Minnie Kelsey’s Wedding” and “Slob Murphy” suggest that the “morbidity” of the life of the tenement dweller is, for all intents and purposes, “unseen” by the middle-class observer, the narrator of “Threw Himself Away” loses “sight” of the typical markers of immigrant identity to refute essentialist claims about the links between descent characteristics and class status.

Most of the anxiety about the mixed marriage in this plot revolves around class and the precarious proximity of the lace curtain Irish to the Lower East Side tenements; however, the interracial implications of the marriage are the focus of the final image Sullivan evokes. It reads: “as I went out the shop door, [I saw] three happy youngsters on their way in. They were well-dressed, sturdy boys, healthfully noisy, all with Rebecca’s fine olive skin and Legrand’s deep blue eyes, the youngest a perfect prototype of one of Murillo’s cherubs.”³⁰ This is a direct reference to an earlier claim by one of the Chaucer members that “no master ever yet painted a Jew cherub.”³¹ This closing scene challenges the racial bigotry voiced by members of the Irish American club and it exposes the ways in which the Irish have embraced hypocritical ethnic biases in their pursuit of middle-class status.

29 Ibid., 110.

30 Sullivan, 113.

31 Ibid., 95.

Finally, the primary occupation of the story's concluding passages is the ways the Chaucer Society members have misjudged Legrand's character and Sullivan is persistent in raising questions about how one measures character and how one represents literary figures by introducing a final image that calls attention to the physical features of race. Basil March of *A Hazard of New Fortunes* famously deplores the lack of a painter to capture the "picturesque" objects of the slums, and the narrator's final words suggest that Sullivan's critique of the upwardly mobile Irish equally can be understood as a response to the reliance on ethnic caricature in realist representation.³² Even though Sullivan, like Howells, relies on elements of caricature to represent the Jewish Americans and Irish Americans in this story, his direct reference to the links between character and dialect in the figure of Mrs. Steinberg illustrate the ways in which these tales problematize the use of caricature in urban realist texts which so frequently rely on dialect to represent ethnic and racial "others." In these ways, both "Minnie Kelsey's Wedding" and "Threw Himself Away," draw from recurrent themes of ethnic literature to challenge the assumptions about character and ethnic identity which are implied by the uses of type in fictional texts associated with American literary realism.

IV. Hogan's Alley, the *Other Half*, and Sullivan's Stories of Lower East Side Street Kids

While urban realism and naturalism are relevant contexts for thinking about the representations of the slum dwellers in "Minnie Kelsey's Wedding" and "Threw Himself Away," in "Leather's Banishment" and "A Young Desperado" Sullivan intervenes in

32 For an analysis of the implications of Howells's rendering of New York as "foreign" and "picturesque" in *Hazard*, see Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism*, 48-51. For a related discussion of the use of dialect and caricature of the immigrant character, in this case, the German immigrant, Lindau, in this novel, see Kaplan, *Social Construction*, 57-58. See also: Wonham, Chapter 2.

discourses about European immigrant subjectivity by responding to a separate, but related, set of cultural texts. These tales of Irish American street kids from the Lower East Side are in dialogue with both the image of independent ethnic youths that became popular with the publication of the Richard Outcault's Hogan's Alley cartoons in the 1890s and the increasing social attention to child welfare in the period as represented in Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives*.³³ This analysis of "Leather's Banishment" and "A Young Desperado" outlines the ways in which Sullivan borrows from the discourses of anarchic children of Hogan's Alley and then considers how Sullivan diverges from these representations by offering a counter-narrative to the gleeful play of the street kids in scenes which depict the underside of poverty and, as such, are similar to the photographs and prose of the *Other Half*.

The Hogan's Alley cartoons first appeared in the *New York World* in 1894 and, by 1895, the year Sullivan began working for the paper, the leading recurrent character of this comic was The Yellow Kid, so named for the yellow tinged smock he wore in each frame.³⁴ These cartoons, such as "What They Did to the Dog-Catcher in Hogan's Alley," have been read as remarkable for their anomalous place in a late nineteenth-century New York culture preoccupied with reform. The art historian Rebecca Zurier has suggested that the "gleefully anarchic world" of independent streets kids figured in the "Dog-Catcher" illustration is at odds with a culture increasingly interested in social order and child welfare. As she has noted, Riis's appeal for urban reform through his moralistic best-seller of 1890, *How the Other Half Lives*, is precisely the kind of cultural production which makes Hogan's Alley seem so unusual.

33 Zurier, 221.

34 Ibid.

How the Other Half Lives is a collection of essays describing the squalid conditions of various areas of New York's tenement district in the late nineteenth century. The articles in the *Other Half* have titles such as: The Down-Town Back Alleys, The Bend, The Cheap Lodging-Houses, A Raid on Stale-Beer Dives, The Bohemians-Tenement House Cigar Making, The Street Arab, and the like. Forty-three photographs are also included in the book. The essays and photos, together, offer a sensational image of urban poverty and, at the time, the book successfully gained the attention of those who did not identify as the "other half"—Manhattan's middle and upper classes. Directed to middle-class readers, the *Other Half* calls for improvement through social progress and child welfare and shows the benefits of tenement reform. For example, in the photograph "Prayer Time" Riis promotes the work of the House of Industry.³⁵ Zurier has suggested that the uniform order depicted in Riis's photographs which were meant to demonstrate the positive effects of reform, such as the image of children praying in "Prayer Time," is a stark contrast to the havoc of the Hogan's Alley image. Equally important, the photographs such as "Prayer Time" in the *Other Half* are set against and in contrast to a host of other images in Riis's text which demonstrate the impoverishment of the tenements. This chapter's analysis of "Leather's Banishment" and "A Young Desperado" demonstrates that Sullivan's stories draw from the textual and visual materials of Outcault's and Riis's texts to reproduce and then complicate their representations of the links between ethnic difference and poverty.

"Leather's Banishment" opens with the young Leather running off the downtown El at Chatham Square with a woman's purse in hand and the victim screaming theft. Once in the tenement district he bumps into his friend Smutty, a bootblack, and camps out with

³⁵ Ibid., 224.

him on the sidewalk. As a police officer approaches, Leather “daubed his face with some blacking from Smutty’s board, seized a boot brush, and held it up and called ‘Shine!’” Even though the officer and the expensively dressed victim question Smutty and Leather, the latter goes unrecognized. Later, still under pursuit by the police, Leather convinces his friend Billy to let him perform Billy’s job that night. Wearing Billy’s blue messenger boy uniform, Leather waits at the police station to deliver a message to the detective under the assumption that there was no “safer place for him than the station, if he could go there as a messenger-boy [sic].” At the station he learns that, indeed, the police are still looking for him and want to arrest him as an “example.”³⁶ The protagonist escapes the police station and spends a long and cold night on a tenement rooftop in hiding. He eventually makes his way to the tenement apartment of his friend Chalkey. In the concluding scenes of the story, as the “infirm” Chalkey recites Bible stories to a Settlement House worker, Mrs. Squiggs, and Leather hides under the bed, the police burst in to search Chalkey’s apartment. Together, Leather and Chalkey successfully outwit the police. Not only does Leather go undetected during their search of the premises, but Chalkey, through manipulating Mrs. Squiggs, secures, for Leather, employment in the country, a place in a “skule,” and, most importantly, safety from the punishment of the law.

Sullivan draws from the representation of tenement children in Hogan’s Alley in various ways in this story. For example, the image of “gleeful” Lower East Side children associated with these comics is exemplified at the conclusion of “Leather’s Banishment” in which Leather and Chalkey celebrate their success in outwitting the detectives and Mrs. Squiggs. This moment in the text reads: “Hardly [was she] out in the hall before

³⁶ Sullivan, 140; 144.

Chalkey and Leather were indulging in a wild dance that took in the whole flat. 'Banished to de woods!' laughed Leather. 'But its fur me health.' . . . the boys passed the day in rejoicing."³⁷ Likewise, Zurier has shown that "The Hogan's Alley gang was never disciplined by parents or police."³⁸ Leather is successful in outwitting all forms of authority he encounters including: the police officer, the detective, and, with Chalkey's help, the Settlement House worker. The Yellow Kid and his cohorts have also been read as "unreformable" to the point of being "contemptuous of conventional ideas of duty."³⁹ Accordingly, Leather and friends are not even loyal to one another. For example, after Leather disguises himself as a bootblack, he has to pay half the purse's contents (\$1.00) to Smutty who insists on his fair share. Likewise, Chalkey only agrees to help Leather hide from the police as a way of repaying a past favor. The relationships between reformers and the tenement children are depicted in a similar way. For example, Chalkey tells his friends, "talk Sunday scholl an ye kin strike dat religious gang for anyt'ing."⁴⁰ When Mrs. Squiggs visits Chalkey, he uses his "Sunday school talk" to secure Leather's escape. In these ways, Leather and his friends appear, very much like the Hogan's Alley gang, as "unreformable" street kids who delight in defying authority figures and exploiting the disorder of tenement life.

The second story about tenement street kids under consideration in this chapter, "A Young Desperado," tells the tale of Raymond Hastings, the young son of a wealthy banker who runs away from his uptown home and gets lost on the Lower East Side. Raymond is the object of abuse and scorn among the children of the tenement district

37 Ibid., 164.

38 Zurier, 225.

39 Ibid.

40 Sullivan, 156.

who strip him of his expensive clothes, cut his hair, and beat him up so that he soon looks like a native of the tenements and therefore fails to convince the police to help him find his way home. A newsboy named Skinny Maguire comes to the rescue by befriending Raymond and, eventually, the latter learns how to survive on the streets by selling papers, stealing food, and sleeping wherever he finds the space. “A Young Desperado” concludes when the two boys are at a newsboy lodging house for the night and Raymond’s father stops by in search of his son. Since Raymond has been transformed into a street kid, covered in dirt and ragged clothes, he is not recognized by his father; it is Skinny Maguire who saves the day for Raymond, once again, by reuniting the banker with his son. Like Leather’s “happy ending,” Skinny is rewarded with placement in a “good school” by Mr. Hastings.⁴¹

The story of Raymond echoes one particular Hogan’s Alley cartoon in which the Yellow Kid and his friends invade and disrupt the birthday party of a wealthy uptown child. This frame is titled: “Amateur Circus: The Smallest Show on Earth” and has been described in the following way: “The respectable children at the party wear Lord Fauntleroy suits and have curling locks, perfectly drawn eyes, and regular features . . . while the Kid and his friends have [. . .] dotlike eyes and ungainly. poses.”⁴² Sullivan describes Raymond in a manner which matches the image of the children in “Amateur Circus.” Raymond’s “fair hair [is] long and wavy” and his clothes are like that of “Fauntleroy.”⁴³ Furthermore, the uncertainty that Raymond encounters on the streets, when faced with the gang of street kids, creates a sense of havoc not unlike that depicted in this image. The “Amateur Circus” cartoon originally appeared with one about “Racing

41 Ibid., 233.

42 Zurier, 221.

43 Sullivan, 199; 203.

Season” and in each of these some of the text is written in street slang. The feeling of chaos that accompanies Raymond’s experience in the tenement district is exacerbated by the fact that, to Raymond, the other boys’ street dialect seems to be an entirely different language.

Skinny Maguire’s role in “A Young Desperado” is also significant. Skinny shows Raymond how to hustle newspapers and he gambles his profits so they can buy coffee and bread. Skinny’s self-appointed position as Raymond’s guide in the tenement district underscores the ways in which the street kids in both “Leather’s Banishment” and “A Young Desperado” are adept at defying authority. That is, Leather’s various acts of cross-dressing as both a bootblack and a messenger boy, Chalkey’s “performance” in front of Mrs. Squiggs, and Skinny Maguire’s ability to pilfer and gamble meals for himself and Raymond suggest that the tenement boys dwell in a neighborhood in which they know more than the authorities and have the power to take on any number of roles for their own delight.

While, then, there are multiple ways in which “Leather’s Banishment” and “A Young Desperado” capture the world of Hogan’s Alley, Sullivan’s stories also engage with discourses about tenement reform, such as *How the Other Half Lives*, popular at the time. Sullivan’s descriptions of tenement kids are similar to those offered by Riis’s *Other Half* in various ways. Like Riis, Sullivan seemed to believe in the “ameliorative power of fresh air” in that both stories end with the removal of the street urchin to a home or school away from the slums. Many of Riis’s and Sullivan’s contemporaries believed that the poor “bore responsibility for their own fate,” and Sullivan’s stories, like the *Other Half*, suggest that if the tenement children are engaged in illegal practices it is because

they have no other choice.⁴⁴ More clearly, for the street kids in Sullivan's *Tales*, under the sheen of gleeful chaos and independence there is a troubled confusion.

For example, Leather is perplexed by the seemingly arbitrary nature of right and wrong. As previously mentioned, before seeking refuge at Chalkey's, Leather spends a cold and fearful night alone on a tenement rooftop. His thoughts at this moment in the text—as he drifts in and out of sleep—are worth quoting:

He had been arrested twice . . . He felt he had harmed no one on either occasion; but the law punished him. So he must have been bad. His mind ran on, dwelling on bad things and bad men. The bad things were the things forbidden by the police, and the bad men were the men whom the police arrested . . . As to the woman's pocketbook, he remembered how hungry he had been, and how lightly she treated the loss, and the only regret he now had was that it contained so little.

Leather's confusion over what constitutes "bad things" suggests, consistent with Riis's thinking, that the police have failed in their role to affect positive change.

Similarly, the image of Leather in this scene, of a small boy bent over a tenement roof, reproduces images, familiar to readers of the *Other Half*, of street kids asleep in the open spaces of the Lower East Side. Sullivan recreates this type of image in "A Young Desperado" as well when Raymond sleeps on the top of "a pile of heavy beams and planks in front of an unfinished building."⁴⁵ Not only do these scenes reflect Progressive Era ideology shared by Riis, and the subject matter of *Other Half* photographs, but they also contradict the happy anarchy of Hogan's Alley. Moreover, "Leather's Banishment" and "A Young Desperado" produce images of tenement life that both draw from the popular image of the lively world of the Yellow Kid and the images and prose of *How the Other Half Lives*.

If Zurier is correct in saying that the images of Hogan's Alley are a stark contrasts

44 Diner, Introduction, x.

45 Sullivan, 210.

to the *Other Half's* occupation with tenement reform, it is also true that one feature shared by Hogan's Alley and the *Other Half* is that they both depict decidedly ethnic spaces. The Yellow Kid and his cohorts are typically rendered in ways which make clear "social, racial, and ethnic distinctions."⁴⁶ Zurier lists the familiar caricatures used in the Hogan's Alley comics: "Adults had the apelike features and cherry nose of the stereotyped Irishman, while the children included panoply of hook-nosed Jews, thick-lipped African Americans, and assorted ragamuffins quite unlike the depictions of the well-to-do."⁴⁷ The Yellow Kid was an Irish American, named Mickey Dugan, and Hogan's Alley was a depiction of an Irish slum in Lower Manhattan. Its characters included Mrs. Murphy, a washerwoman, Tim McFaddan, a neighborhood drunk, and African American, Jewish American, Italian American, and Chinese American children from adjacent neighborhoods.⁴⁸

Similarly, even though Riis aimed for sympathy in his reform-oriented photography and accompanying prose, as Peter Bacon Hales has argued, he clearly saw his subjects as a "race apart." He saw many of these "inferior" races as capable of uplift to the regions occupied by middle-class citizens, but at the heart of his sympathy was pity. He was more occupied by "observation, judgment, and paternalism," than any sense of "kinship." Riis's sense of his subjects as a "race apart" also implied that they needed "journalists, judges," and middle-class reformers to bring them out of the poverty which threatened to infect the "higher" races and the elevated classes with whom Riis himself identified.⁴⁹

46 Zurier, 221.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Hales, "From Main Street to State Street," 481-482.

Alternatively, even though Sullivan was also a journalist and reformer, his *Tales* draw upon types represented in both Outcault's and Riis's texts to challenge the image of ethnic difference implied by their depictions of Lower East Side children. Sullivan's narratives of tenement life offer a counter narrative to the association between tenement living and ethnic otherness suggested by the visual images created by Outcault and Riis. This is most clearly seen in the fluidity of identity represented in each of Sullivan's stories. Sullivan's references to Leather's use of "black cork" to disguise himself as a bootblack and to Raymond's class passing suggest that he is raising questions about the stability of racial identities implied by the representation of the "Street Arabs" which occupy both the Hogan's Alley cartoons and an entire section of the *Other Half*.

