

Through the Eyes of Mary Anne Sadlier: Literary Scholarship on Tales of the Irish Female Immigrant

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the research problem of how Irish female immigrant characters in selected novels written by Mary Anne Sadlier (1820-1903) face racial prejudice and social struggle while transitioning to their new lives in America. These are overlooked texts on the accounts of 19th-Century Irish female immigrants where previous scholarship has focused on other mainstream issues, namely gender inequality, racism, class-based and social divisions. Nevertheless, the challenges brought by the Great Famine (1845) was crucial in contributing to the recognition of the existence of these Irish female immigrants. The Irish emigration literary studies are an area that has just recently begun to open up to scholarly examination. To date, few examples of scholarly research on the literary portrayals of women focussing on the issue of emigration to America have been published. This paper also discusses the cultural and political aspects that have affected writers in general and, to be specific, Sadlier. Due to the Great Famine, the negative conditions of the Irish women's lives have been depicted in Western literature. These women had to endure the conditions and work hard to help themselves out of the Great Famine situation in these new countries and environments. From reviews of studies on Sadlier's writings, it is evident that women are involved in religion, society and politics, unlike before, especially women from England and Ireland. Literary scholarship has shown that Sadlier's novels have created a literary space for which the Irish migrant women could define who they are and voice out their experiences for themselves leading to the conceptualisation of the Irish female immigrant identity.

Keywords

Gender and Nationalism, Irish Female Immigrant, Irish Identity, Mary Anne Sadlier, The Great Famine

1. Introduction

In recent studies in scholarship on novels by Mary Anne Sadlier (1820-1903), female issues have mostly been the subject of a variety of literary criticism; for example, the issue of Irish immigrants' lives and traditional Catholic ideology (Fanning, 1990; Peters, 2009; O'Keeffe, 2013), national identity (Giammanco, 2014; van Os, 2019), and the sense of loneliness and vulnerability (Giammanco, 2014). In contrast, other studies have paid critical attention to the fictional depictions of the Great Famine (King, 2006). O'Keeffe, for instance, also focuses on the issue of female identity in the context of Catholicism and the patriarchal culture of the 19th century (O'Keeffe, 2013) and the effective power of the Great Famine to (re)freshen Irish female immigrants, which gave them a sense of pride of their roots. This, then, resulted in the construction of determined Irish women who mostly occupied a precarious position. In our review of the literary scholarship on Sadlier, it is hypothesised that these Irish female immigrant characters have been portrayed as strong, mature, and independent with unique standpoints in Irish and American societies.

2. Womanhood and Conservative Gender Roles in Sadlier's Texts

In this section, we discuss how Sadlier's female characters in her novels navigate philanthropy, moral character, and traditional gender roles. Firstly, Sophie van Os' significant study, *Reconsidering gender and nationalism representations of English female characters in literature of the Great Irish Famine 1851-1870* (2019) draws on the ground of gender and feminist theories, and the postcolonial theory. Using the definition of imagology by Mark Beller and Jutta Leerssen, her study examines the portrayals of English female characters in the literary works of Sadlier, Mrs. Hoare (1784-1836), John Cullinan (1858-1920), Edmund (1824-1903), Julia O'Ryan (unknown-1887), Mrs. Wolfe (1855-1897) and Mrs. Craik (1826-1887). Through the concept of national identity in relation to Englishness and Irishness, the authors of these narratives were found to be aware of the national concept at the time. The analysis on Sadlier was narrowed to Sadlier's *New Lights*, where the female characters in the text were found to be morally sound (van Os, 2019: p. 6). This study provides a helpful point of reference for the malicious nature of the English, focussing on the writings of 19th-Century female Irish authors, to determine how these talented, but often forgotten, women writers responded to questions of gender and nationalism, and to determine how they defined and sought to shape the consciousness of the Irish race (van Os, 2019: p. 13). To this end, van Os' significant contribution found that Irish women writers were certainly aware of the national personifications used by their male contemporaries to define and shape "the conscience of the race" (van Os, 2019: p. 32).

In the study, the aforementioned female writers have been identified as using traditional personifications of Englishness and England for pseudo landlord classes. By also reconstructing personifications of Irishness purposefully to emphasise

English colonisation and authority over Ireland, they are strategically employed to prove certain stereotypes to emphasise their religious beliefs, nationalist and didacticism (van Os, 2019, p. 23). Additionally, 19th-Century Irish people, in their domesticated ways, were found to be more associated in Irish and British politics than is generally theorised. The findings then lead to a conceptual shift in which a wider concept of political culture, which often recognised and involves private, international, geographical, and philanthropist political expressions and settings, may be employed to research 19th-Century politics and political representations in literature (van Os, 2019: p. 37).

