
Staging Famine Irish Memories of Migration and National Performance in Ireland and Québec

Jason King

National University of Ireland Galway

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [Education Commons](#), [European Languages and Societies Commons](#), [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), [Literature in English, North America, Ethnic and Cultural Minority Commons](#), [Other Arts and Humanities Commons](#), [Other Film and Media Studies Commons](#), [Other French and Francophone Language and Literature Commons](#), [Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies Commons](#), [Reading and Language Commons](#), [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#), [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#), [Television Commons](#), and the [Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, [Purdue University Press](#) selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Recommended Citation

King, Jason. "Staging Famine Irish Memories of Migration and National Performance in Ireland and Québec." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 18.4 (2016): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2907>>

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

The above text, published by Purdue University Press ©Purdue University, has been downloaded 163 times as of 11/07/19.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Volume 18 Issue 4 (December 2016) Article 6
Jason King,
"Staging Famine Irish Memories of Migration and
National Performance in Ireland and Québec"
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss4/6>>

Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 18.4 (2016)**
Thematic Issue **New Work on Immigration and Identity in Contemporary France, Québec, and Ireland**
Ed. Dervila Cooke
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss4/>>

Abstract: In "Staging Famine Irish Memories of Migration and National Performance in Ireland and Québec" Jason King examines recent community theater productions about the Irish Famine migration to Québec in 1847. King explores community-based and national ideas of performance and the role of remembrance in shaping and transmitting the diasporic identities of Québec's Irish cultural minority. While most of the plays re-enact French-Canadian adoptions of Famine orphans as spectacles of Irish integration in Québec, David Fennario's *Joe Beef: (A History of Pointe Saint Charles)* (1984, published 1991) rehearses the history of the Canadian/Québec nation in terms of recurrent labor exploitation epitomized by the struggles of the Famine Irish emigrants. King argues that Fennario's exclusion from definitions of "national performance" in Québec shows the elision of its Anglophone national minority, one that should be included in Québec's negotiations of national identity (Bouchard).

Jason KING

Staging Famine Irish Memories of Migration and National Performance in Ireland and Québec

In this study, I examine the performance of diasporic and migrant remembrance in Ireland and Québec. More specifically, I explore the tension between communal and national ideas of performance and the role of remembrance in staging theater productions about the Irish Famine migration to Québec in 1847. During the Famine migration of 1847, more than one hundred thousand Irish emigrants sailed on "coffin ships" to Canada. Approximately twenty percent of them perished at sea and on Grosse Île, an island quarantine station near Québec City, and in the fever sheds of Montreal, each of which contain mass graves for over six thousand Irish people. I analyze five texts dating from between 1984 and 2016: four plays and one television broadcast. Each of the texts reprises Irish, English-Canadian, and Québec history through the prism of famine migrant memory and dramatizes the transmission of diasporic identities based on traumatic past experience. Four are historical re-enactments of the Famine migration in community theater productions based on published and unpublished scripts from both sides of the Atlantic. Margaret Forrest's, John Halpin's, and Hubert Radoux's *Grosse-Île: A Choral Story / Une Histoire Chorale* (2016), Peggie Hopkins's *Heroes of the Black Rock* (2014), and Jim Miogue's *Flight to Grosse Ile* (1998) are spectacles of integration which highlight Irish orphan adoptions by Québécois-Canadians, providing a communal myth of origin for the Irish in Québec. They form a sharp contrast with David Fennario's *Joe Beef: (A History of Pointe Saint Charles)* (1984, published in 1991) in which he focuses instead on lamenting the divisions between the exploited Irish and Québécois working classes and the plight of marginalized migrant laborers. In Fennario's text several key aspects constitute a critique of what Erin Hurley termed Québec's "national performance," while also calling attention to the performance of Irishness from a diasporic perspective. This has clear implications for Québec's view of itself, as does Fennario's position outside the canon. His play and its lack of recognition in Québec theater also have implications for Irish drama, raising questions about whether Ireland will prove inclusive to all its minorities (in Ireland's case, mainly its recent immigrant communities), as well as the dramatization of their historical memories in the years ahead.