For a more specific example, it is worth considering the moment in "Leather's Banishment," when Chalkey is first introduced to the reader. We first learn of Chalkey when he is described by visitors at the police station who are taking a tour of its premises. Mrs. Squiggs, the Settlement House worker, is among the party "slumming" and says that she is going to see, in her words: "A bright little boy named Fitzwilliam McGregor. The street children call him Chalkey, he is *so* white. Too ridiculous! He has always slept in a dark room. Blanched. Really a boy of rare spiritual nature!"⁵⁰ Sullivan's reference to the damaging effects of the dark tenement recalls Riis's description of the downtown "back-alleys" where, on Cherry Street, a child dies of measles— "that dark bedroom killed it." This scene also functions, when coupled with the mutability of Leather's and Raymond's identities, to complicate notions which associate Lower East Side street kids with ethnic otherness. Not one of the three children central to these stories —Leather, Chalkey, or Raymond—has a fixed identity. The physical characteristics of these characters are fluid

50 Sullivan, 142.

and changing, and, Sullivan implies, even when it is ostensibly the decision of the child to put on a disguise the performance is really driven by the need to survive (and a result of) the conditions of life in the tenements. This doesn't mean that Sullivan was trying to imply the identity itself is inherently fluid, but that, consistent with the implications of passing in "Minnie Kelsey's Wedding," the environment of the slums has the power to alter the essentially good character of those living and working on the Lower East Side.

Furthermore, Sullivan directly challenges descent notions of identity and the hierarchal ranking of the race sciences in "A Young Desperado." In one scene, under the gaze of middle-class onlookers, Raymond fights another boy who attempted to steal his newspapers. The men watching comment that "these street boys are no better than savages" and that "[i]t takes generations of life in the slums to bring average human beings down to the level of these ruffians."⁵¹ The men conclude that the University Settlement is the only hope for the street urchins for there "a bright boy [can be] brought from savagery to civilization in less than a year!"⁵² In this scene, Sullivan treats the Settlement House movement with skepticism.⁵³ He also effectively problematizes contemporary discourses about the inferior racial status of tenement dwellers because, of course, Raymond was the representative "civilized" child prior to getting lost in the tenement district a few days before. Overall, in "A Young Desperado" and "Leather's Banishment" Sullivan both challenges the links between poverty and racial difference

51 Ibid., 221-222.

52 Ibid., 222.

53 Even though, according to Allen Davis in *Spearheads of Reform*, the settlement workers were sympathetic to labor reform, there was a good deal of distrust for the Settlement House movement among the working class and within the labor movement (103-104). The skeptical treatment of the Settlement House movement in the *Tenement Tales* is similar in tone to the following statement, about Settlement workers, by an associate of Sullivan's, Samuel Gompers: "The workers are not bugs to be examined under the lenses of a microscope, by intellectuals on a sociological slumming tour" (Davis, 104).

implied by the caricatures of Riis's and Outcault's texts and, following the theme of "Minnie Kelsey's Wedding," emphasizes the way one is often forced to "surrender" the "goodness in him" while living and working in slum conditions.

V. The *Tenement Tales*, Henry George, and Sullivan's Dual Purpose Irishness

For a more precise delineation of the differences between Sullivan's representations of tenement figures and those created by other writers, reformers, and artists, and for a deeper analysis of the implications of his representation of Irishness, Sullivan's affiliation with the land and labor reform movements in the 1880s and 1890s needs to be addressed. In the years leading up to the writing of the *Tenement Tales*, Sullivan was an active supporter of land reformer Henry George (1839-1897). This relationship is indicative of Sullivan's political and social interests and his placement within a diverse and contentious Irish American political culture at the time. It is representative of the political underpinning of his *Tales* and how *The Tenement Tales of New York* shape an image of Irishness that aims to negotiate the tensions between the upwardly mobile Irish and the poorer and working class immigrants of Lower Manhattan.

Henry George reached international fame for a brief period in the late nineteenth century and was a favorite colleague of New York City's radical Irish nationalist community. His *Progress and Poverty* (1879) was "the century's best-selling work of political economy." In it he tried to answer the question of "why the increase in material progress of the Industrial Revolution was accompanied by an increase in poverty."⁵⁴ His answer to the question was that land monopolies were a large part of the problem and his book argued for a "single redistributive tax on unproductive landed wealth."⁵⁵ His interest

54 O'Donnell, "Though Not an Irishman," 407 and 408.

55 Miller, 291.

in land reform was shared by Irish nationalists in the United States including the Irish nationalist radical Patrick Ford, who, like Sullivan, was active in New York City's burgeoning publishing community, and the "radical priest" Edward McGlynn.⁵⁶ George was an Evangelical Protestant reformer of English parentage, and an "unlikely ally" of the Irish, but he "ingratiated" himself to the Irish American community's radical leaders in New York through the publication of the essay *The Irish Land Question*.⁵⁷ When he ran for mayor at the height of his fame in 1886, their support, and the support of Irish American voters nearly won George the election.

More clearly, it was extremely important and surprising, in 1886, that George nearly got elected with the vote of Irish Americans as they almost defeated the corrupt political boss John Kelly and the conservative position of the Catholic church. Both Kelly's Tammany machine and the Catholic church were fierce competitors for the Irish American vote in a period fraught with political tensions for the Irish American community. The various political factions within Irish America at this time have been identified as the conservatives, the liberals, and the radicals. John Boyle O'Reilly, for example, was part of the more conservative "liberal" wing of Irish nationalists. He encouraged middle-class values for the Boston Irish and peace in Ireland through non-

56 O'Donnell, 413, passim. Patrick Ford was influential in inciting support for George among the Irish. Ford was a Famine immigrant who founded the radical *Irish World* in New York City in 1870. Prior to his work on the *Irish World*, he had worked under William Lloyd Garrison at the *Liberator* and fought in the Civil War. Ford wanted independence for Ireland and an overhaul of the distribution of power and land in Irish society. In 1878, he changed the name of the *Irish World* to the *Irish World and Industrial Liberator* to signify his radical agenda (O'Donnell, 409-410). Father McGlynn was an Irish-born priest and advocate of the poor in New York City who wanted the Roman Catholic church to be at the forefront of radical social and economic change lest the working classes become apostates; however, his "economic heresies and his defiance of Episcopal authority" eventually got him excommunicated by conservative forces within the church (Miller, 528).

57 O'Donnell, 408. Consistent with the ideas put forth in *Progress and Poverty*, George argued in the article that Ireland "suffered from land monopoly and required radical reform. He called for the abolition of landlordism and its attendant inequality, crushing rents, and evictions. In doing so he expressed the central demands of an emerging nationalist movement in Ireland and the United States known as the land league" (O'Donnell, 409).

violent Home Rule. In contrast, Ford, Father McGlynn, and others, such as Michael Davitt and John Devoy, supported radical reform in Ireland and for the Irish American working class.⁵⁸ Like Sullivan, they embraced George who, in turn, supported their efforts in the Irish Land League. While there is no evidence directly linking Sullivan to Ford, Davitt, or Devoy, like Ford, Sullivan was a “long-time close associate” of George’s. He worked on George’s sensational 1886 campaign and edited two newspapers with George: the campaign newspaper, *Leader*, and later, the *Standard* (from 1887-1889).

The *Tenement Tales* do not specifically articulate the land reform policies of George or the Irish nationalists, but, in terms of strategies of representation and advocacy for progressive politics, they cross similar conceptual terrain. The Irish American nationalist reformers framed American political and social agendas in terms of landlordism in Ireland. The historian Edward O’Donnell has described the arguments Irish American Land Leaguers used to gain support among the working class Irish in the United States in the following way:

[I]n linking the struggle in Ireland with that taking place in America, George and his followers. . . . compelled Irish American workers to consider their own situation in America to understand the universality of the struggle against accumulated, undemocratic power and to get them to see robber barons . . . as the “landlords” of the new industrial order.⁵⁹

Similarly, the *Tenement Tales of New York* insists on the ways in which the working-classes are exploited by the system of industrial labor which favors the ownership class.

Also, the *Tenement Tales of New York* links the prejudiced assumptions about character

58 John Devoy was the leader of *Clan na Gael* which “sought Ireland’s complete independence by any means” including violence. Michael Davitt led “a group of progressive Irish nationalists” who wanted Irish independence and economic and social reform. The movement known as the Land League (1878-1883) was comprised of the factions led by Devoy and Davitt as well as by Charles Stewart Parnell, of the Home Rulers, who aimed for home rule for Ireland through “peaceful constitutional means” (O’Donnell, 410). The popularity of the Land League spread throughout the United States and George was a member of the American Land League.

59 O’Donnell, 416.

expressed by upwardly mobile Irish Americans to the same forces—the comfortably middle-class and wealthy reformers of New York—which perpetuate stereotypes about the impoverished Irish of the tenements and are complicit in maintaining the exploitation of factory labor.

Sullivan’s friendship with, and ardent support of, Henry George suggests that, even if he was not necessarily engaged with politics in Ireland, he was clearly invested in shaping a particular image of and future for Irish Americans. In the vein of the political agenda of the Irish radicals, Sullivan’s *Tales* challenge middle-class Irish Americans to examine the significance of their proximity to the tenement district and to think about what it means to adopt the biases and pretensions of the dominant culture in their claims to upward mobility. He does this through constructing a dual purpose image of Irishness over the course of the various *Tales*. Sometimes the Irish American characters are ethnically marked in a stereotypical way and other times the descriptions of the Irish are free from standard “race traits” to a degree which normalizes Irish American ethnic status in important ways. The dual purpose Irishness of the *Tenement Tales* is underpinned by the generic diversity of his collection and, ultimately, allows him to point up the agency of the New York Irish in a way that echoes the reform advocacy of George and the Irish nationalists.

More specifically, Steven Belluscio has argued, in his study on literary realism and racial passing, that white ethnic writers who embraced realist practice in the late nineteenth century often aimed to create the free willing agent central to realism, but encountered contradictions in truthfully representing the realities of working class or ghetto life. He explains it this way:

[F]or the white ethnic author who devotes him or herself to representing accurately all the exigencies of ethnic subjectivity, the realist subject is immediately problematized, as it runs into direct conflict with a dizzying array of social, economic, political, racial, and gendered realities that call into question any notion of the free-willing ethnic self.

Belluscio suggests that one result of this is “an interesting, if incoherent, mixture of realist agency and naturalistic determinism.”⁶⁰ This sort of contradiction is at work in Sullivan’s *Tales*.

In certain stories in the collection, Sullivan is engaged, like Crane or Norris, in a form of naturalism which points up the power of the environment in shaping the life of the protagonist and these tales sometimes draw upon melodrama or exaggeration unrelated to ethnic type. For example, as previously noted, in “Slob Murphy,” Slob’s father, Mick, fits the standard representation of the Irish Paddy in his drinking and his ineffectual brutishness. At Slob’s wake, Mick Murphy tells the other mourners that he was “wance the very bist loightweight in the Shtate of New York” until he had a “calamitous fall” which put him in the hospital for seven months, maimed him for life, and led him to alcoholism. Sullivan’s description of Mick Murphy while “keening” at the wake shows that Sullivan uses caricature in ways not limited to ethnic caricature:

[Mick Murphy] limped to the middle of the room and stood there theatrically. He was a strangley maimed and distorted man. A red scar ran across his neck and chin; another seared his forehead. His head was set askew upon his shoulders. One arm crooked back and spread out his thumb and fingers. One leg was straight, but the foot of the other rested on the floor only at the toes.⁶¹

This image of Mick Murphy is not necessarily one associated with Irishness and, more important, it is grotesque. The naturalism of “Slob Murphy” is apparent, then, not simply in Sullivan’s use of ethnic type but in exaggerations of various sorts. This grotesque

60 Belluscio, *To Be Suddenly White*, 6.

61 Sullivan, 28-29.

image of Slob's father is an extension of the ethnic caricature that Mick already is and it presents him as the physical and psychological victim of his job as a laborer. Sullivan's representation of Mick Murphy, like that of Minnie Kelsey, expresses the way working-class life transforms people into nearly unrecognizable or distorted versions of themselves.

Other stories in the collection are more appropriately identified as urban realism or social realism and do not use caricature to the same ends. For example, "Threw Himself Away" is, in theme and style, better compared with short fiction by Charles Chesnutt than Stephen Crane. Chesnutt's "The Wife of His Youth" is about the way an upwardly mobile group of mixed race African Americans respond to the marriage of one of their most respected members. Chesnutt's Blue Vein Society, like Sullivan's Irish American literary club, aims to embrace Anglo and Anglo American culture and feel themselves very much torn between the poverty of the past (for Chesnutt's characters it is the past of slavery) and the prospects for future immersion into white, dominant culture with all of the social, cultural, and economic "gains" that entails. Both Sullivan and Chesnutt raise questions about the implied rewards of upward mobility. Similarly, in "Threw Himself Away" Sullivan uses dense and long passages of dialect when Mrs. Steinberg speaks. This use of dialect is unusual in realist texts of the period and has the effect of bringing the reader closer to the speaking subject than if, as is standard, the dialect speech only appeared in sentence or two before being interrupted by narration or dialogue in standard English. Notably, Chesnutt was one of the few other writers of the period to immerse the reader in dialect in this manner.⁶² Moreover, this chapter situates

⁶² The immersion in dialect, unique to Chesnutt and Sullivan, decreases the "foreignizing" nature of the informal English (Werner Sollors, conversation with the author, July 10, 2009).

Sullivan's *Tales* in a broad array of cultural materials because they both engage with the uses of caricature in various literary and popular modes and because the collection as a whole does not easily fit into a single generic category.

As previously suggested, this mixture of modes in the collection also is bound up with Sullivan's various ways of representing Irishness in these tales and has implications for the ways the agency of the Irish is envisioned in the *Tenement Tales*. Even though in some of his *Tales* the necessity to "pass" is unavoidable or the disfiguring power of hard labor or factory work inescapable, the effect of the collection overall is one which insists on the agency of his working-class and middle-class Irish American readers. Sullivan's emphasis on the agency of the Irish is most clearly demonstrated in "Threw Himself Away." For example, in the opening section of the story, Sullivan stages a casual debate among various members of the Chaucer Society about why Legrand's marriage is understood as dangerous. The literary society's domineering moderator laments that it is "a matter to grieve over" since Rebecca is a commoner in a "circle beneath" them.

Another member objects:

[T]hese ideas are all relative. In Fifth [A]venue we ourselves might be regarded as one of the lower circles. For a long time we Irish were ostracised [sic] from that elevated region. And as for ignorance, a vote of the Chaucer society has decided that no term is more elastic and indeterminate than the term "ignorance."⁶³

The club members' rehearsal of various opinions on the marriage allows Sullivan to raise questions about the logic of the Chaucer Society's bias prior to the narrator's discovery of Legrand's (and Rebecca's) true character at the conclusion of the tale. Further, Sullivan's placement of this tale about the middle-class Irish at the center of a collection dedicated to depicting the lives of tenement figures of various ethnic backgrounds suggests the

63 Sullivan, 93.

ways “Threw Himself Away” is an anchor for the collection as a whole and that the collection itself promotes the agency of the working-class and middle-class Irish in New York.

