

Star of the Sea: Resistance and Adapted Homelands

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Abstract:

Joseph O'Connor's *Star of the Sea* (2002) offers a nuanced depiction of the lifelong patterns of resistance of the Irish governess and Famine survivor, Mary Duane. Following Gayatri Spivak's notions of the Other and of "wordling" – the practice of the more powerful who seize their impressions of the experiences of those perceived as weaker to elevate themselves to "Sovereign Selves" – this essay charts the intersections of power and the production of meaning and knowledge and argues that *Star of the Sea* is a feminist excavation of strategies of diasporic strength. O'Connor's heroine is not a victimized female Other who can merely report; she is not permanently elusive and powerless, rather she is gradually revealed as a resourceful and inspirational character who relies on the idea of a noble Irish homeland which she adapts to navigate moral dilemmas, trauma and chaotic borders.

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In her celebrated essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Spivak argues that the Other can only report (1995, 28). She uses the terms "othering", "wordling" and "Colonizing Power" to describe the practices and entities involved in the human tyranny of racial and gender subordination (Felluga 2015, 325), and explains that this is a daily rather than monolithic tendency. "Worlding" is practiced by the more powerful who seize their impressions of the experiences of those perceived as weaker in order to elevate themselves to "Sovereign Selves" (*ibidem*). Diasporic narratives are also concerned with power and examine the coping strategies of the displaced. Kevin Kenny argues that "to be diasporic, [...] is to be uprooted from one's place, detached from one's nation, and searching for both" (2003, 162). Most of the steerage passengers in Joseph O'Connor's 2002 international bestseller *Star of the Sea* are presented so obliquely that they cannot even report. Ninety-four

steerage passengers die on the transatlantic voyage and all that is known of them is their names and some of their occupations which are recorded in Captain Lockwood's log. Joseph O'Connor's fictionalized epic of the voyage of a Famine ship sold eight hundred thousand copies in just one year. *The New York Times* assures the reader of Mariner's mass market paperback "a ripping yarn"¹. *The Boston Globe* (seemingly without irony) promises "a feast"². *Kirkus Reviews* praises a "gloriously overstuffed story"³. *The Economist* is rapturous, "this is a confident and sumptuously entertaining book, filled with the voice of O'Connor's native Ireland and composed with the sweep of the Atlantic"⁴. Clearly Joseph O'Connor is marketed as a native informer and the Irish Famine is sold as poignant entertainment.

The first two sections of this essay investigate Mary Duane's strategies of resistance and discuss key episodes which prove that she is not permanently elusive or powerless in her life in Ireland or on board the *Star of the Sea*. The third section argues that Duane is revealed as a resourceful character who adapts the idea of a noble Irish homeland to negotiate a workable sense of kin which allows her to cross the final border and arrive in the promising, yet challenging city of New York. The next sections examine how Mary's audible acknowledgment of maternal loss instills a sense of community among the female steerage passengers as they try to escape their silent suffering. Mary's resistance inspires the other migrant women to witness their loss and try to escape their subaltern status. The final two sections consider Dixon's practice of Othering and establish that Mary exceeds his worlding grasp and reassert that she is a decisive agent of networking rather than a voiceless victim.

The appeal of *Star of the Sea* is wide-ranging. It was a best seller in the United Kingdom in 2004 and within five years it was translated into twenty-six languages. Its reception in Ireland was appreciative and it was shortlisted for the *Sunday Independent* Irish Novel of the Year Award and nominated for International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. It won *The Irish Post* Award for Literature. *The Irish Echo* strikes a solemn note with a contemplative reminder that "O'Connor has written not only an epic novel, but also a very important one"⁵. Irish novelist Roddy Doyle declares that "This is Joseph O'Connor's best book. It is shocking hilarious, beautifully written and very, very clever"⁶. Aidan O'Malley best describes the strategy of O'Connor's sensational epic: "By posing questions about the boundaries between history and fiction, this

¹ See the front cover of the Harcourt edition.

² See the frontispiece of the Harcourt edition.

³ The diction of this advertising is sensuous and indulgent.

⁴ It also markets veracity and excitement.

⁵ This observation is sandwiched between three American promotional quotes.

⁶ Back cover of the hard cover Harcourt edition.

polyphonic, ironic echo chamber, reverberating with fictional and historical voices constantly focuses attention on who is doing the writing, who is telling the tale, and from what perspective” (2015, 138).

According to Clíona Ó Gallchoir the life of Mary Duane is “unwritten” (2013, 347). Contrary to such view, this essay will argue that the governess and heroine of *Star of the Sea* is not a victimized female Other who merely reports. In this respect, Joseph O’Connor observes that “If Mary Duane is the book’s hero – and to me she is – it is Mulvey who lives at the center of its web” (2002, unpaginated). Merridith and Dixon try to maintain life at the center of the web and their imbroglios threaten to dominate the narrative. They are both in crisis. Merridith has just managed to purchase tickets for seven-thousands of his tenants to sail on the cheaper, more dangerous voyage to Quebec and only has enough money left to buy first class tickets to New York for his family and his love interest, Mary Duane who works as their governess⁷. His health is failing, and his estate is bankrupt. Dixon has failed to publish his first novel. He is returning to the United States to take stock of his career and his prospects with Laura, Merridith’s wife. Although Dixon occupies a personally and professionally precarious position, he retains enough power as an American journalist to practice “worlding” during his voyage and throughout his life. He writes over the experiences of Pius and Mary and sells them. Mary reclaims her experience by the end of the narrative because she gains power.

Gayatri Spivak examines the dynamics of power and explores the gaps and dissonances that appear during the process of worlding: “If the project of Imperialism is violently to put together the episteme that will ‘mean’ (for others) and ‘know’ (for the self) the colonial subject as history’s nearly-selved other, the example of these deletions indicates explicitly what is always implicit: that meaning/knowledge intersects power” (Spivak 1990, 215). *Star of the Sea* carefully charts the intersections of power and the production of meaning and knowledge. Dixon is at the helm for most of the epic but the flaws in his worlding and Othering tactics become obvious by the end of his account. Spivak also notes that “feminist historiography often excavates” (1990, 198). In these terms, *Star of the Sea* is a feminist excavation.