In her study, van Os identifies a gap in the representation of English women in Irish literature and art where women in the 19th century greatly influenced the plotline and themes of scholarly work, yet their characters are minor and flat. Van Os (2019: p. 1) is concerned with the underrepresentation of female English characters and uses Sadlier's works to reveal Sadlier's opinions on gender, politics, class, religion and the English national character in the 19th century. These opinions are linked to the famous literature and art of the 19th century to determine if authors represented national stereotypes accurately or modified them in order to use them in their own ways.

Using five aspects of the formalist literary approach to analyse various texts from Sadlier's novels, the third person point of view is identified in her texts. For instance, Sadlier portrays Mrs. Hampton as an English woman who is prejudiced against the Irish people but uses this point of view to blame the system of training for Mrs. Hampton's bias against Irish people instead of blaming Mrs. Hampton herself (van Os, 2019: p. 5). Secondly, the setting of Sadlier texts reveal how they represented the current national rhetoric. For example, *New Lights of Life* is analysed and the English female character of Elanor shows how social classes and religion are played out during the Great Famine. Elanor belongs to the wealthy English class with plenty of food, while the Catholic Irish peasants have nothing to eat (van Os, 2019: p. 92). The setting of the novel is examined to identify the notion of English womanhood with selflessness and empathy with an example of when Elanor goes against her social class to identify with the Irish peasants and provides them with basic needs, to the extent of attending Catholic mass with them (van Os, 2019: p. 92).

Thirdly, the female protagonist characters around which Sadlier texts revolve are identified and their actions and motivations are examined to explore the notion of womanhood. For example, Elanor is analysed to show how women are discriminated against, with men controlling the lives of women (van Os, 2019, p. 92). The character of Elanor reveals how women expressed moral character through philanthropy while maintaining conservative gender roles (van Os, 2019, p. 93). Consequently, the character of Mrs. Hampton was examined and highlighted as an example of Sadlier condoning the wrong actions of English women in the 19th century. Sadlier is criticised in this study for excusing the prejudice of English women against the Irish and what erroneous training means (van Os, 2019: p. 5).

Fourthly, the aspect of symbols is analysed to reveal various elements, where multiple texts in which the Bible is used to represent strict religion have been identified; for example, an incident in Sadlier's texts where the Bible readers, who are very religious people, try to expose a sinful religious leader (van Os, 2019: p. 5). Food is also identified as a symbol of prestige and social class in the 19th century by exemplifying the character of Hetty, who has a table full of food while peasants go hungry and who offers Bibles to the peasants instead of food. The philanthropy of the English women is shown by noting how they donated food to the Irish Catholics (van Os, 2019: p. 93). The concept of English womanhood is also identified as a symbol of empowerment and hope for women through the different actions of Elanor and Granny Mulligan, both English female characters. Lastly, the aspects of character, setting, symbols and point of view are combined to discover the theme of womanhood in Sadlier's texts, which is underrepresented in many other scholarly works written in the same period.

It is concluded in the study that the women authors were not blinded by gender stereotypes and were aware of male authors' stereotypes in their books. The theme of womanhood in Sadlier's novels reveals that both Irish and English women were actively involved in politics, religion, and social activities than is believed or recorded in scholarly work. While most scholarly works have focused on women's roles as mothers and wives, female authors, such as Sadlier, voiced women's real concerns, which were gender, political and social reforms. Sadlier's texts demonstrate that the upbringing of a person affects their beliefs. Still, if one is willing to overcome conservative societal norms, then they can defeat stereotypes in society, as is the case of Elanor (van Os, 2019: p. 125). The findings of this study thus create new areas of study such as female political participation and feminism in the 19th century.

It must be highlighted here that the strength of van Os' study is the data, namely selected works of female authors who narrate gender and political reforms that women were concerned about. Her findings reveal that feminism was present in the 19th century although it was primarily through scholarly work. Using the formalist literary analysis, van Os is able to explore different aspects to explain the active role of women during the Irish famine. On the weaker side, van Os concentrates only on a few authors, making it hard to generalise the views of these authors as the conventional view of the 19th century authors. This is deductive perception which can lead to an unreliable conclusion. The exclusion of male authors in her study presents bias which may have left out important representation of female characters.