The tension between communal and national ideals of performance is apparent in recent scholarship on Québec theater. By definition, notions of national performance seek to stage and reproduce Benedict Anderson's "imagined political community" (6) of the nation state, whereas community theater tends to be confined to subgroups within the national imaginary. In *National Performance: Representing Quebec from Expo 67 to Celine Dion* (2011), Hurley argues that "granting the nation referent status through performance effectively establishes the off-stage "nation" as fact. Thus, the relation between cultural production and nation is mimetic in nature: culture represents nation" (22). Jane Moss criticized Hurley, however, for her exclusion of "Anglo-Québécois theater or immigrant drama in English" from her conception of "national mimesis" (75). According to Moss, Anglo-Québécois plays like Fennario's *Joe Beef* and Lorena Gale's 2001 *Je me souviens: Memories of an Expatriate Montréalaise Québécoise Exiled in Canada* "disrupt and delegitimize the performance of nationhood as created through the discourses of both English-Canadian and Québec nationalisms" (76). In the absence of a "full embrace of cultural and linguistic heterogeneity," Moss insists that the "'national performance' of Québec remains incomplete" (76).

In *Joe Beef*, Fennario does not seek to complete but contest this notion of "national performance," as well as Irish communal memories of migration and myths of origin in Canada and Québec. The play does take the form of a national pageant, but one that is resolutely grounded in community theater, its cast of characters comprised of influential historical actors played by local residents from the downtrodden Montreal neighborhood of Pointe St. Charles, an industrial area where many of the Famine emigrants settled and the city's fever sheds and mass graves were located. Its eponymous narrator, Joe Beef, is an Irish tavern keeper and strike supporter who rehearses the history of the nation in terms of exploitative capitalist and colonial relations from the French and British conquests through the arrival of the Famine emigrants in 1847, whose manual labor epitomizes the oppression of workers during the industrialization of Québec and Canada. "In his critical retelling of Québec's foundational myths," notes Moss, the expansive scope of national performance is compressed into the highly localized setting of "Pointe St. Charles [which] is the site of a Brechtian re-enactment of several hundred years of Montreal history in burlesque and vaudeville mode" (64). Indeed, the play criticizes the Irish Famine immigrants and those of their descendants who failed—and continue to fail—to band together with their French speaking neighbors to confront their economic oppressors both in the past and in the present. Its re-enactment of national historic events with an ensemble cast of community members deflates the pretensions of performing the Québec nation as a distortion of class consciousness and working class manipulation.

More broadly, the exclusion of Anglo-Québécois theater from Hurley's conception of national performance raises questions about its role in defining relations between cultural minorities and the majority as well as notions of membership within Québec's imagined community. Its limitations and blind spots appear conspicuous when regarded in the light of Gérard Bouchard's 2015 *Interculturalism: A View from Quebec*: "It is clear that the definition of the Québec nation must incorporate the contents of the founding culture, but it must also be open to other symbolic references forged in the past of minorities or brought by immigrants ... including a national minority made up of Anglo-Québecers" (47). Bouchard insists that "the Anglophone minority deserves special mention given the status that distinguishes it from other minorities. This minority can, in fact, be qualified as national because of its long history, because of the rights that are recognized for it under the British North America Act of 1867 (reaffirmed in the Canadian Constitution of 1982), and because it is an extension in Québec of a neighboring majority nation" (38).

It is interesting to compare Québec's Anglophones to the Protestant community in the Irish republic, which also constitutes a national minority, but one that has a leading status in the literary canon. Both were privileged minority groups who were "relics of former British rule" (Stevenson 283). It is impossible even to conceptualize a form of national performance in Ireland that excludes Protestant theater practitioners, as this would remove Lady Augusta Gregory, John Millington Synge, William Butler Yeats, Samuel Beckett, and George Bernard Shaw from the genealogy of performance of Irish nationhood. It is true, as David Clare argues, that some Irish Protestant theater practitioners, such as Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw, are not generally regarded as having contributed to the cultural nationalism of the Irish Literary Revival, because they "are usually disqualified from the movement" (91) as playwrights who wrote mainly for English rather than Irish audiences. Nevertheless, it is simply not possible to think of Irish national performance without acknowledging its Protestant national minority or completely erasing the origins of the story. This is not to claim that Fennario or any Anglophone theater practitioner in Québec enjoys remotely the same stature as these Irish figures or that principles of selection can be avoided in any critical work or process of canon formation. Even so, conceptualizations of "national mimesis" that exclude "national minorities" from Irish or Québec theater and performance studies should be regarded with no less caution than in other fields of scholarship.