Equally important, in a collection of stories in which Sullivan deliberately and repeatedly complicates the use of type, his decision to use ethnic stereotypes to describe the Irish in some stories but not in others is significant. The ways in which Irish caricature is employed in “Slob Murphy” have already been discussed. His manner of marking his characters as Irish American without relying on ethnic type is worth pausing upon here. In the *Tales* where Sullivan normalizes Irish American status he indicates the characters’ Irishness in simple or subtle ways. Usually it is the character’s surname, such as Kelsey or Maguire, which suggest she or he is Irish American. For another example, in “Threw Himself Away,” where Mrs. Steinberg’s dialect is of central concern, he refrains from having any of the Chaucer club members speak in dialect, but, just before one unnamed female member delivers a racial slur about Rebecca, she is described as speaking in “a soft and sympathetic Irish voice.” He avoids “foreignizing” this speaker (in that he allows her to speak in standard English) at the same moment he challenges the content of her dialogue and confirms her ethnic background. Moreover, Sullivan finds ways of letting the careful reader know when his characters are Irish Americans, and often he avoids using stereotypical notions of Irishness to do so.

In the *Tenement Tales* Sullivan’s dual purpose representations of Irishness shuffle between the familiar type, with the exaggeration of “race traits” which that entails, and the depiction of Irishness which normalizes the racial or ethnic status of Irish Americans. He avoids delineating a subject position for the Irish which is strictly either ethnically

“other” (and disempowered by poverty and labor exploitation) or as comfortably part of the dominant white culture (and having access to middle-class cultural, economic, and political privileges) in favor of one in which the American Irish are both ethnic “others” (subject to the poverty and exploitation of the slums) and linked to the dominant classes (through their status as white and upwardly mobile). By using Irish caricature in some stories but not in all of them, he creates a collection of stories which does not consistently narrate the agency of Irish American characters but does imply that Irish Americans are both of and outside the slums and, therefore, have the power to and are faced with the imperative to, act agents of their own lives and for social change. In sum, his stories, inspired by the tenants of Georgism, represent Irishness as imbricated in the poverty of the slums, either from within the tenements and factories of lower Manhattan or within the “lace curtain” domain—somewhere between Fifth Avenue and Rum Alley.

VI. Conclusion

In closing, Edward T. O’Donnell and others have argued that Irish American politics “came-of-age” in the late nineteenth century in the sense that it moved past the conservative practices of the antebellum period when Irish immigrants and Irish Americans saw their antagonists, in the Ireland and the United States, as the Anglo-Protestants. Instead, Georgism and the cooperation between George and Irish nationalists aided the “modernization” of the “traditional Irish-American conception of their oppressors, from a cultural religious one . . . to a socio-economic one.” The new conception of their antagonist, for a particular group of Irish American activists and voters, was “any illegitimate monopolizer of resources that belong to all of society.”⁶⁴ Sullivan’s *Tenement Tales of New York* constructs a version of Irishness and Lower East

64 O’Donnell, 416.

Side life which shifts its idea of an oppressor to the degree that the oppression of the poor is due to the corrupt effects of industrialized labor. Sullivan's tales also, consistent with the reform agenda that he supported, suggest that the fate of the Irish is bound up with that of Southern and Eastern European immigrant groups and not strictly the lower class Irish. As such, the *Tenement Tales of New York* calls for cross ethnic affiliation against the wealthy classes and the exploitation of factory work.

Even so, the impetus toward cross ethnic affiliation in the *Tales* is limited to European immigrant groups and contributes to the raced based exclusion central to the perpetuation and maintenance of white privilege. The *Tenement Tales* uses a dual purpose Irishness to hold the middle-class Irish accountable for racial prejudice and to show that upward mobility has its social and cultural costs, but, by failing to represent other marginalized groups, it also signals that Chinese Americans, Latinos, and African Americans were "illegitimate" competition for jobs and resources. *The Tenement Tales* should be read, then, as both "pioneering" portraits of ethnic life which aimed to break down ethnic barriers and, simultaneously, as representative of the ways progressive politics of the 1890s anticipated and instantiated the racial categorizations which became solidified in the twentieth century.⁶⁵ Ultimately, in spite of these limitations, Sullivan's urban realist and naturalist tales are important because they challenge the reliance on type in the "age of caricature" and lay hold of the shifting nature of Irish American status in the period to critique a range of discourses from within and outside New York's Irish American community.

The following chapter will address the work of another writer whose representations of Irishness were bound up with class and the ways the "new" European

65 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 179.

immigrants complicate Irish American ethnic identity. Chapter Four takes up the regionalist fiction of Irish immigrant writer, Kate McPhelim Cleary. Like Sullivan, Cleary responds to the reliance on type in the late nineteenth century to address the place of Irish Americans in an increasingly ethnically diverse culture. Uniquely among the figures whose work is under consideration in *Regular Wild Irish*, Cleary sets her late nineteenth-century stories outside the northeast portion of the United States. Her most compelling tales address gender and racial hierarchies on the mid-western plains of Nebraska.

CHAPTER 4

SERVANTS, HELP, AND HIRED GIRLS: KATE MCPHELM CLEARY'S REGIONAL FICTIONS OF THE MIGRANT MID-WEST

I. Introduction

In July of 1893, at the Columbian Exhibition in Chicago, Frederick Jackson Turner gave a now well-known speech on the role of the frontier in American history in which he argued that Western expansion was central to American national identity and progress. A few weeks earlier, at a celebration of the Exposition's new Corinthian-style Nebraska building, Mrs. Henry Fiske recited two poems written by the Irish immigrant writer, Kate McPhelim Cleary. In contrast to Turner's speech to the American Historical Association, Cleary's poems offered a more complicated version of the meaning of life in the West. Her poem, "The Corn," which was read at the opening of the ceremonies, represented a vision of the Western plains that was equal to the myth of Manifest Destiny. Her closing poem, "Nebraska," depicted, in local dialect, the sacrifices and hardships that frequently accompanied the life of early plains-dwellers.¹ Cleary's Exhibition poems demonstrate ambivalence toward the promises of settlement and the realities of life on the farms and small towns of the mid-West in the late nineteenth century. Her short stories and novel, the central focus of this chapter, frequently support the conflicted image of the West found in these poems and are best described as regional writing because they are, like her Exhibition poems, primarily set on the newly settled plains of Nebraska in the late nineteenth century.

In American literary history, regionalism, as a literary mode, has long been associated with out-of-the-way places—such as Nebraska farming communities, rural

1 George, *Kate M. Cleary*, 26-27.

New England, and small Southern towns. In traditional approaches to late nineteenth-century American literature, regional writing has been defined a subset of realism and referred to as “local color” fiction or “regional realism.” Regional texts often focus on character, as much as, if not more than, plot and, frequently, regional fiction appears in short narrative forms such as the short story or sketch rather than the novel.² More recently, scholars have defined regionalism as a literary tradition parallel to American literary realism which questions traditional assumptions about the categories of genre, place, gender, race, and class, among others. Two influential critics, Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, have identified this mode as “American women’s regionalism” and argued that regional writing shares many features with realist writing but that it is a tradition in its own right. They argue that one of the defining features of American women’s regionalism is its difference from local color fiction. The former depicts local scenes often from the “perspective of a narrator defined as superior to and outside of the region of the fiction and often to entertain and satisfy the curiosity of late nineteenth-century urban readers in Boston and New York” whereas American women’s regionalism allows the regional character to speak free from the assumptions of outsiders to the region. American women’s regionalism flourished in the late nineteenth century and, like Kate Cleary, the writers associated with this mode, such as Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Kate Chopin, and Willa Cather, all came of age in the 1880s and 1890s.

Regionalism developed during a tumultuous time in the United States. For one, as indicated by Turner’s Columbian Exhibition speech, by 1890, there was no longer a clearly defined Western borderland or frontier area of the United States. Additionally, during this period, there were a series of other significant changes in American culture:

2 Fetterley and Pryse, *Writing out of Place*, xvi; xvii.

the progress made during Reconstruction toward equal rights for African Americans were diminished; the second wave of immigration, made up individuals from primarily Southern and Eastern Europe, altered the ethnic population of the United States and caused anxiety about the loss of an Anglo American racial identity; and, the United States moved onto the world's stage as an imperial power resulting from wars with Spain and the subsequent interventions in Cuba and the Philippines. Likewise, this period saw the rise of the women's rights movement and greater visibility of women in fictional texts and in the public sphere. All of this occurred at a time in which technological advances in printing and transportation aided the growth of periodical culture in the United States. Together, these changes incited debate about the very nature of American national identity and, indeed, many regional and local color writers found access to publication through magazines whose editors, aware of public interest in subject matter which captured traditional, local ways in a rapidly changing America, were eager to represent the diverse dialects, natural scenes, and social mores of the various "regions" of American life.

Within this cultural and historical framework, this chapter analyzes Kate Cleary's regional short stories and novel to examine her representation of the shift toward a broadened cultural conception of an American white, as opposed to Anglo-Saxon American, racial identity and its relation to her representation of Irishness at the turn into the twentieth century. This chapter argues that Cleary's Nebraska-set fictions enact gender and class analysis as a means of examining "group differences and hierarchical oppression across racial lines."³ It demonstrates that Cleary foregrounds gender and class inequalities while simultaneously making visible the ways in which racial discourses

3 Ibid., 282

undergird these categories. It considers, in the end, the ways in which Cleary's texts complicate current definitions of American women's regionalism thereby inviting questions about the relationship between migrants or immigrants and regional places.

More specifically, many of Cleary's most interesting fictional narratives, such as "The Stepmother" and "Feet of Clay," portray the restricted lives of white women in the mid-West and her fictions also represent class and racial anxieties at a time of gradual amalgamation among white European races in the democratizing west. As I argue, it is in her 1897 novel, *Like a Gallant Lady*, which Cleary's meditation on white status, and Irish American identity, comes to the fore. In the novel, she draws upon standard images of the white woman of high fashion and the childlike Eastern European immigrant to gauge the privileges and anxieties of racial hierarchies that hinge on a black/white racial binary. As I demonstrate, the links between Irishness and regionalism are drawn together most clearly in an analysis of the author's most complex character, Mrs. McLelland, in whom she situates Irish American identity as one which is well-established and fully absorbed into the culture of the American West. Like her regional short stories, the particularities of the region—a developing Nebraska town—are central to the narrative in *Like a Gallant Lady*; however, not all of Cleary's texts fit nicely into current definitions of regionalism. Through a juxtaposition of one of her Chicago stories, "The Mission of Kitty Malone," and a Nebraska-set tale, "Hired Girls," this chapter considers the ways her larger body of work relates to contemporary discourses about this literary mode and identifies what is at stake in depictions of the region in her work. Finally, through a comparison with the fiction of one of Cleary's Irish American literary predecessors, Mary Anne Sadlier, this chapter shows that, for Cleary, the region is a place of exile and loss.

II. Gender and Ethnicity in Cleary's Nebraska Fictions

We ought to rejoice in the sacredness of this desolate world. We ought to find charm in its aloofness—its serenity. . . . Well, we don't. No one who lives their lives out here can do anything of the sort. The only people who associate solitude, romance and all that sort of thing with the plains are those who write about them without having any personal experience.

—Kate Cleary's *Like a Gallant Lady*

Cleary moved to Hubbell, Nebraska as a young bride in 1884 and produced her first regional stories soon thereafter, but she had been publishing poems, sketches, and short stories since she was fifteen. Born of Irish immigrants in Canada, she moved back to Ireland with her widowed mother for several years before finally settling in Chicago. From a well-educated but impoverished family, Cleary and her siblings made ends meet in the United States by writing fiction and poetry. Kate Cleary published widely. Throughout her life, her work appeared in a variety of periodicals including: *McClure's*, *Belford's Monthly*, *Century*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Harper's*, *Puck*, and *Lippincott's*. Her stories were also published in *The Chicago Tribune's* Sunday Arts section in addition to those by Kipling, Garland, Wharton, and Jewett.⁴ At the time of her early death in 1905, Houghton, Mifflin and Company was negotiating for the publication of a collection of her short stories which never came to fruition.⁵

Cleary's most compelling stories represent the particularly cruel powerlessness and isolation faced by white women in the fictional Western town of Bubble, Nebraska, which was modeled on Hubbell, Nebraska, where she lived for most of her married life. Cleary settled in the newly founded town of Hubbell after her wedding to Michael Cleary, an immigrant from Clonmel, Ireland, in 1884. It had been founded in 1880 by Hubbell H Johnson, "a pioneer from Illinois." The town was approximately four miles

4 George, 58.

5 James Mansfield Cleary, *The Nebraska Fiction of Kate McPhelim Cleary*, Preface.

north of the Kansas-Nebraska border and plots of land sold for \$100 each. According to Cleary's biographer, the town, formerly a cornfield, was established with 100 buildings, a gristmill, and a saw mill, in three month's time. Hubbell was successful largely because of three limestone quarries, resettlement from nearby Ida, Nebraska, and the saloons and pool halls which made it an appealing trade center and an alternative stop to locations in the dry-state of Kansas. By 1881, four passenger trains stopped through Hubbell every day. Within two years of its founding, Hubbell had expanded in size by added acreage and in population with 600 residents. The community built a school and had two Protestant churches, two general stores, two grocery stores, a harness shop, a bank, and a creamery. By the time Michael Cleary established Cleary Lumber and Coal, and brought his 20-year old wife there to settle in a rented house in 1884, Hubbell had developed all of the basic necessities to remain a viable stop in routes across the mid-West.

Cleary's Bubble-set stories recount the harsh conditions of farm life and the inequalities of gender which cause immobility, insanity, or death for her female protagonists. For example, in "The Stepmother" the main character, Mrs. Carney, is a farmer's wife who is desperate to go to town for Memorial Day festivities. She hasn't been there for years and longs to visit the graves of her deceased children and father. Her favorite stepson, Dan, opts to take his fiancée over her, and she suffers a heart attack after facing the impact of a dust storm while he's away. Throughout the tale, Mrs. Carney is subject to harsh treatment from her husband whose repeated crop failures caused him to become "gloomy," "unreasonable," and depressed. Years of poverty and relentless work have remade the protagonist, a formerly "young and romantic" woman, into someone for whom "child-bearing and child-rearing were part of her handicapped existence." Mrs.

Carney's manner of speaking—"the plaintive monotone, produced by colorless years of self-repression and self-denial"—symbolizes her lifetime of labor and loneliness.⁶

Moreover, Mrs. Carney's life in "The Stepmother" represents what women undergo on struggling Nebraska farms where they have little-to-no economic resources and are divided from their dearest kin by death and distance.