Mary believes that she will find respect and freedom in New York once she is able to escape the grasp of Merridith, her first love and subsequent employer. Pius Mulvey, her ex-lover and arch enemy is also on the voyage and this is another challenge she must navigate. She never discovers that Merridith is her half-brother and although Mary was involved in a love affair when they were adolescents, his advances are only tolerated during the years of her employment in his house. Mary intends to break free as soon as the ship reach-

⁷ See Melissa Fagan’s (2011) discussion of these risks.

es America. Their relationship becomes even more fraught when Merridith discovers a letter while settling the bankrupted family estate before leaving Ireland which reveals that his father had a sexual relationship with Mary Duane's mother when she worked as his servant. Although Merridith is shocked by the revelation that Mary is his half-sister, he cannot curtail his feelings.

Her struggle for survival during and after the Famine is initially subsumed by detailed accounts of the picaresque suffering of Pius, the self-serving musings of the Captain and the erotic intrigues of first-class passengers which culminate in bankruptcy, syphilis and murder. Grantley Dixon serves as the primary narrator. He sailed on *Star of the Sea* as a first-class passenger and became obsessed with Mary. He later extracts and capitalizes upon salacious details from Pius's gory revelations about his life as the *Newgate Monster* to jumpstart his flagging career.

Near the end of his ultimately prosperous life, Dixon laments that "looking back over these pages, they seem to say almost nothing about her; it is though she was merely a collection of footnotes in the lives of other, more violent people" (O'Connor 2002, 389). Dixon summarizes and embellishes Mary's plight. She escapes in the second commandeered lifeboat when *Star of the Sea* is detained with hundreds of other Famine ships in the New York harbor on December 8, 1847. Dixon insists that the real danger commences once she arrives on shore⁸. He imagines that there is no new healthy or supportive community for Mary in New York; she is only offered more of the painfully familiar and chronic conditions of hunger, sexual abuse and peniless anonymity which she hoped to permanently leave in Ireland.

Maeve Tynan argues that "O'Connor is motivated by a postcolonial concern to highlight the plight of marginalized subjects [...] the colonial Irish Famine victims" (2009, 83). However, she also stresses that "the ultimate elusiveness of the central character Mary Duane signifies that many stories will remain lost, never to be recuperated" (*ibidem*). Similarly, Clíona Ó Gallchoir focuses on "the qualities of irony and subversion [...] in historical fiction which have all appeared within the period now notoriously known as the Celtic Tiger" (2013, 344). She observes that "O'Connor's book appears at first to counter the trope of silence: it fairly bristles with words, and wears its intertextuality on its sleeve, quoting, referencing and copying all manner of texts and genres from the period of the Famine – novels, ballads, newspapers, reports, diaries, letters and so on" (346). Ó Gallchoir also draws upon Margaret Kelleher's insightful and impressively rich study of the "twentieth century representations of female Famine victims" which identifies reductive narrative tendencies or emerging "recurring characterizations [...] the

⁸ O'Connor's (2007) *Redemption Falls* explores the struggles of Eliza Mooney, eighteen years after the arrival of Mary Duane, her mother.

Famine mother, the ministering angel, the sacrificial victim” (1997, 111). By the end of *Star of the Sea* “Mary Duane has played almost every role available to a female character in nineteenth century fiction – lover, abandoned woman, mother, servant, fallen woman and prostitute” (359). Ó Gallchoir (*ibidem*) views Mary as an “icon [and] a permanently elusive figure of profound meaning”, and concludes that

Mary in fact moves from being a recognizable character, an individual with interiority constructed through the norms of realist fiction, to being effectively a metafictional construct, a commentary on previous representations of women in fiction. What remains constant throughout these multiple roles is the fact that she can never determine her own fate. (*Ibidem*)

1. Acts of resistance and emotional agency

In the early bucolic sections of the saga in Ireland before the Famine, Mary falls in love with her landlord’s son and acts upon her desire. They cavort in the fields and forests of the Kingscourt estate until David tells his irascible father about their involvement. Lord Kingscourt insists that the liaison ends. He is motivated by predictable class concerns but he is also worried about incest in her bloodlines. The family tradition continues, and now Lord Kingscourt’s son is involved with his half-sister. David confesses to Mary that he must obey his father and offers financial compensation. She strikes his face and in spite of her poverty, refuses the blackened coins: “If she’d had a knife, she would have murdered him then. Gashed him in the throat like a slaughterman felling an ox” (O’Connor 2002, 76). Mary experiences violent rage after her rejection but has the foresight not to act. David believes that gifts of money will appease Mary and in their final days in Ireland, he gives her his sketchbook and five pounds. She burns his drawings and donates the money to a charity organized for the starving. She will not be seen as a victim.

Ó Gallchoir (2013) identifies Mary’s multiple stereotypical roles over the progression of the novel but overlooks how she consistently demonstrates emotional agency despite her limited economic and social resources. This pattern of self-respect and meaningful resistance later continues after Pious abandons her when he hears of her pregnancy. She makes the practical decision to accept Nicolas Mulvey’s offer to leave the priesthood and marry her. After she asks the community priest for advice, she decides to pursue an erotic relationship instead of settling for a marriage of convenience. She later courageously escapes from the workhouse, and even demonstrates some agency in her role as servant – she tries to withdraw from ugly dining scenes with Pius aboard *Star of the Sea*, chooses silence or duplicity instead of self-recrimination, teaches herself to read, saves her wages and most importantly, she decides that she is going to leave her position as servant in Merridith’s family

once she reaches New York⁹. She is not a passive victim and by 1847, Mary was waiting in the New York Harbor with the real possibility of a better life.

Additional proof of Mary's agency in her roles as mother, maid and emigrant can be found by turning to other key episodes. Ó Gallchoir argues that Mary's life "has been determined largely by the actions of the central male characters" (2013, 359). She mentions Mary's letter to the Else Be Liables secret society, acknowledges that Mary denounces Pius, calls for his killing and notes that her accusation "is equally focused on his crimes as a land robber, a seducer and a blackguard" (358). Mary calls upon vigilantes to eliminate her enemy rather than do it herself. This is realistic rather than cowardly since Pius or the Monster of Newgate is a seasoned and brutal killer who feels no remorse for his victims. Even his enemies respect his homicidal capacity and they conscript him to kill Merridith before he disembarks. He climbs through the porthole wearing a black mask and brandishing a knife during his search for Merridith. His mission is abruptly aborted when he mistakenly ends up in the cabin of Jonathan, Merridith's young son who awakens and sees the interloper. Pius escapes this foray without blame because no one believes the histrionic child.