3. Marriage, Dowries, and Economic Shifts: Sadlier's Commentary on Post-Famine Ireland

For this section, we review how Sadlier depicts the economic and social changes in post-Famine Ireland, particularly in relation to marriage and dowries. We begin with a study by Janelle Peters in "Lot's Wife in the Novels of Mary Anne Sadlier"

(2009) which focuses on the biblical image of Lot's wife in Sadlier's narratives which function typologically. There are "constructive" uses identified for the figure of Lot's wife in the late 19th century, where it seems that the current women could not do anything for themselves. Lot, in Sadlier's narratives, represent the Jews because of the way they were oppressed using typology in Catholic polemic (Peters, 2009: p. 192). Peters explores the concept of illusion in Sadlier's novels by focusing on Lot's wife. While Peters praises Sadlier for her achievements in the Irish community, she somehow neglects Sadlier's role in biblical interpretation and translation (Peters, 2009: p. 186) as this study is limited to the biblical images and typology in Sadlier's narratives.

More importantly, the study *The Irish voice in America: 250 years of Irish-American fiction* (1990) by Charles Fanning introduces a major contribution to research on the Irish influence on American literature from writers who were of Irish origin themselves. In this historical account, Fanning classifies Sadlier's novels and John McElgun's novels as "Famine generation fiction" (Fanning, 1990: p. 97). This study provides an emerging image of the evolving fictional self-consciousness of an ethnic community that spanned nearly 200 years of history. Fanning, for instance, traces the origins of Irish-American literature in the 18th century, taking it to the present day where it has become one of the most prolific in America. Analysing selected works by Sadlier, Edwin O'Connor (1918-1968), Elizabeth Cullinan (1933-2014), William Kennedy (1928) and Maureen Howard (1930), the novels written by Irish immigrants before and just after the Great Hunger of the 1840s and 1850s have been identified as describing their joys, suffering, and trials and tribulations that they endured during the Great Famine.

On this note, Fanning states that, during the time of the 1800s, there were three styles of Irish immigrant novels. First of all, there was fiction to promote refugees to maintain their Roman Catholic faith. Then, there was fiction that taught them how to live in America. There was also fiction that had a nationalistic theme (Fanning, 1990: p. 99). Any of these novels contained at least one or all of the characteristics of those themes. In particular, Sadlier and McElgun, a contemporary author of Sadlier, had much more in common than any of the other contemporaries of Sadlier. The members of this group grew up in the same conditions and, therefore, were deeply aware of the difficulties that refugee children had experienced.

The vast body of scholarly study that has already taken place in social and historical aspects, and the social sciences has shed a little light on Irish emigration literature. The literary reception of Irish emigration, however, is a field which is only starting to open up to scholarly exploration. To date, a full scholarly study on the literary depictions of gender in the sense of emigration to North America is yet to be carried out. So, by reviewing Sadlier's literary output, we set out to further explore areas that have been opened up by the aforementioned scholars in order to examine Sadlier's literary output. The history of earlier Irish emigrant women is suggested to be especially neglected due to the absence of primary archival records related to their lives.

Our study, therefore, attempts to add more knowledge to the current literature reviews on Irish female emigrant authors and diasporic writings. However, though Sadlier did not engage in the feminist movement because of the lack of political forum, she had, instead, engaged in feminist issues by organising women-only meetings at her home and recorded the experiences of Irish female refugees by writing ahead of time before the birth of the more notable British feminist writer, Virginia Woolf (1882-1941). As Sadlier came from a patriarchal society, her narratives showed strong notions of feminism. Of course, authors such as Sadlier, without a political platform, could only expect to express their frustrations with male hegemony through their literary works. They had no idea, how the life would be for immigrants in America, so Sadlier dedicated her fictional writings to giving valuable advice for those Irish immigrant women in an American environment in order to guide these young women.

As an Irish author, the Great Famine led Sadlier to create authentic literature that recorded the extreme problems of Irish immigrants. Sadlier herself was an immigrant who, in the 1840s, had moved to America as an adult and wrote her migration narratives with a special intent in mind, as her daughter Anna Sadlier states, “(m)ost of them have a history attached to them, and all have some lovable object in view” (cited in [Fanning, 1990: p. 331](#)). As can be seen, Sadlier was a sponsor of Irish immigrant women, and her stories included topics such as the Great Famine, the British repression of Irish farmers and Irish girls in their birth-place, and the persecution of Catholicism, and were a reaction to the life issues of her day. We note that, within her narratives, Sadlier invested in feminist issues and her migrant narratives may also be used as an account of Roman Catholicism. More notably, Sadlier showed how the Irish immigrant women faced persecution in their native land as well as the host country and they were able to rise again and again.