In *Interculturalism: A View from Québec*, Bouchard asks how "in a context marked by the growing presence of immigrants and minorities ... can this memory of the [Francophone] majority be transmitted... while making room for minority narratives?" (66). This is the challenge at the heart of debates about multiculturalism and interculturalism not only in Québec and English-Canada, but in Ireland and elsewhere. It is one that Hurley sidesteps in her definition of "national performance" which is based on the elision of the Anglophone national minority that Bouchard insists must be included in Québec's negotiations of national identity. The question of how to accommodate minorities within a national imaginary provided the impetus not only for Bouchard's text, but also his earlier collaboration with Charles Taylor entitled *Building the Future: A Time for Reconciliation* otherwise known as the Bouchard-Taylor report. In the "collective memory" section of *Building the Future*, Bouchard and Taylor make reference to the similar struggles of the Irish minority and Francophones in Québec to maintain their sense of cultural identity. Bouchard and Taylor tackle the unspoken and spoken fear among the Francophone majority that cultural plurality might "condemn the project of an inclusive collective memory in Québec," causing it to be "watered-down" and appearing to "sacrifice the essence of the French-Canadian past" (211-12). In their view, the challenge is "to make significant and accessible to all Québécois the meaning derived from the French Canadian past, in particular the lengthy struggles for decolonization and the survival of a cultural minority ... It would seem fairly easy to add the stories of the ethnic minorities, which often convey the same values. Besides, several of these paths have already crossed in Québec's past (Irish ... immigrants, in particular, come to mind). It is a question of discovering and recasting these vestiges" (212).

In a study entitled *Fragile Majorities and Education: Belgium, Catalonia, Northern Ireland, and Québec* (2013), Marie McAndrew notes in terms of the sociology of education that "Québec is the site of numerous competing national narratives possessing varying degrees of compatibility with the narratives of the majority group. These narratives include those of Native Peoples, immigrant minorities, and... the Anglophone minority. The need to integrate these perspectives into the teaching of history is all the more essential since ... Francophones and Anglophones share a common curriculum" (91). In spite of their common curriculum, however, McAndrew also observes that "Francophones teaching in French and Anglophones teaching in English have radically different ideas about the purpose of teaching history," with the former encouraging their students from all backgrounds "to share the historical memory of Francophones, something they believe is necessary to ensure authentic integration" (98). She suggests that the history curriculum offers little opportunity for the "discussion of the different nature of group identities or of the relationship to Québec of national minorities such as Anglophones, the First Nations with their distinct legal status, or groups of immigrant origin" (97). McAndrew commends projects that allow student teachers "to broaden the definition of their own identity and to develop empathy for the other group's perspectives and preoccupations" (70). She cites the example of a history trip for student teachers to Grosse Île that focused on relations between Francophones and Anglophones in the nineteenth century. McAndrew notes that Grosse Île "calls into question the traditional definition of Francophones as Catholic and Anglophones as Protestant" (as Irish Catholics were Anglophone) and "helps future history teachers to grasp concretely the concepts of divergent memories and historical consciousness" as well as "the long history of the immigrant presence within this dynamic" (69). For McAndrew, the story of the Famine Irish on Grosse Île provided a vehicle to help reconcile these "divergent memories" and divided forms of "historical consciousness" within the Québec curriculum and society at large.

Fennario uses the memory of the famine Irish in a different way. His play *Joe Beef* mediates between communal and national performance yet repudiates them both to instill a sense of class consciousness and radical remembrance. It was originally performed in 1984 by the Black Rock Community Group and on the surface bears a strong resemblance to Hopkins's later *Heroes of the Black Rock* (2014). Both plays are set within, cast from, and performed by local residents in Montréal's Pointe Saint Charles neighborhood with a replica of its Black Rock Famine memorial on stage. As Fennario notes at the beginning of *Joe Beef*, "because the play was written for performance in clubs, schools, small halls, as well as theaters, the set requirements are simple and portable. A bar with bottles and glasses for Joe Beef, along with a replica of the Black Rock memorial stone that was placed on the common grave of the 6,000 Irish immigrants who died of typhoid fever in Pointe Saint Charles back in the time of the great famine of ... 1847 in Ireland" (7). Both plays appear localized and almost site-specific in their staging of the Black Rock memorial as a symbol and synecdoche for the communal history they rehearse. Yet there are also significant differences between them. Whereas Hopkins's play recalls the traumatic arrival of the Famine Irish in Montréal as a foundational moment and communal myth of origin that