Mary's profound agency reappears in the final third of the novel when she confronts Pius about his role in the death of Alice-Mary. She also blames Pius for the killing of their cow which led to their financial ruin, the subsequent violent expulsion from the estate and Nicholas' mercy-killing of their baby (without Mary's knowledge or consent) because he could not provide for his family during the early years of the Famine. Mary is unsparing in her expression of hatred of the miscreant. She lashes out verbally but refrains from physical violence and this is another wise and self-preserving choice. Pius tries to deflect her anger and garner her sympathy by displaying his gangrenous lacerations inflicted by the Else Be Liables gang. She instantly retorts: "Good enough for you, then. I hope they kill you. I will laugh" (O'Connor 2002, 293).

He further challenges her resolve by asking if she would be capable of actually holding the knife and she remains silent. At the start of their altercation, Mary swears that she would have jumped off the ship had she known that he was there, yet in another example of restraint she waits for a lifeboat. This confrontation (which is followed by calculated silence) also requires courage. She makes the aggressor hear an account of his crimes and rejects

⁹ "Failure of the 1846 potato crop ushered in an extended period of disaster, made worse by the harsh weather conditions. Nature played a cruel trick in 1847, when high yields per acre far from compensated for the greatly reduced acreage under potatoes [...] the 1848 crop was non-existent." Cfr. Ó Gráda (1994, 177).

his paltry excuses by invoking the power of her dead husband to curse him¹⁰. This threat profoundly affects Pius who despite his sociopathic characteristics, still believes in the power of priesthood.

Pius feels guilty because of his despicable conduct toward his only brother who initially joined the priesthood so that they could have a better chance of survival on their small patch of rented, barren land after the death of their parents from hunger. Mary's blistering malediction profoundly unsettles him and gives her peace in an otherwise unbearable situation. The altercation is recorded in the Jamaican sailor's sworn statement to the New York Police Department. John Wainwright was stationed outside the First-Class quarters when he overheard the heated exchange. Eventually he is forced to open the cabin door after hearing screams. Mary reverts to self-preserving silence when the sailor tries to confirm her welfare and rather than condemn Pius and reveal his identity, she leaves the stateroom. Arguably, she is not covering for Pius but is trying to avoid creating a scene which might endanger her position as governess. The statement ends with the sailor's account of the stench of the infected scarlet letter carved on Pius's chest by the *Else Be Liables*.

News of Mulvey's aggression has reached the United States and he remains on permanent police record. This episode is an additional record of Mary Duane's agency. Wainwright intervenes and cares enough to officially report the abuse experienced by an Irish female servant. Ó Gallchoir argues that the letter to the *Else Be Liables* "testifies to her ability to narrate her own experiences, the novel ultimately shifts its focus from her words and her specific experiences, to instate her instead as a purely symbolic figure and undocumented nature of her life" (2013, 359). John Wainwright bravely helps to document this oppressive episode because Mary found the courage to confront her aggressor: "I curse the living day I ever let you near me" (O'Connor 2002, 293).

2. *Resisting worlding*

It is true that for the lion's share of the novel, Mary does not directly recount her own experiences, which are embedded primarily in two official documents – the police report and the doctor's case notes, as well as in Dixon's editorialized musings. Nevertheless, her life experiences are not erased¹¹. Near the end of the saga, in Chapter 34 "a verbatim selection" of Dr. Wil-

¹⁰ See José Carregal Romero's critique of the abnegation and passivity of Irish mothers (Carregal Romero 2012, 123).

¹¹ Pius Mulvey, David Merridith, Dr. Mangan and others sometimes claim to know what Mary is thinking and their impressions of her thoughts are sometimes focalized through their perceptions. This may lead to distortion which is less apparent in the auto-diegetic sequences.

liam James Mangan's case-notes appears (O'Connor 2002, 337). The physician examines sixty-seven steerage passengers, one servant and four first-class passengers. Mary is the penultimate patient and this encounter and the social history which he embellishes for her dominates his case notes. Six terse paragraphs are allotted to the steerage and first-class clients while fifteen detailed paragraphs are allocated to Mary. The doctor is moved by her ravaged beauty and remarks upon "intelligence notably above average. Very fluent English. Strange Chaucerian kind of flavor. Watchful" (339). He has just examined Merridith, diagnosed advanced syphilis and heard his confession about his long involvement with Mary. He is concerned for Mary's health and pressures him to promise that he will leave Mary alone. Dr. Mangan is also fascinated by the siblings' "strong similarity, now one sees it" (*ibidem*).

Mary's considered responses to the doctor's queries are another form of meaningful and strategic resistance. She protects the reputation of her deceased husband Nicolas by skillfully mischaracterizing the mercy killing of their daughter as an accident, disguises her life as prostitute with the probable and conventional fiction of having lived in hostels and worked in convent laundries. Mary tells Dr. Mangan about her miscarriage during her one hundred and eighty mile walk to Dublin after her daring escape from the oppressive workhouse. Her sexual history with Merridith remains a secret and is replaced by a succinct wish to leave the family for "no reason, sir" (338). Mary further demonstrates autonomy in her revelation that she "had never been a servant until relatively recently; felt it was not the life for her" (339). She shares her plan to travel to Cleveland to stay with others from her County or perhaps venture as far north as Nova Scotia to seek shelter with a distant relative. Mary is willing to travel to find the right circumstances and she is also eminently resourceful as indicated in her preference, "to work as a seamstress or a shopgirl, perhaps, but will take any opportunity 'except for domestic service'" (340). This episode demonstrates her determined agency, independence and willingness to traverse the Atlantic and an entire continent to secure respect and safety.

One of the most compelling observations in Margaret Kelleher's *The Feminization of the Famine* is that "women's hungry bodies emerge as the central object, famine's effects most graphically imagined through the construction of the female spectacle [...] woman's body receives from the gaze of the narrator, an unprecedented physical inspection" (1997, 49). Mary survives hunger and prostitution in Ireland and must be examined by a physician before the ship's arrival. In his professional and therapeutic role, Dr. Mangan examines Mary's body and describes a "number of healed but visible scars on abdomen, upper back, buttocks, thighs and other areas but for these she offered no explanation other than roughhouse play with her two charges" (O'Connor 2002, 340). He thoroughly inspects her genitals, "No exanthema at present. No lesions or subcutaneous swelling and can remember none. No

discharge or pain. Showed her a number of symptomatic illustrations but she said she had never had any" (*ibidem*). It is a demonstration of the strength of Mary's resolve that she remains composed during the examination. Her body is a record of her suffering and her survival. She directly asks the doctor whether he is looking for syphilis and reassures him that she "had never had anything like that [...] would know if she did" (*ibidem*). Dr. Mangan offered that his assistant could break the news to Laura about her husband's sexually transmitted disease if he Merridith could not find the courage. Mary is far more independent and knowledgeable about her own health and body and the damage it records.