As an example of the persecution, the father of an Irish daughter was expected to pay a dowry to the father of his daughter’s fiancé in pre-Famine Ireland. The Irish fathers were unable to feed their families during the Great Famine and to pay dowries to the prospective husbands of their daughters, resulting in the exodus of the Irish women. Sadlier, in fact, through the female characters who migrated to America, addressed all the aforementioned problems and, by analysing Sadlier’s writings, this suggests that Sadlier’s true representations of women were the main source of information on the (re)action of Irish immigrant women to the Great Famine in Ireland. More significantly, the post-Famine economy shifted things toward marriage, leading to rarer marriages and the creation of a dowry-based marriage system. A truth that cannot be ignored is that the Great Famine was essential to the experiences and awakening of Irish immigrant women as it led to their lives. Sadlier also highlighted in her works the limitations on motherland opportunities, which pushed women to migrate, searching for bread, marriage and peace.

4. Comparative Perspectives: 19th-Century and Contemporary Depictions of Irish Immigrant Servants

Moving on from the previous section, the portrayal of Irish servant girls in America has long been a significant facet of the Irish female identity, particularly during the 19th century when waves of Irish emigrants, driven by the Great Famine, sought refuge in America. These women, often employed as domestic servants, became emblematic of the broader Irish immigrant experience and played a pivotal role in shaping the perceptions of Irish womanhood both in America and back in Ireland. With regards to Sadlier's scholarship, Yvonne O'Keeffe's contribution, *Mary Anne Sadlier's emigrant narratives, 1850-1870* (2013), is the first full study on literary studies of Irish emigrant women for Sadlier's works. In her study, O'Keeffe examines the cultural constructions of ethnicity, nationality, and religious identities in explicitly textual depictions of Irish women's emigrant experiences, where she compares incidents from Sadlier's narratives to relevant documents of the period which address the significance of Catholicism and the Irish families' emigration and representations in America. Centring on literary depictions of Sadlier's emigrant narratives, O'Keeffe develops a further interpretation of the perspective of the 19th-Century women emigrants who were frequently absent from notable pieces of literature and historical books.

Her study emphasises, among other aspects, the significance of Sadlier's contributions to the development of an Irish American identification, while focussing on the ethnic context and cultural components of her works. O'Keeffe's study mainly discusses how Christian Irish immigrant women tried to preserve their beliefs, and how Sadlier successfully contributed to construct an Irish-American identification. However, her study did not cover the issue on marginalisation and how the Great Famine helped Irish immigrant women to strengthen their standpoints as groups in the dominant country because this issue is not part of her research objectives. The significance of her study on Sadlier's works is that it helps open up a space for critics and researchers to explore new worlds or investigate the literary portrayals of the Irish emigration.

Other than that, a study, *The myth of the strong Irish immigrant servant woman: An analysis of novels by Sadlier, McElgun and Atwood* (2014) by Rosamaria Giammanco, have examined the issue of Irish immigrants in two 19th-Century novels, written in the latter half of the century, and one contemporary novel, namely a novel *Bessy Conway* (1861a) by Sadlier as well as *Annie Reilly: The fortunes of an Irish girl in New York* (1873) by John McElgun together with *Alias Grace* (1996) by Margaret Atwood. This variety in data collection in the study gives different and unique perspectives, where the modern novel looks back on an era and, thus, manages to put the immigration of the Great Famine and post-Great Famine generation into a modern perspective while the novels written in the latter half of the 19th century presents the views of the writers back then. Analysing the depictions of the 19th-Century Irish immigrant servant girl, a connection between these female representations of class, religion, gender and ethnicity are then made.

The issues of class, gender, and religion were identified as supporting the heroines on their adventure in North America by making them stronger characters as the issues made them more confident and comfortable with their own roots.

Additionally, Margu rite Corporaal and Jason King in their study, “Irish Global Migration and Memory: Transnational Perspectives of Ireland’s Famine Exodus” (2014), suggest that Sadlier’s narratives depict the animosity and perhaps even punishment that the predominantly Great Famine Catholic immigrants faced, according to “Irish international immigration and recollection: international views on Ireland’s Famine departure”. Elinor Preston, the female protagonist in *Elinor Preston* (1861b), is constantly subjected to the Evangelicals of the “French Canadian Missionary Society”, who oppose the Roman Catholic Church and seek to transform “the Catholic people of Lower Canada”, particularly the “Irish papists”. The recent Catholic Famine immigrant groups developed in the ensuing years were greatly influenced by their precarious societal status in the Atlantic globe and the trauma of banishment at the core of their feeling of self. Crucial preservation techniques included strengthening connections with one’s home and forming tight interracial relationships in the receiving nation. The transfer of the Great Famine memories strengthened an American Irish Catholic identity of a persecuted cultural group with a strong sense of social and “ethnic” awareness (Corporaal & King, 2014: p. 317).