In a similar fashion, "Feet of Clay" describes a woman from the East, Margaret Dare, whose romantic innocence leads her to marry a Kansas farmer. Margaret is overworked and manipulated by her mother-in-law and unappreciated and, eventually, ignored by her husband. The cornfields outside Margaret's kitchen window are a metaphor for a repressive and suffocating loneliness that eventually turns into a maddening, screaming silence. When the mental health of the protagonist deteriorates at the story's conclusion, she is taken back home by her relatives due to her insanity: "There were those who said when Margaret's people took her and the child home that it was too bad such trouble should have come to such a fine man as Barret Landroth[,] a man who was almost certain to go to the Legislature. There had been nothing in her life to cause insanity. It must have been hereditary."⁷ Cleary's description, in "Feet of Clay," of Margaret's fruitless struggle to adjust to life on the farm and to appease Landroth and his mother make obvious that the restrictions on her life imparted by them are the true source of her illness. Her husband is described as treating her with "facetious brutality" and as expecting "the service of a slave, not the dutiful homage of a wife." Her husband refuses to give her money for any luxuries, such as a piano or books, and when she asks him to allow her to visit her family in a distant town he replies: "Wait awhile. My mother hasn't

6 George, 158; 157; 158; 157.

7 Ibid., 151.

been off this farm for twenty years.” As Margaret slowly slips into madness she recognizes the ways in which she is limited by lack of financial resources: “She had never prized money till now. Now she prized it as a possible means of escape.”⁸ “The Stepmother” and “Feet of Clay” are representative stories which depict the physical, cultural, and intellectual isolation life on the Nebraska prairies engenders for women. Like Mrs. Carney and Margaret Dare, many of the female protagonists of Cleary’s Bubble-set tales have Irish surnames, but it is not their ethnic backgrounds which cause distress. The most pressing conflicts in her stories are the result of the constraints on the time and mobility of her women characters. As in many of her Bubble-set tales, the depictions of women’s lives in “The Stepmother” and “Feet of Clay” counteract romanticized portraits of regional places.

Equally important, ethnic and class divisions are a backdrop to the gender critique of her Bubble stories. It is worth noting that Cleary underscores the mainstream status of her Irish American characters, such as Mrs. Carney and Margaret Dare, their—“Americanness”—by occasionally using racial foreignness to characterize other fictional figures. For instance, Margaret Dare’s cruel mother-in-law in “Feet of Clay” is described as having “pale yellow” skin reminiscent of “those grotesque images the Chinese cut from ivory.”⁹ Cleary emphasizes the mother-in-law’s evil nature by associating her with the racial slur of the “yellow” Chinese. Likewise, she makes links between the European immigrant and the “foreign” to suggest cultural if not racial differences among Bubble residents. In “His Ownliest One” the Dutch immigrant, Irma Destarch, is described as “fair” with “gentle blue eyes” and also as, “in some indescribable way, foreign-

8 Ibid., 149; 148; 149.

9 Ibid., 144.

looking.”¹⁰ In short, Cleary remarks on the foreignness of various Bubble residents but never associates cultural or racial difference with her Irish American characters.

The story “Jim Peterson’s Pension,” is the clearest expression of the ways in which ethnic groupings structure the social sets in Bubble. This humorous tale recounts the trials of a poor farmer’s wife, Mrs. Peterson, who comes into wealth and attempts to join the higher echelons of Bubble society. In one key scene, she throws a party in which she struggles to balance her social commitments to the old and the new. She carefully plans how she will invite “pretty near all the people we know in town, and yet not offend any of them.”¹¹ She does so by “ask[ing] the Linigers, Jiksés, Salsburs, and Wattses, say, from 2 to 3. The Kellys, O’Briens, McCarthys, and Flanagans from 3 to 4. Then the Cheropskys, Chotts, Solinskis, and Saprinkis from 4 to 5. After them could come the Robinsons, Whites, Hills, and Smiths.”¹² Managing the potential conflicts of these groups stratified by ethnicity and class is one of the primary conflicts Mrs. Peterson faces as a result of her new wealth. While the only European ethnic group the narrator names explicitly in the story is the “Bohemians,” the other groups in town are also divided by ethnic background.¹³

As such, Cleary’s Bubble is a community of European immigrants and European Americans from various countries or regions of origin, only some of whom are marked explicitly as ethnically distinct. Cleary doesn’t include characters that are Americans of Asian or African descent in these stories, though she relies on anti-Chinese sentiment in the characterization of the evil mother-in-law Mrs. Landroth, in “Feet of Clay.” In “Jim

10 James Mansfield Cleary, *Nebraska*, 110.

11 George, 194.

12 Ibid., 194-195.

13 Ibid., 197.

Peterson's Pension" Cleary represents the West as a site of uneasy comingling of European ethnic groups who are often divided as much by class as by ethnic background. While many of Cleary's best tales depict the confining and isolating experiences of white women living on Nebraska farms, her gender critique is set against a background of complex and shifting ethnic and class divisions. Moreover, the representation of the particular pressures white women face in the West, and the depiction of ethnic and class tensions in her Bubble tales, troubles the celebration of expansion central to Turner's thesis about American national identity at the turn into the twentieth century.

Cleary elaborates on the links between gender, ethnic, and class hierarchies, and the way these complicate the nature of American national identity, in her well received 1897 novel, *Like a Gallant Lady*. The breakdown of traditional distinctions between groups is largely the subject matter of and source of anxiety in a novel whose primary characters are migrants from Eastern cities and immigrants from the Europe. Set in Bubble, the plot involves the pursuit of the facts behind the mysterious death of a local merchant, Mark Dudley, by his wealthy and well bred fiancée from Chicago, Ivera Lyle. The protagonist Ivera is the novel's "gallant lady" who shows courage after learning that Dudley fathered a child with a local immigrant, Mollie Chourka, and persistence in her determination to learn the facts behind his death. By the time it is revealed that Dudley and his business partners faked his death for insurance money, Dudley's ruined mental and physical health (and eventual death) produced by the potion which made him appear deceased comes to be the central metaphor of the novel. It symbolizes the living death Ivera identifies as the inevitable circumstances of the lives of first generation pioneer

farmers, their wives, and the immigrants who come to make a living in the Kansas-Nebraska border town and surrounding area.

In one exemplary scene Ivera complains: “This is a desolate country.” She describes what she’s heard in conversation with women who live in Bubble: “Such isolation! Such monotony! Such drudgery! And the hopelessness of ever escaping from these conditions accentuates the horror of them.” Even the women who have been in Bubble most of their lives find their tasks and isolation debilitating. Ivera describes a conversation she had with one “exceptionally intelligent” local woman in which the woman compares her experience to that of Kipling’s “Morrowbie Jukes” and describes,

[T]he experience of those endeavoring to escape from the plague pit [:] “We are like that here . . . When those accursed creatures tried to scale the walls that bound their living grave, the sand sifted down on them, destroying their foothold. We try to escape, and there is the drouth one year out of three, sometimes oftener. In the odd years of prosperity the price of grain goes down, until the most a man makes after all goes but a short way toward paying the indebtedness incurred during the years his land yielded him nothing.”

As in her short stories, *Like a Gallant Lady* portrays farm life as particularly difficult for women given their lack of opportunities outside the home, “For the men it does not seem to be so bad . . . They have their larger interests, their trips with stock, their lodge meetings, and local elections. But the women! I wonder they don’t go mad!”¹⁴ The gender analysis of her short stories, echoed in *Like a Gallant Lady*, is complicated by the themes of immigration and exile in the novel.

More clearly, the novel is also an immigrant narrative in which Cleary weighs the various ways European immigrants might experience acculturation to Nebraska culture. When *Like a Gallant Lady* opens, the central male figure in the novel, the Englishman Jack Jardine has been in the United States for six years. He left “his forefathers beyond

14 Kate Cleary, *Like a Gallant Lady*, 63; 63-64; 65-66.

the ocean” in spite of their predictions of his ensured failure in business abroad. Now a respected and propertied cattle rancher, he represents a successful immigrant whose comfortable assimilation is illustrated by his corduroy pants and worn boots. This is in contrast to Peter Jennings, newly arrived from England, who gawks haughtily at the Bubble residents, adorns the ostentatious dress of a “daisy,” and wears the “helmet” of a British tourist.¹⁵ Jennings, the son of the Jardine family’s former butler, is a foil for the hero Jardine who, predictably, is romantically involved with the protagonist Ivera at the conclusion of the novel. A third important immigrant figure in the novel is Mollie Chourka. Poor and always cheaply dressed, Mollie speaks a Bohemian-English dialect and is hired by Ivera as a housekeeper while the protagonist lives at her brother’s home in Bubble. Similarly, several characters refer to themselves as “exiles.” This identification is not exclusive to immigrant characters but associated with all individuals who live on the Nebraska prairies as many are migrants: “the people one finds on these prairies to-day . . . have come from less desolate states. Their one dream and longing is to go back East.”¹⁶ In these ways, the themes of gender oppression, migration, and exile merge in this novel.

These themes are most telling for an examination of late nineteenth-century racial discourses in terms of the contrast Cleary draws between Ivera as a white woman of high fashion and the childlike immigrant Mollie. The American woman of fashion was a recurrent figure in *Life*, *Puck*, and other illustrated magazines of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. Critics have shown that she received more attention than any other cultural type in the period. The American woman of fashion often was depicted as a

¹⁵ Ibid., 4.

¹⁶ Ibid., 65.

“slave[s] to fashion” and as a woman of leisure who was “nothing more than an objectified display of her husband’s wealth.”¹⁷ The ethnic categorization of this type has been called that of the “self-effacing Anglo Saxon woman” that presents itself as a “raceless ideal.”¹⁸ This single type represents both a woman wholly dependent upon her husband and the dictates of fashion and a figure dedicated to the uplift of others for which she is supremely qualified by her status as a “raceless” white woman.

Cleary draws upon this image in her characterization of Ivera. For example, Ivera fulfills the expectations of the type in that her fashionable dress is admired and immediately (if unsuccessfully) imitated by the locals, but she has more depth than the caricatured image implies: she is independent in her relentless pursuit of the facts behind Dudley’s death and she remains unmarried throughout the novel. More important, while Cleary emphasizes the immigrant backgrounds of her English and Bohemian characters, consistent with the representational strategies of her Nebraska-set short fiction, the ethnic identity of her Irish American protagonist, Ivera, is submerged. Ivera is not explicitly identified as Irish American by the author, but the protagonist refers briefly, in passing, to Catholic and “Irish” subject matter. Likewise, when her arrival in Bubble is mentioned to a minor character, Dudley’s business partner, he asks: “[Is she] [t]he pretty little girl with the delicious old Irish name? How do the lines go? ‘How oft when the summer sun rested on Clara, / And lit the dark heath on the hills of Ivera, / Have I sought thee—’.”¹⁹ The reference to a poem in *The Dublin Book of Irish Verse* and the surname, Lyle, meaning “island,” suggests that Cleary figures Ivera as having Irish roots, but is so subtle in these elements of characterization, and these elements diverge so plainly from the stereotypical

17 Wonham, 141.

18 Ibid., 149.

19 Kate Cleary, 81.

image of the Irish American girl of the time, the Bridget figure, that this heroine is, among a cast of immigrant Englishmen and Bohemian men and women, the “raceless” white woman in the novel.

The contrast between the “raceless” and “self-effacing” white woman and the Bohemian immigrant Mollie—and Cleary’s eventual complication of their relationship—is central to the author’s construction of Irishness and to her meditation on class and gender hierarchies in *Like a Gallant Lady*. The class and racial differences between Ivera and her housekeeper are best exemplified at the death scene of Mollie’s infant son. In this scene, Ivera arrives at the Chourka’s house in Mollie’s absence to nurse the ailing child and discovers that Mollie’s brutish parents are uneducated rural folks with no idea of how to care for the sick child, no money to call a doctor, and little inclination to do either. Ivera demands they send for a doctor and attempts to nurse the infant back to health using her own dress to warm him since the Chourka’s only have a threadbare quilt. When Mollie finally arrives her ill-fitness for motherhood is emphasized: “The door opened. In all her cheap, gaudy finery, her hair frizzed, her face powdered, flushed with dancing and the night wind, Mollie stood on the threshold.”²⁰ Mollie is scared and frozen by Ivera’s entreaties to help the baby: “The Eastern girl stamped her foot on the dirty floor” and refused to hold her shaking and dying son. Once the infant finally passes, Mollie’s mourning is brief. She quickly focuses on the funeral that Ivera agrees to provide: “[a] coffin? You buy a coffin? It have a plate – an’ handles? Oh, a pretty plate-pretty handles [.]” She is delighted in her childish way: “[t]hen we have plate an handles to hang up like other people. Them so pretty. All got them but us—the Stepniks—the Chiveney’s—all of

20 Ibid., 123.

them.”²¹ Mollie’s satisfaction and excited attention to funeral ornament (the plate) within minutes of her son’s death shows an irresponsibility and childishness central to her “Eastern” nature. It likewise underscores Ivera’s role as the proper and selfless white woman in the novel.

While this scene, among others, represents the heroine in a superior light in contrast to Mollie, Cleary’s portrait of the democratizing nature of the West suggests the instability of this marked difference. For example, both Mollie and Ivera attend the same holiday ball and their proximity in this social setting dismays multiple observers who are new to Bubble, including Ivera:

Somehow the sight of her maid, attired in a sprigged muslin waist, streamers of pink ribbon and a blue skirt that did not reach her shoe tops, dancing with much spirit and evident enjoyment, brought home to Ivera, as nothing hitherto had done, the democracy of the new Western town, and the feeling of absolute equality that prevailed.

Jennings has a similar response and remarks: “your servant, by George.” Cleary writes, “the idea of a mistress and maid meeting at a social function seemed even more singular to him than it did to the American girl.”²² The description of Mollie as an “equal” to Ivera and the upwardly mobile Englishmen Jennings contributes to Ivera’s characterization as the raceless heroine and illustrates the ways in which that status is destabilized by the social codes of the prairies. Additionally, the reader knows that Mark, Ivera’s deceased fiancée, is the father of Mollie’s illegitimate child which suggests further injury to the ideal status of the white “American girl” figured in the heroine.

Henry Wonham has argued that, in periodicals of the period, the caricature of the

21 Ibid., 131.

22 Ibid., 106.

wealthy white woman of fashion was both ridiculed and legitimized within the space of just a single image. In a somewhat related way, in these scenes, Cleary both legitimizes Ivera's role as heroine and shows that the democratization in the West occurs at the expense of the sustainability of that image of the untainted figure of the "raceless" white woman of fashion. The tension between Ivera and Mollie is equally complex. Through the juxtaposition of these figures Cleary does a number of things, she: revises the standard image of the white woman of fashion to be seamlessly inclusive of a "raceless" Irish American girl; legitimizes her image in the culture by making her the lauded and self-effacing heroine; and problematizes the viability of that figure on the equalizing prairies of the West.

Furthermore, the breakdown of traditional class boundaries associated with Mollie's proximity to Ivera takes an emotional toll on the heroine, as demonstrated at a crucial scene when the protagonist expresses the burden she feels over the "silence" of the plains. Just as her brother Rob is about to disclose the facts of her fiancée's life and death in Bubble, the truth she has spent months searching for, Ivera suddenly decides to defer the conversation. She walks out of the house into the "white, hot night" and feels pressure from the "whitish clouds,"

Between [the clouds] crept the silence, the awful, oppressive, overwhelming silence of the prairies. It seemed to close around the girl standing there in gigantic coils that crushed out individuality—almost extinguished identity. An impulse to scream as if in nightmare frenzy— anything to break the spell, came to her.²³

The oppression of the West is described as a silence so overwhelming that it endangers Ivera's individuality. As suggested above, Ivera's feeling of identity loss is a symptom of her response to her fiancée's betrayal as well as the democratizing features of Western life

23 Ibid., 266.

which enable new proximities between the poor Eastern European immigrants and the comfortably middle-class American migrants.