The doctor is suspicious of Mary's account of her occupational history and her inability to remember addresses or names of convents or hospitals where she claimed to have lived. He records that he is "nevertheless v. troubled as to reason for evasiveness or dissembling re the scars. Not scrapes or bruises as might result from horseplay, but severe abrasions, welts, and striations to the skin" (O'Connor 2002, 341). The physician decides that "the unfortunate girl may at one time have earned her living in a certain matter. Possesses a far greater knowledge of matters of conception and how to avoid it, indeed of the mysteries of the female assemblage in general, than is customary" (*ibidem*). Mary realizes that the doctor does not believe her fabrications and reassures him that she has not been whipped by her employers, also indicating that she will not disclose additional details about her sexual past while asserting that she is aware of his conjectures.

Mary does not allow herself to be underestimated. She explains that she created an ointment from honey to soothe her irritated skin and he is impressed that she is very familiar with a remedy he has just discovered in a current medical journal. Her most graceful gesture occurs at the end of her examination. Dr. Mangan may see Mary as a poignant and alluring representative of "the deserving poor", to use Kelleher's wording (1997, 96), and accordingly offers help if she ever returns to Dublin. She declines and in turn offers to pray for his family, thankful for his gentleness at the end of the appointment. This remark demonstrates how little solicitude she has received in her life. Her magnanimity impresses the doctor who feels that he has "been in the presence of a very exceptional person" (O'Connor 2002, 342). Mary carries herself with poise during this official medical examination on the pivotal night before *Star of the Sea* arrives in New York. Even though she has been travelling First Class, as a servant, her medical report still matters. Steerage passengers were even more vulnerable, and although some were comparatively healthy, they were forced to live in a limbo for seven desperate weeks with barely any food, water, suitable bedding or clothing on board *Star of the Sea*. Upon final release from the oppressive and unseaworthy ship, all steerage passengers were confined indefinitely at inspection stations on Ward's Island. They managed to survive the inhumane voyage and even

though many had relatives (within sight of the vessel) who were anxiously inquiring about their well-being, they were powerless however desperately they wanted to disembark into the promise of their new lives.

3. Navigating borders / adapting homelands

Mary's most decisive and powerful demonstration of agency occurs near the end of the novel in the mutiny scene in the Buttermilk Channel, within sight of Staten Island to the west and Brooklyn to the East (O'Connor 2002, 348-349). Although the traumatized steerage passengers rejoice at the sight of the American coast, the seasoned Captain of *Star of the Sea* is alarmed:

I knew something was badly amiss, for in fourteen years making the voyage this had never happened before. A very heavy feeling of foreboding came down. From there we were towed around the island and into the harbour to meet a situation of extreme concern. Such a scene I had never seen in my life. At my estimation, about a hundred vessels are lying at anchor in the harbor at present, all having been refused permission to tie up at the dock. (348)

Steerage passengers throw their bedding overboard fearing that the inspectors will discover lice. They do not realize that this will make their lives even more miserable because they are still to face a lengthy quarantine below deck and if they become ill, they will be deported.

Mary joins a group of fifty steerage passengers who have managed to cut loose two lifeboats from their iron chains. She decides that she will jump and try to board the lifeboat rather than wait indefinitely until the American authorities release the vessel. Predictably, the first-class passengers are briefly detained and promptly rewarded for a comparatively minor inconvenience with a complete remission of their fares. They are also treated to a lavish champagne reception at a luxurious hotel at the expense of the owners of *Star of the Sea*. Mary's decision to leave the ship without permission also required courage under pressure since she could see the group in the first life boat panicking and flailing after losing their oars, the desperate fugitives were seen trying to paddle with their hands" (363). At this tense moment, she must defend herself from the importunate and egregious Pius who tries to push aside the enfeebled Daniel Grady, an old man whose Bostonian relatives anxiously await his arrival on the dock. His family rejoices when they see that he has been given the last seat on the crowded lifeboat. Grady succumbs to Pius's whimpering and offers his seat. He also takes the opportunity to remind Mary about the importance of respecting her kin. Mary decides to admit that Pius is her "only living relative in three thousand miles" (366). In this exchange, Mary and Grady share what James Clifford identifies as "the currency of diaspora discourses [...] The language of the diaspora is in-

creasingly invoked by displaced peoples who feel (maintain, revive, invent) a connection with a prior home" (1994, 49).

Pius selfishly contravenes Mary's initial wish that the old man be given the last seat. Grady dies shortly after within sight of his bewildered relatives who have made many painful sacrifices to pay for his passage to America, "Often they themselves had gone hungry just to save him. There was no need for him to do it, only simple human mercy" (O'Connor 2002, 364). Grady finds tremendous comfort in his memories of Galway and is proud of his community and he reassures Mary, "That name is wealth to you. Your people were great" (*ibidem*). Unlike Pius, who uses the violent past to try and cajole Mary into forgiving him and publicly claiming him as kin so that he can take the last seat, Grady's apotheosis lies in his heartfelt tribute and loyalty to their shared idea of homeland. In such respect, James Clifford emphasizes the tenuous nature of the currency of diaspora, and observes how a "sense of connection must be strong enough to resist erasure through the normalizing process of forgetting, assimilating and distancing" (1994, 310). Grady's reverential memories of Mary's family give her the courage to leave the ship as quickly as possible and risk the final journey on the lifeboat. His intervention invokes pride, nostalgia, longing, a sense of belonging. Mary experiences additional pain in this scene because Pius is a destructive and malicious force in her life in direct opposition to the earnestly invoked memories of her beloved family. There is a dissonance in the "lived experiences of diasporic women" which involves "painful difficulty in mediating discrepant worlds. Community can be a site both of support and oppression" (Clifford 1994, 312).

Mary faces a triple border or multiple sites of "regulated and subversive crossing" (310). Her first journey was the long but regulated crossing on Star of the Sea which required careful negotiations with Merridith, Pius and Dr. Mangan. Her next test demanded her ability to quickly reconcile the difference between Grady's recollections of her deceased heroic family with the present reality of her remaining kin, the threatening Pius. She invokes her daughter's loss at this perilous junction and this act of witnessing past trauma permits her to begin her shortest but most dangerous journey on the commandeered lifeboat. This episode resonates with "forms of longing, memory and (dis)identification" (303). Dan Lainer-Vos considers the role of gifts in fortifying a communal sense of homeland, "The language of gift-giving and exchange is absolutely central to the way people understand their relationship to the nation. Selfless giving often serves to attest to one's ties to the nation" (2012, 78). Mary and Grady have very limited resources, but they honor their memory of a noble homeland by giving the undeserving Pius the gift of a very scarce commodity.