A study, “The Irish-American Novel in Australia: Mary Anne Sadlier, Christine Faber, and Nineteenth-Century Diaspora Fiction” (2019), by Kevin Molloy examines the position of two Irish-American women authors, Sadlier and Christine Faber, through the two of their novels serialised in the media. The focus is on how the novels have been essential both in phrasing and supplying points of view on framing and providing perspectives on complex political, social and cultural issues for the intergenerational Irish migrant cohort. The function of the Irish-American authors in the Australasian provinces in the framework of contemporary Irish diaspora poetry is the focus of this study.

Research has demonstrated that their contributions to discuss the issue in American Irish-Catholic groups is substantial. Public scrutiny of their works of fiction at critical intersections in Irish and the history of colonialism, such as financing in America and discussions on female immigrants and refugees, and housework, should have indeed be highlighted. Sadlier’s Bessy Conway, in *Bessy Conway*, is particularly discussed; from the emotional book style’s capacity to show a ‘common, Christian, nonreligious nation’ one that empowers Sadlier’s Catholic and Irish female heroines in both the internal and external realms (Molloy, 2019: pp. 71-73).

Given that the overwhelming bulk of Irish women immigrants work in households, such a statement would not be regarded as inconsequential. Linda Hinkle, a reviewer, highlights Faber’s partiality for sexual identity and cultural divisions in her review of Faber’s *Carroll O’Donoghue*. Her women protagonists, such as Nora McCarthy and Clare O’Donoghue, are described as tenacious and powerful

for varying reasons. Sadlier's female character, in contrast, are determined but a powerful religion drives their persistence; for instance, women are not single actors over their fate. The perfect traveller, Bessy Conway is linked to both faith and good acts. As she observes, defeatism and piousness described the globe of the initial Famine migrant workers in America, noticing that works of fiction, like Sadlier's narrative, discloses her 'conservatism' regarding a forcible nation back in Ireland, notwithstanding her order to articulate with emotion about Irish chronological action sequences and ideological champions of the old days. This is not the situation with Faber in *Carroll O'Donoghue*, where geopolitical metaphor is balanced with a moral necessity substantial enough to govern personal connections and promote short-term governmental objectives firmly. This is indeed how Sadlier and Faber have employed their Irish-American works in a Catholic colonial environment where both Sadlier and Faber acquired enormous publications of fame over several years (Molloy, 2019: p. 67).

Regular wild Irish: Race, ethnicity, and identity in Irish American fiction (2011) is a study by Bridget M. Chapman, which evaluates how the Irish American writers intertwine the American and the Irish aspects of their lives in their literary works. The focus of the study is mainly on the literary works during the antebellum stretch, primarily the 1890s. It tries to demolish the ignorance showed in the Irish literary works of the 19th century due to the perception of the works being flawed by romantic, emotional assertions. Therefore, it aims to change the concise ignorance by examining three novels and short fiction by three authors published in the 1890s. These works include the impact of reform extents, realist representation, and the famous cartoons in the "Tenement Tales of New York" by James W. Sullivan, a journalist. It dissects the regionalism represented by Kate McPhelelim Cleary's novel and short stories. In addition, it evaluates how American Celticism inflects the short fiction essayist and poet, Louise Imogen Guiney. The bookends of the main chapters of the dissertation include a thorough dissection of one of the most popular Irish immigrants, Sadlier, and Farrell's trilogy of *Studs Lonigan*, of the antebellum period. Therefore, its main purpose is to show that the literary works of the 19th century are worthy of critical evaluation as they provide insights on the ethnicity, identity and attitudes on their European origins with questions on the inclusion of interactions made in America. It focuses on two selected texts by Sadlier, namely *Con O'Regan* (1864) and *Blakes and the Flanagans* (1855). These works are critical as they represent other immigrant groups due to their similar shared experiences that impact their literature.

Regular Wild Irish has placed the Irish American fiction works in three related categories, including the instability and contradictory attitudes showed to the European immigrant groups that had their whiteness often under scrutiny and questioned within the antebellum period. Another aspect is the transitions in a diversifying Irish American society in the 19th century and the changing 19th-Century production of Irishness. The first representation of the Irish in the media displayed a singer and dancer rowdy man who was subsequently changed to represent

how people viewed Irish-American immigrants in the following years. The transitions made on Irish men were also borrowed from different representations from popular novels published in Dublin or London. The counterpart of the first Irishman was a woman named “Bridget,” also dubbed “Biddy.” These two characters are often shown in brawls, fights representing the Irish immigrants as violent and drunk people. The transition of the Irish Americans is clear since, during the early antebellum period, they were stereotypically represented as undisciplined and rowdy. By the middle of the 19th century, they were shown as people under the vicious cycle of poverty, with a superstitious religious system and ethnically and racially different from the Americans, posing a threat to American life.