Conversely, Cleary's use of "silence" to describe this loss complicates her illustration of the differences between Mollie and Ivera and implies that there are limits to the ways in which class privilege can overcome gender inequality. Specifically, Mollie, like Ivera, suffers under the pressure of silence. An important subplot involves Jack Jardine's insistence that Dudley's affair with Mollie be kept a secret. He orders Mollie to keep quiet about it in order to uphold the facade that Ivera's fiancée was faithful, "Don't let [Ivera] know anything about it. You must take care that she never discovers the truth. She is not likely to do so if you only keep still. . . . And I'm determined she shall not find out. You will keep silent, Mollie?"²⁴ Cleary fuses the images of a silence that entraps Ivera and the stillness Jardine endeavors Mollie to maintain to point up the shared restrictions European American women, driven by the need to maintain the purity of the white womanhood, face in the male-dominated environment of the American West.

The author complicates her contrast between these two characters to comment upon the lack of mobility available to women. Jardine's request that Mollie "keep still" underscores a recurrent theme of Cleary's short fiction: the physical and financial restrictions women experience on isolated Nebraska farms. Cleary's emphasis on stillness and lack of mobility suggests that while many men in the novel find financial success on the prairies, there is little to no authentic economic mobility available to migrant and immigrant women whose husbands move to Nebraska in search of financial gain. In these ways, the democratization she associates with the West is represented, through this trope of "silence," as limited for women. While there is social mingling that posits

²⁴ Ibid., 95.

significant challenges to traditional class and racial hierarchies, the genuine opportunity associated with democracy and Western expansion is not available to women.

More importantly, the pressure of silence to preserve the purity of the white woman's sense of her fiancée, and sense of self, is not simply an experience Ivera and Mollie share as women, but one defined, finally, by racial binaries. When Ivera describes her feelings of isolation to her brother Rob, he replies: "Yes" . . . "the silence is damnable":

When I was in New Orleans I saw a mob drag along Tchoupitoulas street a nigger whom they were going to lynch. The screeching of the victim and the hooting of the rabble were the most atrocious sounds I ever heard. I put my hands over my ears to keep them out. Since I've lived on the plains, I find there is one thing worse than any sounds, and that is silence.²⁵

The evocation of the lynching of an African American man at a moment when Ivera feels her individuality is at stake is indicative of the ways in which other nineteenth-century white American writers have represented an "Africanist presence" at key narrative moments. More than once in the novel Ivera experiences a feeling of "impenetrable whiteness" and, in the above mentioned scene, the haunting, oppressive coils that threaten to extinguish her identity are described just before Rob recalls an African American "under complete control" and soon to be killed. As in texts by other late nineteenth century female writers, such as Cather, the white woman in this novel meditates on her own identity through "available" "Africanist others."²⁶ In this way, the oppressiveness of the frontier is measured, at a key textual moment, along a black/white racial binary.

In an era in which lynching was increasingly justified as an act of Southern white

25 Ibid., 266-267.

26 Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, 33; 25.

male chivalry and by the imperative to protect white women from sexual advances from African American males, it is worth noting that Cleary points up patriarchal restrictions upon white women in relationship to not just the image of the African American victim but also the noise of the lynch mob. This implies that the chivalry of the heroine as a “gallant lady” is in response, not to African American males as the rhetoric of the day suggested, but to the dominant male culture’s insistence on the purity of white women as a means of maintaining power and restricting access to women and other minority groups. In these ways, white female identity is recuperated by the image of the lynched African American: there is a double discourse in the novel in terms of late nineteenth century ideologies of gender and race. On the one hand, in the era of Turner’s frontier thesis, Cleary describes the ways in which European American female subjectivity in the West is limited by the dominant male cultural forces, belying the myth of Western progress and illustrating the limited nature of the democratization it promises. On the other hand, *Like a Gallant Lady*, published within a year of Plessy vs. Ferguson, also makes visible the ways in which the solidarity of European ethnic groups occurs in reference to the image of the controlled and unequal African American and at the expense of non-European ethnic groups.

In sum, Cleary represents very clear racial and class differences between Mollie and Ivera to highlight anxieties about the breakdown of these hierarchies in the West and to demonstrate the ways in which those differences are obscured by the shared experience of gender inequalities. The anxiety produced by the dismantling of these boundaries by the culture of the West is finally overcome by the appropriation of the image of black racial difference. In their distance from, and relationship to, the scene of the lynching,

Mollie and Ivera share more through gender oppression in the West than divides them by class or race. There is solidarity between white women in the novel over and against the image of the black body and the noise of the lynch mob. Cleary solidifies her critique of gender across class boundaries and against a black/white racial difference; however, this sense of shared experience is short lived, as Ivera, unlike Mollie, has the means to “opt out,” to leave Bubble, and to escape “the pit.”²⁷ Class and ethnic hierarchies, in the end, are consequential in spite of the narrative’s impetus toward solidarity among white women.

While Cleary’s depiction of *Like a Gallant Lady*’s protagonist as an Irish American revision of the caricatured white woman of fashion is meaningful in terms of both her gender critique and the broader racial discourses of the period, Cleary’s most compelling depiction of Irish American identity comes, not through Ivera, but in the figure of her most well drawn and recurrent fictional character, Mrs. McLelland. Mrs. McLelland appears in numerous tales set in Cleary’s fictional town of Bubble, Nebraska and is the most obvious source of “local color queerness” in Cleary’s novel. For example, she seeks advice from Ivera on minor social conflicts in Bubble and how they may be judged in terms of upper class values and the dictates of “the 400.” She speaks in Western dialect, proud of her “genius” for “salt-riz biscuits an’ chicking pot-pie” and tells humorous tales to Ivera, illustrating her distance from the social practices and values of the city. Moreover, she is consumed by the success of her husband’s funeral services business suggesting her “avaricious” priorities, general lack of refinement, and the ways

27 Wonham, *Playing the Races*, 146.

in which she has been desensitized to the morbidity of the plains.²⁸

In spite of her queer characteristics, she is a powerful figure in the novel. Mrs. McLelland is the only character to articulate the mores and concerns of Bubble life, to receive respect and trust from the other characters in the novel, and to speak out against the primacy of urban values and perspectives. For example, she tells Ivera the story of a city friend who came to visit her and looked out the McLelland's window at a large flock of healthy turkeys by the lake. When the visitor remarked on the "beautiful view" outside the window, Mrs. McLelland expressed her disbelief that the city dweller only saw the picturesque nature of the view and not the wealth of the fat birds in the yard.²⁹ While this scene contributes to the image of Mrs. McLelland as greedy and narrowly-focused it also shows that Cleary raises questions about what is seen and unseen and by whom in regional fiction.

More importantly, Mrs. McLelland is the primary arbiter of cultural knowledge in *Like a Gallant Lady*. She is the only longtime Bubble resident with significant social capital as indicated by her "square, clean-cut, alert, shrewd old face." "Mrs. Mc," as she is called by Jardine and the others, is a source of comfort and guidance to the migrant characters in the novel and a trusted voice of reason and instruction aiding Ivera through her transition to life in Bubble. For instance, she is the primary mediator between Ivera and Mollie. When Ivera arrives in Bubble and says she needs to find a good house servant, Mrs. Mc corrects her saying, "A -- servant? . . . We ain't got servants in Nebrasky, sometimes we git help."³⁰ Mrs. McLelland's statement suggests, through the Ivera/Mollie relationship, a deeper relevance in Cleary's reference to the previously

28 Kate Cleary, 29

29 Ibid., 150.

30 Ibid., 39; 48.

mentioned “Marrowbie Jukes.” Cleary alludes to Kipling’s story to gauge the ways in which her depiction of life on the prairies is similar to and diverges from travel tales borne out of migrations and shifts in populations resulting from Western expansion and colonialism. Whereas Kipling’s protagonist is saved by his dedicated servant, it is clear that, in *Bubble*, the relationships between classes and ranks work in different ways. I’ve already discussed the implications of this difference in terms of the themes of *Like a Gallant Lady*. What is crucial for her depiction of Irish American identity is that of all the characters in the novel, it is Mrs. McLelland who understands and articulates this difference most plainly and without angst.

Similarly, in a story in which she is the title character, Mrs. Mc acts upon her need for the independence that many of Cleary’s *Bubble* women experience but rarely embrace. In “Mrs. McLelland’s Rebellion” she desires to visit her daughter and sick grandchild in a distant town and goes to great lengths to make the trip in spite of her husband’s discouragement. In this narrative, Mrs. McLelland is subject to many of the same pressures and restrictions other *Bubble* women experience: Mr. McLelland has consistently refused his wife’s entreaties for the money to travel. Uniquely, as implied by the story’s title, Mrs. McLelland retaliates against her husband’s wishes and walks long miles to the train before arriving at her daughter’s home. In a novel in which “silence” is a metaphor for gender inequality and the lack of mobility Cleary associates with women’s lives on the prairies, it is significant that Mrs. McLelland, both in the novel and in other tales, is one of the few characters who has the mobility and the verbal tenacity most female characters lack entirely. Likewise, as demonstrated above, she is the only character who articulates a response to urban values in favor of Nebraska ones. As such,

Mrs. Mc is positioned as one of the most trusted and empowered of “American” folks in *Like a Gallant Lady*. Her characterization confirms the implications back of all of the Irish American protagonists in Cleary’s fiction: in spite of numerous class and gender restrictions, Irish American ethnicity is not a barrier to the possibilities, however limited, the West offers white women.

III. Beyond the Bubble-set Tales

The above analysis has shown the ways in which gender critique is central to Cleary’s regional fictions and that, in her Bubble stories and novel, gender restrictions are complicated by, and sometimes mitigated by, class differences and racial hierarchies. The examination of *Like a Gallant Lady* has demonstrated Irishness to be a somewhat malleable form of identity which can be linked to both the “raceless” urban white woman, in the figure of Ivera, and, the steadfast American Westerner, in the character of Mrs. McLelland. To more fully gauge the meaning of Cleary’s representation of Irishness and what it suggests for her participation in American women’s regionalism, it is worth considering the ways the themes of *Like a Gallant Lady*, “The Stepmother,” and “Feet of Clay” relate to two stories not set in Bubble: “The Mission of Kitty Malone” and “Hired Girls.” The first is one of Cleary’s Chicago-set stories and unique because its characters are immigrants from Ireland. The second, set in an unidentified Nebraska town, adopts the narrative voice of an urban, middle-class woman which might be compared to “local color” renderings of region in which, unlike most of her Nebraska stories, the “backward” nature of the regional place and its inhabitants is evident. The juxtaposition of these tales reveals the anxieties that underpin the author’s larger body of work and demonstrate what exactly is lost or gained by Cleary’s Irish American protagonists who

are acculturated migrants in the West.

“The Mission of Kitty Malone” portrays two days in the life of an impoverished Irish protagonist who goes to great lengths to hide her financial straits while visiting a charity organization which will provide her with food and supplies for Thanksgiving dinner. Kitty and Dennis Malone are immigrants from County Tipperary, Ireland. They have raised their children in the Blue Island section of Chicago and, as an elderly couple, struggle financially while their grown children have trouble providing for their own families. At one time they were homeowners, but now live in a small, rented flat. Ashamed of her need for relief, Kitty hides her “mission” from both her husband who is sick in bed and the Irish neighbors she encounters on her trek across town to the aide facility. After successfully obtaining a basket-full of goods for Thanksgiving dinner, Kitty, weak and hungry, is hit by a trolley and passes out on the street by her one room flat. In the end, she is rescued by her neighbors and her only unmarried son—a soldier who has just arrived home from fighting in the Philippines. Her son’s full back pay from the army solves Kitty’s financial worries for the moment and the Malones are ensured a plentiful Thanksgiving Day meal.

Unlike any of Cleary’s Irish American figures in *Bubble*, the Irish characters in this story are associated with more typical features of Irish immigrant life in the period: the Malones and their Irish neighbors are urban, industrial, poor or working class, and Catholic. The characters, the Malones, Patsy Heffernan, and Mrs. Comisky, all speak in a brogue. Likewise, Kitty’s friends refer to their “parish” rather than their “neighborhood” and Kitty worries over the priest’s response, at her Christmas “juty” (her next confession), to the series of lies she has told to conceal her need for charity. Additionally,

“The Mission of Kitty Malone” is significant because it is the clearest expression of themes which recur in other Chicago-set tales by Cleary. Her best Chicago stories depict characters who struggle to conceal their poverty and are deeply ashamed by their lack of economic independence and by their financial insecurity.

Alternatively, “Hired Girls” is narrated from the perspective of a newly married middle-class woman who sets up house in a small, unidentified Nebraska town. The narrator recounts her troubles in finding a reliable domestic servant among a succession of farm girls and immigrant women whom she employs as a housemaid. She lists the ways a series of eight or more servants, usually shoeless and unkempt, dispute their orders, ruin the delicate furniture, break the precious family heirlooms, and burn the potatoes. The narrator laments the numerous suitors her house servants receive in the evenings and complains that the visitors stay too late. The “queer” Western norms regarding class and social standards are the central focus of this sketch.

While there is nothing ethnically specific about the protagonist and first person narrator of “Hired Girls,” the various servants the narrator hires are Germans and Swedes and one, Amberiller, is described as “a comical combination” of “French descent and American birth.” All of these young women speak in local dialect which is a sharp contrast to the proper English used by the narrator of the tale. The democratic possibilities of life on the Western plains is at issue in this story, as in *Like a Gallant Lady*. For instance, in one scene, a domestic servant, Miss Judson, attempts to “talk pieces” for her employer, the narrator of the tale. Miss Judson wants to impress her employer and so she “talk[s] the Declaration of Independence.” In response the narrator

“flees.”³¹ The narrator’s discomfort with the poor Swedish girl’s embrace of the founding documents of the nation underscores the class and social differences between the narrator and her servants. This tension is representative not only of the uneasy relationship between the narrator and her various domestic servants, but also of the broader cultural “difference” of the region itself. For example, when an older woman applies to fill the vacant spot as domestic servant, she complains to narrator saying: “I had heard that you do not make your companion—your help, I suppose I would say—one of the family. . . Are you aware that is contrary to the customs of the West?” In response, the narrator is incredulous that she is “being badgered and boycotted because [she] considered the society of [her] servants too extravagant a price for the scrubbing of [the] kitchen.”³² Moreover, “Hired Girls,” unlike Cleary’s Bubble-set tales, depicts the region as backwards and its inhabitants as curious objects of entertainment and dismay.

While the typical Irishness of the Malones and their Chicago neighbors stands out in contrast to the Irish Americans in Cleary’s Bubble-set stories, it is the *absence* of the Irish which is important in “Hired Girls.” That is, “Hired Girls” is the type of sketch that, by virtue of its subject matter, may have appeared in any number of women’s magazines in the nineteenth century. The sort of article or story which described the backward habits of a domestic servant appeared throughout the nineteenth century and were a standard feature in women’s magazines since at least the antebellum era. Usually the hired help in the early versions of these sketches were German or Irish immigrants and it is precisely this sort of sketch which contributed to the production of the Irish domestic servant as a “socio-cultural phenomenon” from the mid- to late nineteenth century.

31 James Mansfield Cleary, *Nebraska*, 32.

32 *Ibid.*, 34.

Similar to the stage Irishman, the Irish immigrant maid, the Bridget, was a “bumbling but warm-hearted girl who broke dishes in the kitchen and variously disrupted order in well-appointed dining rooms and parlors of the Gilded Age.” For instance, in one typical late nineteenth-century sketch, the lady of the house points out to her house maid that the dust is so thick on the furniture that she can write her name in it. To this Bridget replies: “It’s a wonderful thing to have an education, isn’t it, missus?”³³ Not only was the Irish house servant common in the periodical culture in which “Hired Girls” also appeared, but Irish-born women were dominant in domestic service from the antebellum period through the turn into the twentieth century.³⁴ As the historian Margaret Lynch-Brennan describes it:

The reputation of the Irish in domestic service took on such a strong emblematic value throughout the United States that, according to Blaine McKinley, “after 1850 domestic servants and the Irish became virtually synonymous.” While the Irish were certainly not the only group employed as such, African American, German, and Scandinavian immigrant women, who also worked as domestics, failed to gain the sort of prominence that the Irish did.