Dixon is not on deck to hear this pivotal exchange and so he relies on the accounts of the steerage women of Mary's grace. He characterizes her actions in messianic terms: "When the moment of retribution rolled up out of

history and presented itself like an executioner's sword she did not seize it" (O'Connor 2002, 366). The crisis in this scene is amplified when a bystander asks the distraught Mary whether she would rather return to the ship and perhaps risk deportation to Ireland with Pius. Dixon indicates that "She wavered briefly [...]" (363). It is noteworthy that even in this episode of duress she takes the time to evaluate her best course of action. She faces a dilemma: either she claims Pius as kin and saves his life and risks endangering herself by prolonging her contact with him when she hoped for an unencumbered and fresh start in the United States, or she claims revenge by disowning him and forcing him back to the ship where he may likely die of his infected wounds or the violent machinations of the Else be Liable gang who would certainly find a way to board the quarantined and immobile *Star of the Sea*. And though Grady encourages Mary, he also acts as her conscience:

Was he indeed related to her? She must speak the truth. To deny one of your own family was a dreadful thing to do. Far too many in Ireland had done it before. So many had turned against their own blood now [...] For a man to turn his back on his brother was the blackest sin. But men were weak. So often they were afraid. For a woman to do it could never be forgiven. (364)

In this dramatic confrontation, Mary must balance her need for self-preservation and refrain from denouncing Pius as an act of revenge¹². She hesitates but ultimately stays on her practical course of jumping ship. She manages to distance herself from him even in the act of claiming him, "[...] she confirmed that Pius Mulvey of Ardnagreevagh was the brother of her late husband [...]" (O'Connor 2002, 366). Carna represents dignity and greatness and her husband signifies decency. Mary honors her suffering by implying that although Pius is kin, he is not from Carna and he is not her husband. This is a poignant example of how diaspora affects a sense of place. She is within site of the New York shoreline but the only way she is able to reach it is to adapt her sense of truth and the meaning of kin. She must bend her view of Pius to match Grady's belief in the nobility of family.

Dixon notes that Mary and the others "were last seen drifting in the direction of the dock" (366). This scene may easily be misread as proof of Mary's dispensation of saintly forgiveness to Pius. She honors the spirit of Grady's view of homeland and claims her only living, albeit murderous family skillfully manages her anger while sitting beside Pius. She renegotiates the mem-

¹² See José Carregal Romero's (2012) discussion of the impact of the older Irish generation's attempt to transmit their values to younger generations. Romero suggests this process can sometimes be "menacing" (133). Although Mary's encounter with Grady reminds her of the inspirational power of community, his public challenge also adds to intense the pressure she faces before deciding if she should jump into the unstable and chaotic lifeboat.

ory of trauma and blessings of her homeland without damaging her hope for the future during this altercation. Accordingly, “the inbetweenness of the passage of the ship, of the migrants on board who are about to renegotiate their identities as immigrants in the United States, and of the novel itself, which lies somewhere on the border of fiction and history, brings the uncanny to the heart of the text” (Beville 2014, 36). Mary has safely crossed the Atlantic but not without danger or strife and now she has faced the final crossing. Her admission that Pius is her relative permits her to claim the last place. As Clifford reminds us, “identifications not identities, acts of relationship rather than pre-given forms: [are] a network of partially connected histories, a persistently displaced and reinvented time/space of crossings” (1994, 321).

Near the end of the novel, Dixon becomes obsessed with tracking down Mary, “It is almost seventy years since the events of that night and not a day has passed in those seven long decades – I mean not one single day – without my searching my mind for some explanation of what happened next” (O’Connor 2002, 365). She becomes his new *cause célèbre*. This preoccupation alleviates his guilt about profiting from publishing lurid accounts of Pius’s violent life. He has escaped punishment for murdering Merridith, married his widow and enjoyed the affection of his victim’s sons. His lifelong interest in Mary’s life also distracts him from the fact that his grandfather once owned slaves. Dixon accepted a generous monthly allowance from the wealthy patriarch for several years so that he could pursue his impecunious novel writing aspirations in London. His family lore insists that their beloved patriarch only bought the slaves in sympathy because of his own Choctaw blood and his pressing need to give minorities a better life. This tradition of rationalization likely motivated Dixon’s bold yet calculated decision to slit Laura’s husband’s throat one hour before midnight on the last night at sea. It also assuaged his fears that she might never leave her husband. The timely murder also provided him with the opportunity of cultivating close bonds with Merridith’s two sons who rapidly begin to think of him as their new and financially fit father.

Dixon absolves his conscience after the murder because he knew that Merridith was in the advanced stages of syphilis and that a sudden and mysteriously violent death spares his family from censure. He is aware that the education of Merridith’s sons would now be funded by the Navy pension which would have been forfeited if he committed suicide or died from a stigmatized sexual disease. It is common knowledge that Merridith was on the verge of bankruptcy and his poorly conceived and tasteless plans to quickly amass wealth by building replicas of Irish Manor houses in Manhattan (instead of embracing the practical and profitable trend of skyscrapers) would only bring additional financial anguish to his beleaguered family. His advancing syphilis would have rendered him blind, unable to work and requiring constant medical care. He is so debilitated that the ship’s doctor recommends

he enters hospice care as soon as he disembarks. Laura's patience is likely to run out, but her father's wealth ensures that her new American future was certainly bright unlike Mary, who had to take her chances and continuously strive to advance herself.

Merridith was fully aware that Laura was having an affair with Dixon. His conspicuous bravado inspired his melodramatic performance with his razor, insistent dismissal of his armed guard shortly before midnight on his last night on earth and his declaration "Lay on MacDuff" all suggest that he knew that Dixon was intent on murder (O'Connor 2002, 362). It is possible that he welcomed a sudden death which would preserve his honor and unburden his family. He likely planted the Else Be Liable note so that suspicion would be deflected from Dixon who could then support Laura and her two sons for the rest of their lives. Mary survives the voyage while her employer succumbs. In such terms, *Star of the Sea* deftly illustrates the inevitable decay of the Anglo-Irish landlords and the survival of their servants.