Interestingly, the Irish American females were represented with masculinity, drunkenness, and forcefulness. By the 20th century, most American Irish were innocently represented since they had gained economically, socially and politically. A few representations included the previous rowdy, undisciplined backward Irish stereotypes. The Irish Americans took an interest in the Celticism that was common in Ireland, which fostered pride among those of the Irish race. Further, the Irish American literary works had critical transitions and conflicts with its traditional Irish American societies. They became more diversified since many more immigrants were coming to America. These immigrants were without skills, resources and spoke Gaelic, or were bilingual. Also, the immigrants, who had been to America, had their children educated and were rising in status (Chapman, 2011: p. 34). These changes meant that the new immigrants worked in low-paying jobs while the existing immigrants had better jobs since they had better education and skills. The difference was noticeable and caused conflicts. During the following periods between 1880 and 1920, attitudes towards different races in American changed and were often contradictory.

These changes, in culture, race and generally to the Irish American society, is crucial to this study since it shows the transition of their communities in several ways, primarily about race and ethnicity. In the late 19th century, the whiteness dominance of the American Whites included the amalgamated whites of European descent, which included the Irish. This study has shown that Sullivan, Cleary and Guiney have normalised the white status of the Irish Americans. These authors have shown how the Irish American communities have taken for granted the many privileges resulting from the amalgamation of the marginal white groups into the Caucasian race (Chapman, 2011: p. 54). Cleary used variation to represent and complicate the cartooned showing of Irish American identity while criticising their practices by exploring the issues of gender and racial rankings.

Guiney and O'Reilly were two writers linked with Celticism, a proud moment for the Irish Americans in the late 19th century. In the study, Sadlier is also identified as a prominent Irish American immigrant writer during the antebellum period and in the late 19th century. Even though her work superficially showed the pride of Irish people in American Celticism, it also showed the tensions that were happening in the political, ethnic and cultural attachments as a result of the many

immigrations and generational changes that had been happening between 1880s and 1890s. Her work was pivotal in capturing the changing attitudes in religious and racial categories representing various forms of kinship and identity among the Irish Americans in the late 19th century.

On the other hand, Sullivan's *The Tenement Tales* is a literary work that called for the middle-class income of the Irish American group to rise to the occasion and call out the atrocities that were evidently against their low-income counterparts due to racial discriminations. Its purpose was to ascertain that racial and ethnic barriers were broken, which showed that the period was politically progressive but with racial categorisations. Her work was very influential and ardent for a part of Irish American Catholics. In this study, Chapman illustrates how Sadlier explored the nationalistic effects of domestic theories to construct an identity that can be embraced nationally for the Irish and Americans simultaneously. The works of Farrell are the most studied Irish work in America where she identified the similarities between the stereotypical misrepresentations that were fought against by the African Americans and the media representation of the Irish Americans.

The strengths of this study are that Chapman has demonstrated that the Irish Americans use familiar ways that show racial difference and anxieties in their literary works and ideologise new ways of racial affiliation, which were emerging in the late 19th century (Chapman, 2011: p. 168). Therefore, these literary works are not worth the ignorance and negligence they have previously received because of their inadequacy to fit into the critical frameworks evident through connections between Irishness and Blackness. The study has addressed the need to analyse these literary works during the antebellum period without any correlation to the present. In addition, it has opened up areas and works that foster debates, analysis, teaching, and exploration, primarily on the areas of ethnic and racial representation in Ireland, America and other regions (Chapman, 2011: p. 187). However, it has its weakness including not associating the literary works and the current political situation as experienced due to the foundations laid during the antebellum period.