“Hired Girls,” which on first glance seems least occupied by Irishness, is haunted by the nineteenth-century prominence of the Irish immigrant servant girl, the “ubiquitous Bridget.”³⁵

Furthermore, in the early nineteenth century there was a distinct difference in the United States between the terms “servant” and “help” in New England and these terms carried particular significance for Irish American working-class laborers. The Irish working class in the United States insisted they be identified as “help” rather than “servants” to distance themselves from slaves. Crucial to these linguistic preferences

33 Dezell, *Irish America*, 91.

34 Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, xvii.

35 *Ibid.*, 333.

among Irish American laborers in the early and mid-nineteenth century was the need to define themselves in a way which would support the “dream of a republic of small producers” and “against the nightmare of chattel slavery.”³⁶ Their uses of “help” over “servant” suggested the possibility that Irish American laborers might become shop and land owners in their own right and, as such, definitively distinguish themselves from African American slaves. The language of “help” versus “servant” implied, for antebellum Irish American laborers, the possibility of economic progress and opportunity—their independence.

Within this historical and cultural context, Cleary’s representation of the poverty of the Malones in “The Mission of Kitty Malone” and her decision not to represent an Irish servant girl in “Hired Girls” is significant. On the one hand, it reiterates that Cleary’s representation of the Irish is one which suggests the process of westward expansion into rural and regional places, whatever its limitations, has benefits for Irish immigrants and Irish Americans—they are not of the servant class in the American West. Likewise, Mrs. Mc’s clear articulation of the language of “help” rather than “servant,” discussed earlier, confirms the ways the West is a space of acculturation for the Irish because she expresses these linguistic preferences in such a way that she (as opposed to Ivera) is untroubled by the democratization offered by the region. She even refers to the lack of servants in “Nebraska” as a mark of pride and regional distinctiveness.

On the other hand, the absence of the Bridget figure and the representation of a number of domestic servants of other ethnic backgrounds in “Hired Girls” suggests that the legacy of Irish American working-class strategies of demarcating class and racial categories of identity is relevant for Cleary’s representations of Irishness in the West in

³⁶ Roediger, *Wages*, 44.

other ways as well. That is, the large role played by the Bohemian immigrant, and hired girl, Mollie, in *Like a Gallant Lady*; Ivera's discomfort with her own proximity to the ethnically different and lower-class Mollie; and Kitty Malone's story which is essentially about economic insecurity and the shame of admitting the need for public relief, all suggest the way class, and the insecurity of Irish American class status, informs Cleary's prose whether the stories are ostensibly "about" Irishness or not. Ultimately, the comparison between "The Mission of Kitty Malone" and "Hired Girls," in the context of her Bubble fictions and the dominance of cultural associations between the Irish and domestic service, highlights the ways in which discourses of class and anxieties around the association between the Irish and economic dependence underpin the various forms of ethnic and gender conflict in her short fiction and novels regardless of locale.

In addition, the power of the gender critique in Cleary's Bubble stories is generated by the implication that her female protagonists are, in fact, "servants" in their own homes—in their responsibilities as farmers' wives. For example, in one important scene in "Feet of Clay" Margaret Dare receives a package of magazines in the mail and sits down to "enjoy her treasure" until she is quickly interrupted by her mother-in-law who insists she take on a chore that appalls Margaret. She is commanded to "go to the shed" where "they're stickin' hogs for winter pickling." Her mother-in-law directs her to hold a pail under the slaughtered animals and "get it full of blood to make black sausage."³⁷ At this order, Margaret "dropped the pan," grew "white," and nearly passed out from the mere thought of performing the assigned task. Her mother-in-law subsequently tells Margaret's husband that they need to hire a housekeeper because his wife refuses to help with domestic chores and Margaret's mental health deteriorates from

³⁷ George, 146.

this moment forward. The representation of Margaret as a servant to her husband and a “slave” to farm life is consistent with Cleary’s representation of other Irish American characters such as Mrs. Carney and, to varying degrees, Ivera, Mrs. Mc, and even Mollie. Moreover, the lack of physical and cultural freedom and intellectual mobility Cleary’s female protagonists experience is consistently rendered in the language of class and as forms subjugation associated with the status of the servant class or the financially insecure.

To put it in other terms, central to recent definitions of American women’s regionalism is the crucial difference between local color writing which brings an “ironic perspective” or distance to the inhabitants of the region and regional writing which “allows the reader to view the regional speaker as subject and not as object.” This difference has been articulated as the difference between cosmopolitan perspective which privileges the culture of urban centers of the United States over the rural or regional places which are depicted as quaint, queer, or backwards. Cleary’s stories are in an ambivalent relationship to this binary opposition. The bleakness of “The Stepmother” and of Cleary’s Bubble stories in general is a rejection of the “touristic implications” associated with local color writing and complicates simplistic renderings of small town Nebraska; they allow her female figure to speak in important ways. Alternatively, even when Cleary relies on “local color” attitudes toward region, as in “Hired Girls,” that perspective is undercut because her representation of the Chicago Irish in “The Mission of Kitty Malone” does not sustain the urban/rural, city/region binary.

The continued attention to class anxiety in her fiction suggests that Cleary’s regionalism is not wholly or primarily invested in privileging the cosmopolitan culture

over the culture of the region or, in contrast, in allowing the regional person to speak, though the latter is certainly true. Rather, what is central to the conflicts in her work more broadly is the lack of resources and mobility among her female characters in fictional texts which take place in a variety of locales. In Cleary's body of writing, issues of class and economic independence are more prominent than those of region and the limitations of gender are often expressed as and related to issues of financial stability and the privileges and luxuries, or basic necessities, material success can provide.

One important critic of Irish American fiction, Charles Fanning, has interpreted Cleary's Nebraska stories as "an effective antidote to the anti-urban romantic pastoral of Mary Anne Sadlier's *Con O'Regan* and the propagandists for rural colonization who believed that moving to the country would solve all Irish-American ills."³⁸ In his assessment, Fanning refers to the "bleak" nature of Nebraska life which Cleary's stories describe and, as such, is a reasonable reading of her fiction and its relationship to Sadlier's antebellum domestic novels. However, the above analysis of Irishness in "The Stepmother," "Feet of Clay," and *Like a Gallant Lady* contradicts his claim in the sense that both writers, ultimately, represent the mid-West as amenable to Irish American migrants. The crucial difference between Cleary's and Sadlier's representation of Irishness in developing Western towns, then, is not simply, as Fanning suggests, the way Western settlements are described or imagined by these writers, but the stakes involved in Irish American relocation to the frontier areas. It is more accurate to say that the differences between their texts is in what is lost or gained in the process of migrating west.

38 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 180.

In Sadlier's novel of the Catholic American rural ideal, *Con O'Regan*, the Irish leave Boston to reconnect with the Irish homeland and express their American identity most fully by establishing a closed Catholic and Irish community in Iowa; however, the opposite happens in Cleary's stories. In the urban space, in Chicago, the Irish have a stable but poor community which retains the common features of Irishness including religious and linguistic markers of identity. Alternatively, in *Bubble*, Cleary's Irish American protagonists have none of those characteristics. Her characters are not immigrants from Ireland, nor do they speak in a brogue. Mrs. "Mc" is a Baptist. In Nebraska, Cleary's Irish Americans live in ethnically diverse communities and display few signs of recreating the "Old World" so central to the characters in *Con O'Regan*.

To draw this point out further, as I argued in a previous chapter, Sadlier's immigrant figures demonstrate their ability to adhere to American values best when they live up to a Catholic value system. For Sadlier this means: living in a closed Irish community; holding fast to Irish "traits" associated with their agricultural past; and emigrating far from the temptations of Protestant American culture. Cleary's representation of the Irish in the West is a complete inversion of Sadlier's. Unlike Sadlier's Famine generation immigrants who become symbolically reunited with the Irish homeland *and* enact their fitness to be Americans most in their settlement in Iowa, Cleary's Irish American characters become, if you will, less "Irish" in their move to Nebraska. Cleary's characters lose ethnic markers of identity and standard associations of Irishness in the process of relocation and settlement in Nebraska.

More importantly, they never gain the sense of an Irish community that was so central to Sadlier's novel and the colonization society which encouraged the writing of it.

Not only do Cleary's characters fail to retain Irish characteristics they, including Mrs. Mc, all express feelings of loss and exile from family and friends. The ways in which exile is experienced by the immigrants and migrants in *Like a Gallant Lady* have been discussed. The way exile shapes the experiences of the women in her short stories is exemplified by the contrast in the conclusions of "The Stepmother" and "The Mission of Kitty Malone." It is meaningful that Kitty Malone's story ends romantically with the family's much anticipated Thanksgiving dinner. In Bubble, Mrs. Carney, who also desires to participate in holiday festivities and to celebrate Memorial Day, finds herself isolated from the celebration and eventually dies never having made her desired journey into town for the holiday. The region is a place of loss and exile for Cleary in a way that Chicago is not. Historians have shown that, like Sadlier's generation of Famine immigrants, Cleary's generation of immigrants from Ireland also felt deep feelings of exile. Sadlier imagines a settlement in Iowa which remedies those feelings of loss by offering a new version of Ireland on the American frontier. Cleary, who was dedicated to refuting romantic pretensions about region, is unable to imagine a solution to the ills of exile. Her regionalism allows her regional Irish American figures to speak, but also insists on the difficulties of migration. Ultimately, Cleary's stories suggest that recovering an Irish homeland, or building an American community, is a trying, if not impossible, task for Nebraska women.

IV. Conclusion

In the winter of 1905, over a decade after Cleary's poems were read at the Columbian Exhibition and just a few months before her death that summer, Cleary sent a letter to the then little known Willa Cather. Her letter was written in response to Cather's

short story “The Sculptor’s Funeral” published in the January issue of *McClure’s* magazine. Cleary identified with Cather because both had suffered critical objection to the “exaggeration” about western life represented in their stories. For Cather, this was specifically the case for “The Sculptor’s Funeral” and was the subject of the reply letter sent to Cleary on 13 February 1905. Cather said that “she appreciated Cleary’s acknowledgment of the lack of culture and the discouraging lives of many western people.” The note from Cather also described “Cather’s desire to render an America that had not yet been portrayed in fiction—the smalltown, midwestern world of Nebraska.”³⁹ Both writers treated life on the Nebraska prairies in their fiction and, even though Cather would become a more prominent writer than Cleary, their texts often shared similar themes: both dealt with European immigrant and pioneer life on the struggling farms and small towns of the American West.

It falls out of the scope of this chapter to do a comparison of Cleary’s work with the later and more celebrated writer’s fiction, but it is worth noting that Cather’s relationship to region has been defined in a manner which might easily have been used to describe Cleary’s. Regarding Cather’s late novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, in relation to her stories set in Red Cloud, Nebraska, recent criticism has suggested that “transplanting, not rootedness, lies at the heart of Cather’s relation to region, and that unlike the regionalists who preceded her, Cather experienced region within the context of loss.”⁴⁰ This similarity between Cather’s and Cleary’s writing suggests that the association between region and migration (or immigration) and the related associations between region and feelings of loss may not be the result of a backward glance from a

39 George, 96.

40 Fetterley and Pryse, *American Women Regionalists*, 593.

writer who is also associated with modernist fiction, as is implied by Fetterley and Pryse. It suggests that the migration experience might be something that is more indicative of representations of region than previously thought.

Furthermore, the potential for re-examining definitions of regionalism, through a comparison of Cleary and Cather as “migrant” writers, raises an additional point about Cleary and her work. Cleary’s case exemplifies the ways in which nineteenth-century Irish immigrant writers, more generally, do not easily fit into contemporary critical categories of analysis. That is, because the Irish who were publishing in the nineteenth century had English “upon arrival” and because of their status as white Americans, there are not many current models for thinking about the nineteenth-century Irish as immigrant writers.⁴¹ From this perspective, Cleary’s fiction raises a range of issues about categorization within the study of nineteenth-century and ethnic American literature well beyond that of the literary mode of regional fiction.

In closing, Cleary’s Nebraska-set fictions point up the restrictive nature of gender roles in the mid-West of the 1890s and they meditate upon the meaning of racial hierarchies among European ethnic groups in the late nineteenth century. On the one hand, her body of work naturalizes Irish American status on the plains and makes visible the anxieties and opportunities of Irish American life associated with the “new” immigration and related economic and political gains of Irish America in the period. She exposes the ways in which European and immigrant success in the West occurs across

41 Another contributing factor to this is that immigrant writing is usually treated as beginning with the “second wave” of European immigration in 1880 and, therefore, immigrant literature published prior to that (or written by immigrant groups associated with the “first wave”) has not typically been associated with immigrant or ethnic literatures of the U.S. In *Writing out of Place* Fetterley and Pryse do include one immigrant writer among their list of American women regionalists, Edith Maude Eaton. The self-identified Eurasian immigrant writer, Eaton, primarily set her texts in urban spaces and she is read, by Fetterley and Pryse, as a “border” writer and cultural translator in the tradition of Anzaldua.

racial hierarchies among European American ethnic groups whose shared status is solidified by the violent insistence on black and white racial differences. On the other hand, her acculturated Irish American figures persistently express feelings of exile and, for Cleary, Nebraska is more often than not rendered as a space of isolation and immobility. In spite of the bleakness of her portraits of Nebraska, Cleary demonstrates that the American mid-West is a rich source of fictional material for Irish American writers and the final section of this dissertation treats James T. Farrell's well-known Chicago trilogy, *Studs Lonigan*. The following epilogue contextualizes one of the most important texts of Irish American fiction, *Studs Lonigan*, in terms of the analyses of chapters one through four of *Regular Wild Irish*.