Mary did not have the luxury of relying upon marital income. She does not have the financial means to buy "flexible citizenship" (Clifford 1994, 312). She is one of the fifty thousand of "assisted emigrants" (Miller 1999, 182). Once she decides to sever her ties with Merridith, her success will mostly depend upon her own resilience and resourcefulness. *Star of the Sea* landed in the New York harbor in December of 1847. Tyler Anbinder observes that "fewer cities had ever grown so big so fast. By 1845, New York was home to 70, 000 Irish immigrants, 65,000 immigrants born elsewhere, and 236, 000 American born residents" (2016, 27). Meanwhile, in Ireland, "excess mortality mounted from the summer of 1846 on and was at a peak in 1847-1848 though it was to persist until 1850 or 1851 in some areas. Hunger induced dysentery and typhus accounted for most of the deaths" (O Gráda 1994, 197). Mary was from County Galway, which along with County Clare experienced "high death rates" (O Gráda 1999, 110). As Kevin Kenny (2017, 7) explains:

Throughout the post-Famine era, Ireland bucked the trend of social and economic history elsewhere in the West [...] Ireland's population by contrast was cut in half, its industrial base contracted, and the number of people living in cities declined. Migration from the countryside to cities was common everywhere [...] but those who left the countryside had little choice but to move abroad.

4. *New homelands: the subalterns speak*

Dixon sanctifies Mary and turns the altercation at the lifeboats into a *pietà* with Pius kneeling in contrition at her feet. The journalist imbues his reaction to the scene with a mysterious inconclusiveness and characteristically inserts himself into the middle of the trauma:

I have spoken to every living person who witnessed the occurrence: every man, every woman, every child, and every sailor. I have discussed it with philosophers, doctors of the mind. Priests. Ministers. Mothers. Wives. For many of those years I saw it in dreams; sometimes still, I see it even now. And I believe when my own time comes, I will see it again; an event I never saw only reported. (O'Connor 2002, 365)

His obsession over Mary's reaction for the rest of his life may absolve him of regret for his sins. He offers accounts from the women who overheard Mary weeping when she called out the name of her murdered daughter, "For she wept that night on the Star of the Sea, as perhaps only the mother of a murdered child can weep" (*ibidem*). The passengers also begin to keen and call out the names of their own lost children. The women in steerage are the true subalterns in the novel, suffering squalid and dangerous conditions in the bowels of the converted slave ship. Up until this dramatic moment, they were seldom seen and never heard. They are a ghostly presence except for their mention in the Captain's log of daily internments in the sea. Mary's expression of loss leads to a collective bonding of the mothers in steerage and they help her stand. In this moment, Mary's memories of homeland resonate with their own experiences and they help her rise from her grief which is facilitated by a collective "backward glance towards the Irish homeland" (Jenkins 2009, 86). It is cathartic and inspires the women to position Mary toward the future. Their literal and symbolic support of Mary is even more meaningful because there is no room left for them on the second craft. Lucy Collins stresses the importance of unity in the collective experience of emigrant women, "This [...] shift is an important one for migrants, giving memory a particular valency in defining their past selves and in recording the transition they have undergone" (Collins 2015, 52). It is significant that this is also the exact moment in the novel when Mary is liberated from Dixon's worlding. The Global Irish Diaspora Strategy explains, "The Irish diaspora comprises emigrants from Ireland and their descendants around the world and those with a tangible connection to Ireland. This is not static [...] Interest can be prompted by major external events, by changes in circumstance or by chance" (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2015, 16). Here the once silent women of steerage are emboldened by the major event of the sight of America and the prospect of better lives. Mary's invocation of loss is a flash-point of unity and serves as a tangible connection to their homeland and this acknowledgement of their collective loss as mothers leads them to additional diasporic strength. Fiona Adamson maintains that a "diasporic identity is a means of asserting a political identity, which can be taken up by a group as a source of empowerment" (2008, 30). Their choral incantation of maternal grief empowers through connection. Adamson identifies the process as transnational networking which is "defined primarily by a shared collective identify – in other words, networks that are defined by a common identity

marker or category” (2008, 30). The female migrant passengers mourn the loss of their children in Ireland and also honor the memories of their family members lost *en route* to New York. Mary’s lamentation for her child is an act of resistance which inspires the steerage women to join her in protest and facilitate her escape on the lifeboat. These acts of resistance inspire a third intervention. Captain Lockwood planned to dispose of the corpses in steerage with rat poison but Captain Daniel O’ Dowd of the New York Police intervened and sent two barges to pick up the dead. The relatives of the steerage passengers were denied seats until the Pilot overheard their crying. He offered a compromise, “[...] Rose English, a married woman of Roscommon was selected, her husband being among the dead” (O’Connor 2002, 369). Rose English asserts herself and asks that the ceremony might be delayed for a few minutes until it is six p.m. in Ireland, when “the bells would be tolling all over [the country] for the Angelus” (*ibidem*). Like Mary Rose relies upon an adapted sense of a noble homeland: she controls the timing of the ritual in America so that it corresponds with the Catholic call to prayer back home. This enables her to honor her kin and their shared spirituality. Perhaps inspired by Mary, she becomes an agent of networking when the Pilot’s mate from Naples joins her recital of the Rosary in Latin. She agrees to Reverend Deedes’s request to read from the *Book of Common Prayer* and takes the hand of Lady Kingscourt thus honoring the spirit of goodwill of the Angelus. This is another powerful example of diaspora’s profound affect upon a sense of place.

Dixon does not explain Mary’s ability to survive the icy journey on the crowded lifeboat in the sleet. In his imagination, she has landed but does not manage to thrive. Instead she immediately succumbs to her former vagrancy and quickly digresses to tuberculosis and prostitution. He also tries to locate any of her living relatives in Ireland and explains that Mary’s only brother was an Irish revolutionary who was killed after helping to murder a British police officer. Clearly, (and unfairly) for Dixon, this only surviving male Duane is a dangerous example of “the undeserving poor”. He transfers his worlding practice and downplays the heroic nature of the Fenian rescue attempt. Dixon cannot imagine that anything good will ever happen to Mary. He suggests that she was arrested twice while working as a prostitute in lower Manhattan, became a beggar in Chicago and that she spent two days in a Minnesota hospital for a chest ailment in 1854. Dixon hires investigators and detectives, posts rewards, and collects reports of various sightings. His efforts are indefatigable and varied: she has become a nun in Ontario, a lavatory sweeper, a brothel maid, a frontiersman’s wife, an orphanage cook, or a janitor on trains. Only the last possibility promises agency: she is a senator’s grandmother. In this scenario Mary must wait to gain the power she can only acquire through the success of her male progeny.