From another perspective, a study by Michelle Milan, "Mary Anne Sadlier's Trans-Atlantic Links: Migration, Religion and Translation" (2022), enriches the field of scholarship on Irish women writers by exploring the connections between religion, translation, and migration through the life and work of Sadlier. Sadlier is labelled as a prolific Irish-American author of Catholic, immigrant, and patriotic novels, as well as a celebrated leading writer of the Famine generation. Also, she is described as a key figure in shaping Catholic literature in English after emigrating from Ireland to North America and marrying into the prominent Catholic publishing family D. & J. Sadlier. Despite her extensive translation and editorial work from French, Sadlier's contributions in this area have been largely overlooked in critical studies. This study shifts the current focus to examine how her translations, driven by themes of religion, morality, and education, reflect the

evolution of Catholic literature during a formative period for both Irish and American Catholic communities. Additionally, Sadlier's success as a writer, translator, editor, and publisher is illustrated as she highlights broader issues of social and cultural authority for women of her era. More importantly, her career exemplifies the broader emergence of a Catholic transnational or translocal culture in the 19th century, where mobility and translation challenge fixed notions of identity and nationality. Sadlier's life and work thus offer valuable insights into how translation played a role in expanding and deepening trans-Atlantic connections.

On the other hand, a study by Jason King, "*Six Thousand Half Forgotten Victims: Mary Anne Sadlier, Contested Famine Memory and French-Canadians*" (2024), investigates why Sadlier did not document her firsthand experiences of the Irish Great Famine migration to Montreal in 1847 until over forty years later. It compares Sadlier's portrayals of French-Canadians as faithful co-religionists and Irish Catholic allies in *Elinor Preston* with the more critical portrayals found in Protestant Irish author Elizabeth Hely Walshe's *Cedar Creek* (1863-1864). This study argues that sectarian rivalries influenced both authors' views of French-Canadians and that Sadlier's reflections on the Great Famine may have been affected by the establishment of the Black Rock Famine memorial by Montreal's Protestant leaders in 1859. It posits that Sadlier's engagement with her Great Famine memories only emerged after the Irish Catholic community reclaimed the memorial as a site of pilgrimage and collective memory in subsequent decades.

More notably, a study "From Regional Remembrance to Transatlantic Heritage: The Transportability of Famine Memory in Fiction by Mary Anne Sadlier, Anna Dorsey and Alice Nolan" (2024) by Margu rite Corporaal explores Famine fiction by prominent women writers who significantly shaped the literary portrayal of the Irish Famine diaspora. It examines Mary Anne Sadlier's *New Lights* (1853) and *Elinor Preston* (1861b); Alice Nolan's *The Byrnes of Glengoulah* (1868); and Anna Dorsey's *Nora Brady's Vow* (1869). It is argued here that these narratives depict the Famine as a pivotal legacy influencing the identity formation of Irish North-American communities. In these works, sites of memory—particularly ruins—serve as symbols of Famine trauma, representing the suffering of rural, Catholic populations and the destruction of regional culture due to starvation, disease, and mass emigration. The *lieux de m moire* in Ireland are identified as central to the development of the characters' Irish transatlantic identities, while the narratives also suggest how these memory sites are transported and transformed in their new places of settlement.

In contrast, Catherine M. Eagan, in her study "Irish Sentimentality and White Racial Projects in the Civil War Novels of Mary Anne Sadlier and Mary L. Meaney" (2024), proposes how, Sadlier and Mary L. Meaney explore Irish whiteness by employing themes of European heritage, civilisation, Christianity and freedom in their Civil War-era novels. It is suggested that they contrast Irish racial identity with the inferior status of slaves and indigenous peoples, asserting a privileged position for the Irish. At the same time, both authors appear to have distanced

their characters from English and Anglo-American culture as well as from Protestant ideals of womanhood prevalent in American sentimental fiction. They achieve this by emphasising their commitment to Catholicism and Irish cultural values. Sadlier, in particular, underscores the racial inferiority of Anglo-American women, reinforcing the notion that Catholic Irishwomen represent the true ideal of white womanhood. This dual strategy—asserting Irish whiteness while questioning the racial and moral integrity of Anglo-American and English Protestants—enables Catholic Irishwomen to emerge as exemplary figures of white femininity, whether in America or in a future nationalist Ireland.

Finally, a study by Alashjaai et al., “Racial Prejudice and Marginalisation of the Irish Female Migrants in *The Irish Girl in America* by Mary Anne Sadlier through the Standpoint Theory” (2024), examines *The Irish Girl in America* (1861a) by Sadlier, which is set against the backdrop of the Famine. It is argued in this study that Sadlier’s narratives highlight the lives of 19th-Century Irish female immigrants—a topic that remains relatively underexplored in literary studies. Despite historical records showing the significant role of Irish women in advancing the recognition of Irish female immigrants, it is posited that their literary representation is often overlooked. It also hypothesised in this study that Sadlier’s portrayals of Irish female migrants in *The Irish Girl in America* reflects their efforts to achieve privileged positions within the host society. Utilising a hermeneutic textual analysis and Sandra Harding’s “standpoint theory” (1986), this study focuses on how Sadlier’s characters navigate their marginalised status to gain recognition and agency. Their analysis reveals how these Irish female protagonists strive for self-definition and assert their perspectives, ultimately finding ways to attain advantageous positions in their new communities.