reaffirms their descendants' sense of belonging, *Joe Beef* seeks to defamiliarize communal and national history as distortions of class consciousness that prevent the French and Irish from forming a more united front. Fennario, a descendant of Irish immigrants himself, also deploys a number of Brechtian techniques and distancing effects such as having actors speak directly to the audience, a fluid rotation of community members playing the roles of historical figures on stage, frequent interjections of colloquial dialogue and anachronistic references to contemporary events within the historical pageant, and interpolations of popular cultural genres like "burlesque and vaudeville" (Moss 64) to puncture any nationalist illusions.

The community actors and audience in *Joe Beef* do not pay tribute to their Irish ancestors but pass judgement for their repeated acquiescence in exploitative labor relations and for their failure to improve their situation which is the recurrent theme of the play. Fennario's eponymous protagonist, Joe Beef, is a raconteur and tavern keeper renowned for feeding and providing refuge for striking workers during nineteenth-century industrial disputes, but he becomes a trans-historical figure in the script who claims to "have been around as long as there's been a Pointe Saint Charles" (13). He even berates the community actors and audience members for failing to band together and form unions with French Canadians as much in the past as in the present. "You're still making the same stupid fucking mistakes," he laments at the beginning of the play (13). This recurrent pattern of labor repression becomes Fennario's leitmotif in recalling local history, as well as that of nation. From the periods of the French and British conquests until the present, the neighborhood of Pointe Saint Charles is represented by Fennario as a microcosm for working class oppression and the exploitation of "cheap labor" (59) which reaches its nadir with the arrival of the Famine Irish in 1847. Their plight becomes a focal point and is re-enacted in an extended scene that brings together anonymous Irish immigrants and keening women with local residents and industrial capitalists into the same dramaturgical frame. All of them are exposed to some degree to the threat of contagion from the local fever sheds and the immigrants who have "crawled" from them into the city (49). Ultimately, Joe Beef delivers a funeral oration and comments on the catastrophe: "Over six thousand people died and were buried that summer in Pointe Saint Charles," he declares; "shoved in a hole, like garbage, by the City Fathers of Montreal. Gone, forgotten and buried in a common grave" (52). This imagined spectacle of the immigrant's disempowerment invests the audience as well as local residents with a sense of historical duty not simply to remember them but to recall their struggles as a vehicle for the mobilization of class consciousness as much in the past as in the present.

In the play's final scene, the characters congregate around the replica Black Rock memorial which becomes a marker of their class rather than minority ethnic affinities. Impersonating their ancestors, modern day French Canadian and Irish workers "stand together" and insist that they will only be "strong together" if they form "une grande Union" (102): "les Blokes et les Pepsis tout ensemble" as expressed in their self-mocking and pejorative working class dialect (73). The stage directions read that "Joe Beef comes out from behind his bar as the workers bring on a replica of the Black Rock" which they place "centre stage, then gather around it in a semi-circle" (103). In unison they read its inscription, "raise their fists," and declare: "Je me souviens" in an ironic recuperation of the provincial motto (103). Québec's motto is often assumed erroneously (by residents of the province of all backgrounds, as well as in the rest of Canada) to refer to the conquest of French Canada by the British. However, its remit is both vaguer and broader and is thus open to appropriation. Its recuperation in a spirit of radical remembrance gives expression to the formation of working class consciousness.

By contrast, Hopkins's, Minogue's, and Forrest's plays re-enact the mass adoptions of Irish orphans in 1847 as a communal myth of origin that dramatizes their integration into the Québec host nation. As I argue elsewhere ("Remembering Famine Orphans"), this cultural memory has been widely disseminated in the *Les Orphelins d'Irlande* Heritage Minute produced in 1991 by the Historica Canada Foundation. It emphasizes French-Canadian "sympathy for the victims" and their endeavors to "preserve the Irish identity of the children" adopted by Québec families (<<https://www.historicacanada.ca/fr/content/heritage-minutes/les-orphelins-dirlande>>). Both French and English versions of the Heritage Minute show Montréal Bishop Ignace Bourget and an adoptive mother speaking in French (the English version has subtitles). Bishop Bourget's magnanimous gesture of permitting the orphan Molly Johnson to keep her Irish name "in memory of her homeland" is emphasized as being a significant part of Canadian heritage. Thus, whereas he initially confers "the proud new name" of Bélanger on Molly Johnson and proclaims her a "Canadian now," he then relents at the behest of her new French Canadian family to honor her dying mother's wish "to keep her Irish name." The implication is that there is no contradiction between becoming Canadian and the retention of an Irish cultural heritage. The memory of the Famine orphans is perceived as an integral part of Québec heritage because it exemplifies that accommodation rather than assimilation defines the process by which immigrants and cultural minorities become integrated into its host society.