Generations later, near the end of his own life, Dixon imagines he sees Mary selling violets on Broadway. His rational mind registers the age discrep-

ancy, but he is still fixated on propagating her marginalization and perpetual martyrdom. He is sustained by these unverified reveries of the disenfranchised Mary after the death of his ex-wife. In one of Dixon's more honest and humble moments, he confesses that if he "found Mary Duane now it would be a kind of loss" (O' Connor 2002, 382). Although Mary is his most venerated yet prostituted saint, he believes she has not amounted to much in America. He imagines that countless iterations of Mary clean toilets. She serves as Dixon's fetishized emblem of disenfranchised and underemployed Irish victims. Tyler Anbinder reveals that in the years after the Famine, "Irish immigrant women were much more likely to work for pay than any other female immigrants or native-born women" (2016, 164). By 1860, thirty-five percent of Irish-born women were employed with the majority working as servants or in the needle trade. Four percent of Irish immigrant women in New York owned their own businesses while three percent worked as nurses (2016, 169). This is a conservative estimate because many married Irish women faced stigma in the U.S. workforce. Mary's demonstration of resourcefulness in Ireland and her skillful negotiation of conflicts in liminal spaces and borders suggests that she will be successful in her new life.

5. New homeland possibilities

Mary could have continued working with Laura after the death of Merridith, and she may have been free from abuse in upstate New York. By 1872, in neighboring Massachusetts, "the annual earnings of servants exceeded those of most other women workers, without even taking into consideration that servants got their board free" (Ó Gráda 2015, 8). And although male and female employers sometimes abused their workers, "domestic service held out several advantages. It offered a healthier lifestyle than factory or needlework and steadier employment. It involved living in private dwellings in middle class streets rather than tenements. It facilitated saving and remitting funds home" (9). Of course, in Mary's case, there was no one to receive money since all of her remaining family in Ireland starved to death except for her previously mentioned brother who was allegedly one of the Fenian prisoners killed in the Clerkenwell Explosion of December 1867 while awaiting trial¹³. Merridith's choice of New York was a boon for Mary, although it was more expensive she could earn a higher wage.

Dixon is wedded to the trope of Mary's perpetual martyrdom and abject poverty. He undersells her economic possibilities and overlooks her demonstrated traits of unwavering stamina and resourcefulness. Emigration to

¹³ See Melissa Fegan's (2011) compelling discussion of one of the most famous events in Irish Nationalist History.

North America did not spell universal misery for those who fled the Irish Famine. Several newcomers found prosperity and happiness and, as Ó Gráda observes, “the very early history [...] offers testimony of the adaptability of emigrant Irish, even the very poorest among them” (2015, 9). Dixon prospers because of his *schadenfreude*. Mary Duane always refuses the role of “ministering angel” and this saves her from perpetual victimhood. Her experiences are embedded and recorded in the police report, Dr. Mangan’s case notes and the accounts from the steerage passengers of her crying out the name of her drowned daughter during the lifeboat crisis. Her courage can be distilled from Grantley Dixon’s proximity and privilege. She also has the foresight to ensure that the Merridith family provides her with an excellent recommendation¹⁴. And although Mary did not want to work as a domestic servant, a good recommendation letter would help to secure gainful employment in other occupations.

In “The Haunted Man” chapter, Dixon anticipates critics who might accuse him of using Mary’s struggles as a ghoulish muse just as he profited from selling accounts of Pius’s depravity: “Only once, in response to a newspaper advertisement, did I receive anything she might have written herself” (O’Connor 2002, 358). Dixon is intent on convincing his audience that he made every effort to find the truth about Mary’s life. He critiques the misspellings in the letter and questions its provenance because of its missing return address. He maintains that it was “laden with the speech patterns of southern Connemara” (359). The fact that it was sent from Dublin, New Hampshire on Christmas Eve, 1871, adds to the suspicious bathos. And since the author used the third person, it is likely that they were trying to collect some of the ample reward money that he had advertised across the United States. He characteristically absolves himself of prurience:

I would have liked to have been able to say more in the present account, to do more than record the few known facts of her existence in terms of the existences of the men who hurt her. But I am simply not in a position to do so. Some things I have invented but I could not invent Mary Duane; at least no more than I have already done. She suffered more than enough composition. (389)

As a final act of cultural appropriation Dixon names his only child (who died shortly after her premature birth) Verity Mary Merridith Dixon, thus producing an incongruous memorial or hybridized amalgamation of various tropes. Clearly he values the pathos of the virtuous Anglo-Irish landlady who dies after ministering to her tenants. The naming of his child is a tribute to Verity and ameliorates her loss. If she had lived, she would have been con-

¹⁴ “One of the most difficult aspects of domestic service for an immigrant was finding the first job without references”. See Anbinder (2016, 165).

fronted with the indignity of her husband's chronic infidelity and the scandal of Merridith's syphilis and murder. Dixon is an unpunished murderer and his hubris is crowned by his choice of names. Every tragedy somehow reminds him of his own regrets. He laments that he could not conceive another child with Laura. Adoption is not possible and he claims marginalized and oppressed status in his explanation that he was forbidden to adopt because of his father's partial Choctaw heritage, "the colour of my body is the same as President Wilson's but the colour of my soul is legally not"¹⁵ (389). He is incensed that the Office of Minors mislabeled him and listed the reason for his unsuitability "with the single word 'Negritude'" (*ibidem*). Dixon is overjoyed with his relationship with Laura's sons who become "the joy of my days" (393). He is proud that they have fully assimilated into American life: "They never talk about Ireland now. They tend to say that they were born in America" (*ibidem*). Ultimately, O'Connor's male protagonist displays mock humility when he boasts they both decided to legally change their names to his in their early twenties, "an election as unexpected as entirely underserved" (*ibidem*).

6. *Dying habits of sovereignty*

Mary in the end eludes the worlding grasp of Merridith and manages to travel beyond the reach of the relentless Dixon. Even until his dying days, he continues his imperial habit of collecting impressions about the poor and those he perceives as Other:

I sometimes see a child netting the astonishing butterflies that cluster in the nettles near the back of the chapel. He sells them in fruit jars at his shoeshine station on 12th Street; this bright little mulatto boy who whistles southern gospel as he tiptoes between the gravestones chuckling to himself... I like to think of the boy whistling gospel over me, and his sons whistling, when he grows to be a man. But I know this will not happen. I will hear nothing then. (O'Connor 2002, 394)

In this racist and self-pitying vignette, Dixon recreates symbolically his grandfather's "munificent" relationship with his slaves. Mary has travelled beyond the range of his worlding tendencies so now in order to retain his status as "Sovereign Subject" he must find a new preoccupation. In this respect, Sinéad Moynihan considers the "strong connections O'Connor creates between the respective situations of Irish immigrant to America and African Americans [...]" (2008, 44), a connection that may be vexed and which "foregrounds the central issue that is troubling in relation to *Star of the Sea*,

¹⁵ O'Connor explains that he invented the existence of this adoption law in New York (2012, 400).

namely the nature of its assumed relationship with the Black Atlantic" (*ibidem*). Dixon's habit of "othering" is predictable. Mary has escaped his grasp and this means that he must return to his primary guilt while he continues his pattern of limiting the possibilities of those he classifies as Others. Dixon imagines nothing but misery in America for Mary and although she was not landing in Paradise she did have the will to succeed.