CHAPTER 5

EPILOGUE: JAMES T. FARRELL'S *STUDS LONIGAN* AND THE ORIGIN MYTH IN IRISH AMERICAN FICTION

In a concluding chapter of the Studs Lonigan trilogy's final book, *Judgment Day*, Patrick Lonigan, the aging father of the protagonist, returns to the neighborhood of Washington Park in Chicago where he and his family lived for many years. It is 1931 and, in the wave of economic strife which accompanied the Great Depression, the Irish immigrant Lonigan is about to lose his home in South Shore and the business which he spent his life developing. Embittered and desperate over his son's imminent death from pneumonia, and his own financial ruin, he revisits the old neighborhood—stopping in at Saint Patrick's church, his old parish, driving by the Carter School playground, and parking in front of “the building he used to own.” He wonders what he had done to find himself facing troubles “neither fair nor right.” He asks: “Hadn't he always provided for his family to the best of his abilities, tried to be a good husband and a good father, a true Catholic, and a real American?” Even while Lonigan thinks about these familiar places with a “deep nostalgia” he stares at the African Americans now living in the old neighborhood—a “stout shabby Negro woman” walking past the brick apartment houses which line the block across from St. Pat's; the “black children [at the playground who] romped and played in the same place and in the same way his own children had romped and played”; and the babies who would grow up “into black dangerous buck[s].” Already mourning the loss of his son and “all the life, hopes, [and] expectations [that] lived in the building” where he used to reside as landlord, Lonigan mutters over the “Jew trickery

that had ruined his neighborhood.”⁴²

The Lonigans reluctantly moved to South Shore, just a few years before, as a result of the changing racial makeup of Washington Park. They moved out because African Americans moved in. The scenes of Lonigan back in his old neighborhood at the conclusion of Farrell’s best known work represents the ways the trilogy as a whole shows that racial violence and race hatred were second nature to Studs Lonigan and to the largely Irish American community he grew up with in Chicago. *Studs Lonigan* has been identified as a foundational text of Irish American literature, in part, because it exposes the “assumptions and consequences” of the racial and ethnic biases of working- and middle-class Irish American culture in the early to mid-twentieth century.⁴³

The *Studs Lonigan* trilogy, comprised of *Young Lonigan*, *The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan*, and *Judgment Day*, centers on Studs and his friends from a fictional neighborhood near Chicago’s Bridgeport section and spans a time period from 1916 through 1931. It opens on the day of Studs’s graduation from eighth grade when, in spite of his inarticulate nature, he shows signs of intelligence and athleticism which would allow him to move forward with his education and eventually take over his father’s painting business. The series chronicles the downfall of the protagonist as he quits high school, falls in with a crowd of semi-hoodlums, and wastes away his youth and health drinking and hanging out on street corners. Eventually, his health deteriorates from his reckless lifestyle. On his deathbed he leaves his girlfriend pregnant and unwed and Farrell’s mostly realist narrative becomes a “fevered” and surreal, stream of consciousness dream sequence in which the roles of his dominant mother, “ineffectual”

42 Farrell, *Studs Lonigan*, 825; 827; 825.

43 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 267.

father, and various lay and religious community figures appear complicit in Studs's wasted life.⁴⁴

Like Studs Lonigan, and the protagonist of a later series, Danny O'Neill, James T. Farrell (1904-1979) grew up in a Chicago neighborhood made up of working-class and upwardly mobile Irish immigrants and Irish Americans. While Farrell is best known for *Studs*, he was a prolific writer and critic. His first story was published by the time he was 25 and, over the course of his life, he published over 50 books of short fiction and novels. He was deeply influenced by figures such as John Dewey, Theodore Dreiser, James Joyce, Anton Chekhov, Richard Wright, and Sherwood Anderson. He was known as a "fellow traveler" in the 1930s and during that period his work received "important and enthusiastic appreciation."⁴⁵ Politically "moderate" and "first and last a writer," he rejected both the literary realism associated with the *New Masses* and promoted by Michael Gold as well as "the high art as tradition creed" advocated by T.S. Eliot. The *Studs* trilogy is undeniably a part of the realist tradition, but Farrell was insistent that Studs's story was not one of environmental determinism and that it was a "biological and social tragedy."⁴⁶ Farrell's deep knowledge of Western literature, his prolific literary production, and the consistent representation of fictional subjects of Irish American descent have contributed to his current status as one of the best known and most studied authors associated with Irish American fiction.

As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, at least since the *MELUS* publication dedicated to Irish American fiction in 1993, Farrell has been considered the first great Irish American writer and, as such, his work has been treated as a point of

44 Ibid., 273.

45 Douglas, Introduction, x.

46 Ibid., xii.

origin in Irish American fiction. The goal of this epilogue is not strictly to debunk such claims. Rather, my interest here is to think about the implications of that assertion in terms of current frameworks available for analyzing racial and ethnic representation in Irish American fiction. To do so, I address the larger critical significance of recent scholarship about representations of Irishness and ethnicity in *Studs Lonigan* and its relationship to *Regular Wild Irish*. This epilogue demonstrates that greater attention to nineteenth-century Irish American fiction is important for bringing new questions to the canonical text, *Studs Lonigan*, and, as shown throughout the dissertation, for broadening the critical lens on twentieth-century Irish American literature.

Specifically, by way of an examination of a recent study of racial discourses in Farrell's well-known work, representative of trends within the field overall, I argue that this dissertation points to a potentially richer framework for thinking about the "ethnic dimension" of *Studs Lonigan* and Irish American literature more broadly.⁴⁷ I discuss the ways whiteness studies has enlarged and then threatened to limit discourses about ethnicity in Irish American fiction. I argue that discourses of whiteness studies, largely based in scholarship about antebellum Irish Americans, and recent studies of the Irish/black connection, drawn from analyses of late twentieth-century Irish popular culture, have been influential in framing the ways in which critics approach examinations of race and ethnic identity in Irish American fiction. Finally, by offering a summary of the ways in which the thematic elements of *Studs Lonigan* relate to predominant themes in fiction by Sadlier, Guiney, Cleary, and Sullivan, I reiterate the larger claims of the dissertation as a whole. I suggest that examinations of Irish American fiction of the nineteenth century have the potential to offer a new language or new models for thinking

⁴⁷ Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 258.

about the relationship between Irishness and blackness, Irishness and Irish American identity, and a host of other issues central to studies about Irish and Irish American literature and culture today.

One of the more important recent readings of Farrell's trilogy in terms of discourses of race and ethnicity is Lauren Onkey's "James Farrell's Studs Lonigan Trilogy and the Anxieties of Race." In the article, Onkey argues that Farrell perceived that "Irish American anxieties are worked out most violently and consistently against African Americans" and that this view was "rooted in the similarities that he saw between representations of both groups." She argues that the trilogy, like minstrelsy, "represents Irishness as inseparable from blackness" and that Farrell saw similarities between the stereotypical representations which African American writers such as Richard Wright worked against and the figure of the stage Irishman which plagued Irish American writers. She also notes that "Studs Lonigan is one of the first Irish American works self-consciously and critically to depict the potent —perhaps pathological—hold that African Americans had on the Irish American imagination as symbolic of their own insecure status in America."⁴⁸ Indeed, the novel is set against the historical backdrop of the great migration of African Americans from the south to northern cities between 1916 and 1920 during which there were a series of race riots in Chicago. Studs and his friends repeatedly fantasize about committing acts of racial violence against African Americans and Jewish Americans and, in a scene in *Young Lonigan*, they terrorize a young African American during the riots of 1919.

Onkey's analysis of Farrell's trilogy is important and entirely persuasive; what

48 Onkey, "James Farrell's Studs Lonigan Trilogy and the Anxieties of Race," 106.

interests me about the argument is that it is indicative of a range of analyses of Irish American culture and literary productions of late which, like my project, address ethnic representation and rely on the findings of historians working in labor history or whiteness studies as a context for addressing Irish and Irish American culture. More clearly, while Onkey's reading of Irishness and race in Farrell's trilogy is, in general, productive and provocative, the language she uses to frame the argument is largely dependent upon the links between Irish Americans and African Americans defined by studies of the antebellum Irish and Irish identifications with African American oppression in twentieth-century Irish popular culture. As such, it risks denying the possibility that other forms of racial difference, ethnic anxiety, and Irishness inhabit the pages of *Studs*. The discussion here is not a matter of addressing which ethnic groups were most frequently objects of Irish American racial animosity or violence, or which groups are represented as racial enemies in Irish American literature.⁴⁹ Nor is it a question of the validity of Onkey's argument in this particular article. Rather, what is important is that the relationship between Irishness and blackness and Irish American claims to whiteness have recently dominated discussions of ethnicity in studies of Irish American contemporary culture to the degree that the discourse is at risk of becoming constrained by the very terms which allowed it to become a more relevant area of study in the first place.⁵⁰

A brief overview of the ways in which contemporary Irish American studies has been influenced by, on the one hand, whiteness studies, and, on the other hand, the

49 See Shiffman, "Ethnic Competitors in *Studs Lonigan*," for a discussion of the representation of Jewish Americans in *Studs Lonigan*.

50 The historian Kevin Kenny has expressed a similar warning. He notes that the "debate [over whiteness] as it stands deals almost exclusively with the public actions of male Irish workers and their male, native-born citizens" (qtd. in Onkey, 106).

development of identifications, among the late twentieth-century Irish, between African oppression and Irish oppression, will elucidate this point. For example, two well-known works, Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White* and Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness*, focus on Irish immigrants and Irish Americans in the antebellum period. They discuss the ways the Irish were not definitively understood as "white" by the larger culture. Further, Ignatiev, Roediger, and others have shown that Irish Americans used racial violence and metaphors of blackness as a means to distance themselves from African Americans, to substantiate their own claims to white status, and dissociate themselves from slavery. These books, among a series of others, have shaped the field of whiteness studies and have provided a language for denaturalizing white racial identity. They have raised an array of questions about how scholars address the history and culture of white American and white immigrant groups from the nineteenth century and into the contemporary period. This body of historical criticism has been particularly useful, in recent decades, for the framework and language it offers for addressing issues of race, ethnicity, and identity in Irish and Irish American literature and culture.

One outgrowth of the emergence of whiteness studies as a field, with its deep ties to the work of Ignatiev, Roediger, and others, has been critical recognition of the ways in which, during the second half of the twentieth century, the Irish (especially in Northern Ireland) compared their experiences to those of Africans and African Americans. For instance, in the 1960s "Northern Irish Catholic activists often described their struggle as analogous to that of African Americans in the Deep South" and some promoted the non-violent forms of protest advocated by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.⁵¹ The most cited cultural text which articulates cultural assumptions about the links between Irishness and

51 Eagan, "Still 'Black' and 'Proud,'" 21.

blackness in the late twentieth century is the 1991 film *The Commitments*, based on the 1989 novel by Roddy Doyle. As Catherine Eagan describes it, during a scene early in the film:

Jimmy Rabbitte tries to inspire his mates to form an Irish rhythm-and-blues band by showing them a James Brown concert. As they watch the video with a mix of curiosity and confusion . . . Jimmy instructs, “The Irish are the blacks of Europe, lads. . . An’ Dubliners are the blacks of Ireland. . . An’ the northside Dubliners are the blacks o’ Dublin. Say it once, say it loud, I’m black an’ I’m proud.”⁵²

Eagan argues that “the film’s popularity in the United States also exposes the ways in which the issue of race impacts and influences Irish American ethnic pride.”⁵³ She argues that the film was popular among Irish Americans because it articulates, as in the scene described above, Irish struggles against oppression.

As such, relatively recent Irish identifications with black struggles for civil rights and labor histories that point up the unclear racial status of the Irish in the United States in the nineteenth century have produced a series of images and analogies which link the Irish and Irish Americans with African Americans. Jointly, these historical works and cultural texts have laid the groundwork for Irish American disavowal of white privilege.⁵⁴ They have also, indeed with a separate set of political implications, inspired analyses of Irish American literature, such as Farrell’s trilogy, that examine the relationship between representations of Irish Americans and African Americans and consider metaphorical connections between Irishness and blackness.

This dissertation is indebted to the studies of labor historians whose work has

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., 20-21.

54 Eagan has pointed out, of course, the divergence in Irish American response to the analogy between black experience and the Irish. She notes examples: the “cool reception” Irish Americans showed to the Irish black Panther sympathizer Bernadette Devlin McAliskey who visited the United States in 1969 and the Boston busing riots supported by Irish Americans in Boston in the 1970s (“Still ‘Black’ and ‘Proud,’” 21-22).

been foundational to whiteness studies and to new developments in Irish American studies within the last few decades. The type of analysis that Onkey and Eagan are doing in their discussions of the Irish/black connection in Irish and Irish American culture is important. However, when the analyses of labor historians, largely focused on the United States in the nineteenth century, are coupled with cultural criticisms about how associations between Irishness and blackness operate in late twentieth-century Ireland, they inevitably produce a particular set of assumptions about the strategies of representation at work in Irish American cultural productions. Often enough these assumptions are brought to bear on twentieth-century Irish American fiction and, in spite of the resulting articles, which are interesting, the analysis is potentially limited because it is formed in the absence of a thorough critical engagement with earlier periods in Irish American literature. To put it another way, the relationship between Irishness and blackness has so dominated discourses about ethnicity in Irish American fiction that it has risked obscuring the variety of ways discourses of race and ethnicity are imagined in texts written in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries.⁵⁵

In her book, *Blackness and Transatlantic Irish Identity*, which includes a chapter based on the Farrell article, Onkey argues that “one of the most persistent tropes of Irish and Irish-American identity formation is a comparison between Irish and African-American experiences of oppression; as it traverses the Atlantic, this trope oscillates between identification and loathing.” It is worth quoting Onkey at length here:

In Ireland, blackness becomes a foil for the Irish to express their experience of

55 Examples regarding Irish American and Irish literature include: Malouf’s *Transatlantic Solidarities: Irish Nationalism and Caribbean Politics*; Mishkin’s *The Harlem and Irish Renaissances: Language, Identity, and Representation*, and Eagan’s “‘White’ If Not ‘Quite.’” Examples of this analysis from Irish and Irish American popular culture include Meany’s “Dead, White and Male: Irishness in Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Angel” and Malouf’s “Feeling Éire(y): On Irish-Caribbean Popular Culture.”

colonial oppression, to define a transatlantic, antiracist, anticolonial identity. In the United States, however, blackness becomes a negative foil, used by Irish Americans to distance themselves from African Americans in order to assimilate into mainstream white American society. But both Irish identification with African Americans and Irish-American resistance to the comparison use blackness as a tool to define Irishness in often remarkably similar ways. I reveal the trope's tenacity as it continually reemerges as a way for writers, musicians, and political activists to make sense of Irish and Irish American experience.⁵⁶

Again, while I do not want to entirely disagree with Onkey's analysis, one can't help but wonder if the "tenacity" of the trope isn't also related to the persistence of scholarship which insists on the relationship between blackness and Irishness in works such as Farrell's because, in the absence of deeper critical engagement with nineteenth-century Irish American fiction, this is the trope which is "available" to critics in the same way that it has been to late twentieth-century Irish people, Irish Americans, and writers and artists of Irish descent.⁵⁷

Regular Wild Irish has argued that Irish American writers of the nineteenth century use familiar means of representing racial anxieties and racial difference in their short fiction and novels. This dissertation has shown that, consistent with Onkey's argument, representations of Irish American identity rely on representations of black racial difference. For instance, Mary Anne Sadlier describes the threat of "black" Protestants in Boston as a way of defining her Irish, Catholic figures as capable of the duties of American citizenship in *Con O'Regan*. For another example, James Sullivan uses the image of blackface, and alludes to minstrelsy, in the figure of Leather as a

56 Onkey, *Blackness and Transatlantic Irish Identity*, 3.

57 Eagan discusses five novels published between 1995 and 2005, by Irish and Irish American writers, which deal with the Irish/black connection. Several are set in Civil War America. *Paradise Alley* addresses miscegenation against the backdrop of the draft riots. *This Side of Brightness* takes up intermarriage among black and white "diggers" of the NY subways. These are international in setting as well; one novel, *Testimony of an Irish Slave Girl*, is set in the seventeenth-century and "treat[s] white Irish slavery" in Barbados (Eagan, "Still 'Black' and 'Proud,'" 37-38).

bootblack, in the *Tenement Tales*. In doing so, he underscores that even though his Irish street kids are impoverished and understood as ethnically and racially different they are not so racially different as to be African Americans. Like representations of blackness in Sadlier's texts, Leather's "blackening up" in "Leather's Banishment" functions to solidify the street kid's white identity. In these ways, and in numerous others, the late nineteenth-century Irish American writers whose work is examined in this dissertation have employed metaphors of blackness and African American racial difference to define themselves and Irishness.

This dissertation has also shown, notably, that even while these authors use familiar tropes of racial difference in their fiction, they theorize new forms of racial affiliation which were emerging in the late nineteenth century. That is, they respond to more than the pressure to define themselves as a white immigrant group against African Americans—a legacy inherited from at least the antebellum era—but to the pressure to define themselves as Irish and Irish American in the midst of the arrival of mostly poor and often Gaelic-speaking Irish immigrants and masses of Southern and Eastern European immigrants. We can be blinded by our own racial categories and racial binaries when we fail to give critical recognition to the anxiety produced by the perceived racial or ethnic "difference" of Southern and Eastern European immigrants after 1880 and the fact that Irish American authors responded to this anxiety in their fiction.