5. Unexplored Aspects of Sadlier’s Novels: A Review of Existing Literature

Our review on literary scholarship on Sadlier’s novels has shown that there are indeed theoretical and methodological limitations in studies of Sadlier’s works. As such, we propose a selection of four novels by Sadlier to analyse, namely *Bessy Conway*, *Elinor Preston*, *Old and New* (1862) and *Con O’Regan*, to address this research gap. A textual analysis method is adopted and it will entail focusing on the settings of the novel, narrative points of view and characters in the selected novels. The analysis will be conducted to discuss how the Irish female immigrant characters try to assert their power and socio-cultural status which has been threatened by Americanisation. These traditions shall be discussed as the context of the selected Irish female immigrant characters’ identity where it shall be hypothesised that the American social oppression has made them lead a very difficult life. As a result, three literary elements are to be analysed, namely characters, settings, and points of view.

In analysing the characterisations of Bessy Conway along with other female characters in *Bessy Conway*, *Elinor Preston* in addition to other relevant female

characters in *Elinor Preston*, Fanny and other female characters in *Old and New* and Winny together with other female characters in *Con O'Regan*, emphasis will be on Sadlier's fictional portrayals of Irish female immigrant characters. In this case, the Irish female immigrant characters will be the main focus of our analysis. The dialogues of the characters, moreover, will be understood as the expressions of these sufferings. In this regard, their dialogues are viewed as the manifestation of the criticisms of oppressing Irish female immigrant character.

Understanding the characters and their social affairs will be expanded by describing the fictional context of the selected works. These are the real margins of the reality of the Irish female immigrant characters in America. The settings, in this case, are Sadlier's symbolic approach that attempts to address the current bitter realities of life for Irish female immigrant characters in America. The details of these issues will be explained methodologically. Therefore, the discussion will focus on the social implications of these concepts and how they represent the Irish female immigrant social struggles in America. Last but not the least, the chosen narrative points of view shall be evaluated. Consequently, the narrators bear the responsibility for pinpointing the authorial representations of the oppression of Irish women characters in America.

6. Conclusion

The Irish emigration literary study is an area that has just recently begun to open up to scholarly examination. To date, few examples of scholarly research on the literary portrayals of women focusing on the issue of emigration to America have been published. We have discussed the historical Irish migration contexts, more significantly the Great Famine. We also discussed the cultural and political aspects that have affected writers in general and, to be specific, Sadlier. Due to the Great Famine, the negative conditions of the Irish women's lives have been depicted in Western literature. The Great Famine is also the cause of their suffering and being looked down on. These women had to endure the conditions and work hard to help themselves out of the Great Famine situation in these new countries and environments.

We have also discussed that female authors are not influenced by gender stereotypes even when they are already aware of the stereotypes in male authors' works. From reviews of studies on Sadlier's writings, it is evident that women are involved in religion, society and politics, unlike before, especially women from England and Ireland. The narratives written by authors like Sadlier have also addressed the gender, social and political issues in concert with women.

Furthermore, it is evident that the female authors were not influenced by gender preconceptions and were aware of male authors' stereotypes in their works. As demonstrated in our reviews of the above-mentioned studies on Sadlier, women were more involved in politics, religion, and society than previously assumed or documented. This is especially true for women from Ireland and England. The majority of scientific writings did not address women's political, social,

and gender issues. However, authors like Sadlier did. Sadlier's narratives demonstrate how one's upbringing impacts one's viewpoints.

We have also discussed the different literary works' points of view. Before, the Irish women writers placed their point of view on the challenges and difficulties the Irish women went through in these host countries. Later, they focused on the involvement of women in society, politics and religion. On the other hand, the English authors focused their point of view on how Irish women were looked down upon due to the Famine but later changed to the empathy and selflessness of English women.

In addition, we have discussed the literary works of Irish-American women in America. The narratives written by Sadlier place the works of scholars within the world's frameworks, which examine cultural contexts that characterise writings about themselves in the migration countries. The aforementioned marginalisation of Irish women authors made it very hard to effectively engage and communicate to the mainstream society about their identity. However, like our reviews have demonstrated, the findings of Sadlier's novels have made a literary space for which the Irish migrant women could define who they are and voice out their experiences for themselves. As a writer, she is trying to be heard on her own and Irish women's behalf. Sadlier has been writing narratives that are against the sense that women, due to their religion and roots, have been oppressed in the host country.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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