Mary is now free and Dixon needs another "cause". This explains his fascination with the whistling shoeshine "boy" who is a comfort to Dixon who enjoys what he perceives as the street worker's happy-go-lucky acceptance of stultification and economic deprivation. The child tries to earn extra cash with his impractical venture of selling butterflies; a poignant details which serves as a replacement for the report of Mary Duane weeping while uttering Alice Mary's name. The cherished *memento mori* is a badge of Dixon's sovereignty: "They were born, and they lived and they died. And I see myself on the deck in a scream of vengeance; as though it were my own spouse who had been scourged to despair; my own helpless child so cruelly destroyed" (O'Connor 2002, 366). Here Dixon claims center stage in the real suffering of those he has "Othered". The American journalist thrives by feeding vicariously on real pain and cataclysmic Irish loss, but he is not immortal.

Dixon is imaginative enough to ensure that his fetish is never depleted and fantasizes that the children of the shoe polisher are equally listless and stereotypically musical. In Dixon's hierarchal musings, they have nothing more pressing to do than serenade the murderer into the afterlife with their mellifluous southern hymns which may remind him of the family plantation in Louisiana. The children of the street worker never become men. It is important to the aging Dixon that they remain boys¹⁶. In this soliloquy, he needs the reader to pity him in his last diseased, mournful days. He reveals his craving of admiration for his self-professed stalwart strength as a widower lunching with his sons when he gamely brags about overhearing the waiters joke about the trio resembling "Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego" (O'Connor 2002, 393)¹⁷. Mary Hickman reminds us that:

nineteenth-migration from Ireland to the United States of America is seen as fulfilling the criteria of a classic 'diaspora'. Irish immigrants arrived during a century in which the United States of America became a post-slavery society, at a time

¹⁶ Consider the perpetual apprentice role of Wash in Titch's scientific career in Esi Edugyan's Booker Prize nominated tour de force *Washington Black* (2018).

¹⁷ This is a very odd joke for the waiter to make about the stepfather and his two sons since it is a parable in Daniel 6 about three Jewish boys who refuse to worship King Nebuchadnezzar and his golden statue. They survive the attempted immolation because the wrathful king becomes penitent when he see that God joins the boys in the inferno. After the King witnesses the miracle, he promotes the dissidents and becomes a believer. Perhaps the joke appealed to Dixon's sense of entitlement.

when racial differentiations cleaving America were reconfigured after the civil war and a bifurcated hierarchy emerged. (2005, 122)

The last full paragraph of the novel is dedicated to Dixon's confession of murder. His admission is qualified by the self-serving speculation that men and women since Cain have suffered from homicidal tendencies which they have inherited from their vengeful fathers. The last ironic flourish of his account of his voyage and senescence is his careful record the date of Easter Sunday, 1916 under his confession and his current location of New York City. He is not yet aware of the Easter Rising in Dublin and five other counties which led to the execution by firing squad of fifteen Irish nationalists and the arrest and deportation to England of eighteen thousand without due process¹⁸. This detail is not merely coincidental. The last two words of the novel serve as a coda which reminds the reader of Dixon's chronic hubris and misguided yet profitable enjoyment of the pain of others.

Dixon, Pius (and to a lesser degree Merridith) tried to capitalize upon their interest in Mary while underestimating her life-long practice of strategic resistance and virtually unlimited resourcefulness. Her unwillingness to be captured, tracked, delayed or controlled suggests that she was much more than an underwritten life. Gayatri Spivak considers the predicament faced by those forced to report rather than speak, "Between [...] subject-constitution and object formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into pristine nothingness, but to a violent shuttling [...] caught between tradition and modernization, culturalism and development" (2010, 61). Mary made herself visible and heard despite Dixon's worlding and sadistic ventriloquism. Her resistance inspired the steerage mothers to unite in protest and determination in the New York harbor.

Robert Garratt argues that the early trauma novel "offers only occasional portrayals of the traumatized mind in action opting instead to devote most of the novel to a consideration of trauma as subject matter [...]" (2011, 28). Unlike such novels, *Star of the Sea* excels at portraying the anguish of Mary's traumatized mind. She is not a victim but a character who travels toward liberation and self-assertion. Sylvie Mikowski raises the possibility that O'Connor's narrative strategy of embedding and accumulation "tends to make the reality of events recede" (2010, 8). Fortunately, although Mary's voice is not the loudest or the most frequently heard, it is arguably the clearest and most resonating force in *Star of the Sea*. Once Dixon's bluster and bombast recedes, the deck is cleared to reveal a self-empowered working-class Irish woman who adapts her idea of a noble homeland to help her face struggles of identity and power in the diaspora. Melissa Fagan reminds readers of Margaret Kelleher's argument that "Famine novelists choose the female as the

¹⁸ See McNamara (2016).

‘archetypal victim’ despite historical evidence indicating the higher survival rate of women during the Famine” (2002, 211). Joseph O’Connor’s portrayal of Mary resists such a reductive tendency. Mary is not a victim and her ability to confront and reconcile the gap between the idealized and the actual facilitates her border crossings and ensures her survival.

After his murder, Merridith’s corpse is shrouded in a Union pennant from the mast of the *Star of the Sea* and carried onto a barge where he joins eight passengers from steerage who are committed to the depths of Lower Bay. Grady is one of the deceased. Surviving steerage passengers remind the Captain that nine hundred corpses were dumped in a mass grave in Bantry the day the Anglo-Irish landlord embarked on his voyage to America. Pius lasted only one year in New York before he was murdered. Dixon withered away, trapped in his practice of Othering. It is Mary who outlives the scrutiny of colonizing forces. Judith Palmer reveals that Joseph O’Connor’s habit of meticulous research led him to find a sea chart from 1847 so that he could correctly calculate the longitudinal and latitudinal details for the Captain’s log. He also investigated the heights of Atlantic waves, wind speeds and sea temperatures in his quest for historical accuracy (2003, 5). This study contends that Mary Duane is not a voiceless, archetypal female Famine victim, her enduring and adaptable vision of a noble Irish homeland partially accounts for the success of Joseph O’Connor’s progressive epic.

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