For example, Guiney may well have been too timid to represent miscegenation between a white American and an African American in "An Event on a River" and, therefore, she may have used a mixed "race" figure—the son of an Italian woman and an Anglo American man—as a metaphor for thinking about tabooed relationships between

white and black Americans. However, it is equally plausible that she may have seen Italian racial difference, and the new proximity between the Irish and Italians in Boston, as constituting a racial mixing which would convincingly comprise and produce narrative tension in “An Event on the River.” *Regular Wild Irish* suggests that it is worthwhile to think about the representations of racial or ethnic mixing in her short fiction along both registers. For one, the story can be read as about the anxiety over African American status in the post Civil War years and as suggestive for addressing the links between Irishness and blackness. Simultaneously, it can be understood as about the ways Guiney identified Catholicism as a fundamental feature of identity which the Irish shared with the Italians, and, therefore, could be interpreted as an engagement with and reflection upon the changing ethnic identity of the Irish during the second wave of immigration which brought many Italian immigrants with it.

Fictional texts by Cleary and Sullivan also demonstrate that metaphors of blackness have been used in interesting and surprising ways by late nineteenth-century Irish American writers. In *Like a Gallant Lady*, Cleary fully represents the ways in which white immigrant groups are defined against black others. As previously noted, the scene in which the protagonist, Ivera, feels she is losing her identity and the image of a lynch mob is introduced into the text exemplifies the ways in which Cleary uses metaphors of blackness to represent white racial identity and status. This scene should not be read as simply an expression of how the Irish defined themselves against African Americans. At this moment in the text, Cleary, like Farrell in *Studs Lonigan*, reflects upon and gives critical attention to the processes through which the Irish exploited white privilege. Further, simply because Cleary represents the ways white identity is formed against black

racial difference does not mean that she sees blackness as, fundamentally, a negative foil for Irishness. The fact that she exposes the ways exploitation undergirds white privilege troubles a simplified, or, at least, more traditional, reading of literary representations of these racial identities in nineteenth-century Irish American literature. Similarly, Sullivan's *Tenement Tales* could easily be read as precursor to the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy in a variety of ways, particularly in its critique of Irish American embrace of the racial norms of society. While, as previously mentioned, Sullivan's description of Leather's episode of "blacking up" as a boot black in disguise of the police is meaningful for what it suggests for blackness as a foil for Irish whiteness, it is equally productive to think about the fact that he finds ways of addressing Irish American racial identity and its representation—and relationship to other European ethnic groups—in ways that are largely absent of representations of African Americans or metaphors of blackness.

I do not mean to suggest that contemporary studies of ethnicity in *Studs Lonigan* or other fictional texts of the twentieth century are invalid or unimportant or out dated, but rather that there are potentially a host of representations of ethnic identity in Irish American fiction which deserve examination and are being overlooked because they do not appear to immediately fit into existing critical frameworks that are dominated by links between Irishness and blackness. The positioning of Farrell's *Studs Lonigan* as the original text of Irish American fiction only contributes to the limited nature of the questions being brought to bear on Irish American fiction because, as argued earlier, it implicitly marks any text written prior to 1930 as less worthy of critical attention. With greater scholarly focus on an earlier body of work, it is possible that new questions and frameworks will emerge for thinking about representations of race within *Studs Lonigan*,

discourses of race and ethnicity in Irish American fiction, and representations of Irishness in Irish American and Irish literature and culture more generally.

Representations of Irishness in the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy could be compared, in fruitful ways, with any number of the nineteenth-century novels and short stories discussed in *Regular Wild Irish*. For example, central to Sadlier's antebellum domestic fiction was the theme of Irish immigrant degradation in urban America. As Fanning has noted the "grim story of the criminal life and violent death of young Hugh Dillon" from Sadlier's *The Blakes and the Flanagans* is echoed in the downfall of Studs and several of his friends from the Bridgeport section of Chicago.⁵⁸ Likewise, throughout the trilogy, Patrick Lonigan dreams of his return, with his wife, to the "old sod" and there is the recurrent tension in Sadlier's novels between the desire to return and the economic impossibility of it. As in *Con O'Regan*, the American mid-West is imagined, by Paddy Lonigan, as akin to the land of his birth. Before they move out of Washington Park he tells Studs: "your mother and I are getting' old now, and, well, . . . this neighborhood was kind of like home. We sort of felt the same way I feel about Ireland, where I was born."⁵⁹ Fanning identifies this scene as noteworthy because it is a turning point to the "displacement" Studs and his father will experience from then on, but it is also of interest because it depicts another thematic element shared by Sadlier's and Farrell's novels. They both represent the mid-West as a site which both is and is not a regained Ireland for its immigrant inhabitants. The dangers of the urban landscape, the dream of immigrant return, and the image of the mid-West as a re-imagined Irish homeland are three themes

58 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 270.

59 Qtd in Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 269.

shared by these two prolific writers.

Similarly, one could make multiple associations between the thematic elements of the Farrell trilogy and texts by Guiney and Cleary. In the opening pages of *Young Lonigan*, Patrick Lonigan imagines returning to Ireland and participating in Irish “things”: he and Mary would “take a trip to the old sod and see where John McCormack was born, take a squint at the Lakes of Killarney, kiss the blarney stone, and look up all his relatives.” Sitting on his porch smoking a cigar, he “sang to himself so no one would hear”:

Where the dear old Shannon’s flowing,
Where the three-leaved shamrock grows,
Where my heart is I am going,
To my little Irish Rose.
And the moment that I meet her,
With a hug and kiss I’ll greet her,
For there’s not a colleen sweeter,
Where the River Shannon flows.⁶⁰

Lonigan’s private rendition of the song “Where the River Shannon Flows” might be a useful point of departure for a comparison with the Celticism of Guiney and O’Reilly. The song was written by two well established Irish Americans, James and John Russell, who had used it to “brighten up” their play about Irish servant girls called *Maid to Order* in 1904. They had been running the sketch in the New York theatre since the 1870s.⁶¹ Although their use of Celticism for commercial success was nothing new in American

60 Farrell, 17.

61 Triskelle, Where the River Shannon Flows.

<http://www.triskelle.eu/lyrics/wheretherivershannon.php?index=080.010.080.040>.

culture, it would be worthwhile to consider Guiney's version of Celticism and how it differs from and is related to that which Farrell depicts as representative of sentimental associations with Ireland by middle-class Irish immigrants in 1916. The general critical line on Celticism in American culture, and the uses of Irish folk culture in the United States, is that it is and always has been inauthentic and overly commercialized. That may be the case, but the celebration of folk culture as a form of race pride among O'Reilly's circle and the persistence of it in Farrell's work suggests that an examination of the uses of these materials from the early nineteenth century and into the twentieth may be of interest to literary scholars and critics interested in the circulation of Irishness in the United States.

Cleary's regional fictions also offer a source of comparison with *Studs Lonigan*. The Malones of "The Mission of Kitty Malone" were living in the same section of Chicago where the Lonigan's reside for most of the trilogy and, inevitably, there is thematic overlap in their fictions. For instance, Farrell's Lonigans are a middle-class family who find themselves, in the face of the Depression, sliding down the class ladder. Cleary's Malone's have experienced a similar fall (in an earlier period) and, while Farrell focuses on what precedes that fall, Cleary's short story is a representation of the poverty and shame which are the aftermath of financial decline among Irish immigrants in Chicago. Likewise, Fanning has read Farrell's trilogy as critiquing the "crippling maternal dominance" and the "character of the matriarch as moral example" in Irish American fiction.⁶² Cleary's attention to Irish American wives and mothers on the Nebraska plains offers an alternative to the vision of the Irish American mother depicted by Farrell in *Mary Lonigan* and raises questions about Fanning's claims about the

62 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 273; 267.

representation of Irish American mothers in nineteenth-century Irish American fiction more broadly.

In spite of the range of possibilities for thematic comparison among Farrell's novels and the fiction of the nineteenth-century writers considered in this dissertation, Sullivan's *Tenement Tales of New York* lends itself most naturally to a comparison with *Studs Lonigan*. Fanning has lamented that "unfortunately, it still ... need[s] to be said that the trilogy criticizes middle-class life. The myth of Studs as a child of the slums persists among those who have heard of, but not read, the books."⁶³ While it is the case that the Lonigans are a comfortably middle-class family, it is not surprising that readers mistake Studs for a child of the slums. Farrell appears to self-consciously allude to literary images of Irish slum dwellers in his early descriptions of Studs. For example, in *Young Lonigan*, Studs is victorious in a street fight against his enemy, Weary Reilly, and after the fight wanders past two young "punks" on Indiana Avenue. As he passes them he overhears one say to the other: "You know who that guy is? That's STUDS LONIGAN. He's the champ fighter of the block."⁶⁴ This identification of Studs as the "champ," echoes Crane's description of Maggie's brother—the "champion of Rum Alley." Studs's propensity for and enjoyment of fighting, in addition to the amount of time he spends on the streets, recalls any number of novels about urban kids from the slums in late nineteenth-century American literature. Furthermore, a comparison of the *Tenement Tales* with this early image from *Studs Lonigan* suggests that the slippage in identification of Studs as poor instead of middle-class, the one that frustrates Fanning so, may well be intentional on Farrell's part. That is, if we approach *Studs Lonigan* through the lens of Sullivan's

63 Ibid., 267.

64 Farrell, 70, emphasis in original.

Tenement Tales of New York, it seems more plausible that Farrell may have alluded to Maggie's brother in his depiction of the young Studs in order to raise questions about what precisely constitutes middle-class status and culture for first generation Irish immigrants and their children.

Critics have argued that *Judgment Day* presents "the first detailed fictional examination of the phenomenon of 'white flight' to avoid neighborhood integration" and, from this perspective, the trilogy can be seen as an extension of Sullivan's "Threw Himself Away."⁶⁵ Both fictional texts depict Irish Americans who are excessively aware of their own proximity to parts of the city where non-Irish folks live and they freely articulate their desire to keep those neighborhoods, and their inhabitants, at a distance. As previously noted, like Sullivan, Farrell's analysis of Irish American middle-class life holds up a mirror to the Irish American middle class. The *Tenement Tales of New York* and *Studs Lonigan* both demonstrate the ways that, to cite Onkey, the Irish adopt the "dominant racial ideology of the U.S." at the expense of cross-ethnic solidarity.⁶⁶

More interesting, there is room for a considerable amount of discussion, in a comparison of these two writers and their fictions, about Irish American political affiliations and how they are employed by Irish American writers to critique middle-class Irish American culture. Towards the end of *Judgment Day*, after Paddy Lonigan has revisited Washington Park, in the scene cited earlier, he witnesses a "Red parade."⁶⁷ Lonigan and a young police officer, a friend of Studs, watch the parade and Lonigan is surprised by the ethnic diversity of the group marching:

Behind him came a Jew, a Negro, and another tall, solidly built fellow who looked

65 Fanning, *Irish Voice*, 267.

66 Onkey, "James T. Farrell's Studs Lonigan Trilogy and the Anxieties of Race," 107.

67 Farrell, 833.

to Lonigan like a white man. A band followed playing that strange tune, . . . they passed in a steady and confusing flow, men and women, white and black, blond and swarthy, carrying crude signs, slogans written on cardboard and attached to sticks and poles, singing and shouting, a succession of slogans breaking forth clearly, causing Lonigan to knit his brows and shake his head in wonderment.⁶⁸

The political underpinning of Farrell's novel is quite different than Sullivan's Georgism, but bringing Sullivan's stories into a discussion of Farrell's text raises questions about the links between discourses of race in Irish American fiction and broader political movements as well as how political ideologies have shaped late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Irish American literary history.

While the above discussion is simply a summary of various intersections between Farrell's trilogy and the novels and short stories considered in *Regular Wild Irish*, it demonstrates that *Studs Lonigan* addresses many of the issues most important to Irish immigrant and Irish American writers whose work preceded it. Charting these recurrent themes opens up new possibilities for thinking about how Irishness is represented by Irish American writers. Further, it shows that maintaining Farrell's position as the first great Irish American writer, and *Studs Lonigan* as the original work of Irish American fiction, potentially has foreclosed a wealth of possible forms of analysis which very well may contribute to a range of discourses important for scholars in various fields. It suggests, ultimately, that we might be better prepared to answer the questions which are most pressing in Irish American studies today by revisiting some of our basic assumptions about Irish American literary history and the value of nineteenth-century Irish American literature for thinking about debates on race, ethnicity, and identity in national and international frameworks.

68 Ibid.

As I have been in the last stages of the writing of this dissertation, the United States has moved fully into the second decade of the twentieth-first century and, along with other nations around the world, has responded to the economic, social, and political ramifications of the “great recession.” At such a juncture, analyses of nineteenth-century European immigrant writing or studies of the representations of the race prejudice of an Irish American fictional figure, Paddy Lonigan, whose tale is set during Depression-era Chicago, may seem irrelevant. *Regular Wild Irish* insists that, to the contrary, examinations of racial and ethnic identification, formation, and expression in immigrant writing are as important today as they ever have been.

Within the last year, Governor Jan Brewer of Arizona signed a bill, SB1070, which requires immigrants to carry documentation “legitimizing their presence on American soil.” The bill has been interpreted as a response to the economic decline and the need for scapegoats in the face of an unstable economy. It also has widely been seen as “an open invitation” for “harassment and discrimination against Hispanics regardless of their legal status.”⁶⁹ Any student of the history of anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States can see similarities in the rhetoric used to support the bill and the language of nineteenth-century nativism as well as identify the ways in which discourses of race underpin the strife around the bill’s passage. Simultaneously, there recently has been a heated debate over the location of an Islamic community center in New York City. Threats to burn the Koran have accompanied widespread outcry among politicians and public protests against the building of the center in Lower Manhattan. We know that questions of Irishness in antebellum American culture were associated with anxieties over

69 “Arizona Enacts Stringent Law on Immigration.” *New York Times*. April 24, 2010. New York Edition. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/24/us/politics/24immig.html>.

religious difference and, indeed, there was considerable controversy, in the 1840s, over the ownership of real estate by the Roman Catholic church and the erection of Roman Catholic churches and schools in that city. These two contemporary controversies suggest that the kinds of questions about ethnic and racial representation and religious identification addressed in this dissertation are still manifested, in albeit different ways and around different historical, social, and political trajectories, in the culture of the United States today.

The comparison between ethnic controversies related to the nineteenth-century immigrant Irish and contemporary culture in the United States always risk, as recent scholarship has articulated so well, perpetuating ideas about Irish and Irish American ethnic discrimination which facilitates an “innocent” vision of Irishness and Irish American history. I am not entirely confident that my own research could not easily be put to such ends; however, in spite of that, or precisely because of that, Paddy Lonigan remains an instructive figure. As Fanning has shown, at the end of the trilogy, when Lonigan is desperately blaming other ethnic and racial minorities for his own downfall, he “comes under the influence of the anti-Semitic radio priest ‘Father Moylan.’” Moylan was based on an influential figure of the 1930s, Father Charles Coughlin, and the latter’s name has reemerged in American culture of late—he has been identified as a precursor to the most influential and inflammatory pundits in U.S. culture today.

In closing, *Regular Wild Irish* does not feign to respond directly to the kinds of questions implicit in recent political disputes over immigration in Arizona or an Islamic community center in Manhattan, but it is based on the premise that diverse responses to the economic, political, and social conflicts and changes in one’s “neighborhood” can

usefully be contextualized by openness to a larger, not a smaller, portion of the American literary and cultural past. *Regular Wild Irish* has aimed to recover texts which will help us to think more broadly about immigrant writing and discourses of ethnic and racial representation in the United States, Ireland, and elsewhere. In turn, it has hoped to open up new areas for exploration, analysis, and teaching.

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