The orphans' experience in *Les Orphelins d'Irlande* also appears to promote the idea that both English-Canada and Québec provide ideal models of the multicultural or intercultural nation for those who arrive as immigrants. The Famine Irish "were the first large group who were regarded in North America as "immigrants" (a foreign element needing to be absorbed) rather than as "settlers"" (Stevenson 13). In Québec in particular, nineteenth-century Irish immigrants have been described as its first sizeable minority ethnic or cultural community, who generated a positive model for the reception of immigrant groups that followed them because of their gradual upward social mobility and capacity to create their own institutions and social infrastructure (see Olson and Thornton 351). In "The Politics of Recognition," Charles Taylor defines multiculturalism as a process of negotiation in which immigrants and minorities struggle for recognition and respect of their distinct communal identities by members of the dominant host society: "Discussions of multiculturalism are undergirded by the premise that the withholding of recognition can be a form of oppression" (36). He adds that what he terms "the struggle for [communal acceptance] can only find one satisfactory resolution, and that is a regime of reciprocal recognition

among equals" (50). A multicultural society is thus comprised of a variety of distinctive cultural communities that afford mutual respect to one another within the context of the larger nation. Québec interculturalism diverges from English-Canadian multiculturalism in its emphasis on the preeminence of the French language, although the similarities between them "seem in practice to outweigh the differences" (Stevenson 226). At root, Québec interculturalism represents "a culture of convergence based on the centrality of Francophone culture, traditional and modern, [that is] expected to be enriched by the contributions of the cultural communities" (McAndrew 152-53), including contributions by minority ethnic groups.

It is significant that in *Les Orphelins d'Irlande* the French-Canadian family provides the vehicle for recognition of the Irish as a distinct community within the larger Canadian society. In taking the place of her Irish predecessor, the French-Canadian mother becomes the conduit for the transmission of Irish identity to her adoptive children from their stricken parents, and guarantor of its recognition and respect within their new family and the nation at large. Her provision of recognition also extends from the family to the French-Canadian community, in whose name Bishop Bourget safeguards the orphans' Irish identity as an expression of its tolerance of diversity. Indeed, *Les Orphelins d'Irlande* encapsulates the ideals not only of Canadian multiculturalism, but also the type of openness to the "symbolic references" of other cultures that Bouchard describes in *Interculturalism: A View from Québec*. In presiding over Irish orphan adoptions, Bourget prefigures the role of both the English-Canadian multicultural and Québec intercultural societies by providing recognition and respect to a minority community that helps to comprise the nation's diversity.

Yet it is noteworthy that the celebration of tolerance takes place within a context of French linguistic preeminence, as it is the French Canadians, speaking in French, who are fore-grounded as the receiving community. In some senses, *Les Orphelins d'Irlande* serves to demonstrate how easily important levels of diversity can be elided, even while the concept itself is being promoted. Many of the arriving orphans were adopted into English-speaking Irish Catholic families and Protestant Irish orphans were given new homes by their co-religionists. Significantly—and ironically given the emphasis on French in *Les Orphelins d'Irlande*—many Irish orphans in Québec became English rather than French speakers, especially in Montréal (see Dowd). In Montréal their influx led to the creation of St. Patrick's Orphan asylum which would become a source of bitter rivalry between Bishop Bourget and Irish Catholic community and religious leaders a generation after the Famine migration (see King, "Remembering"). Equally noteworthy is that the Famine orphan Molly Johnson speaks in relatively fluent French although she is just off the boat (and partly in Canadian-accented English), as an exemplary immigrant in her new host society.

This capsule history of the adoption of famine orphans has been repeatedly re-enacted in community theater productions in modern Ireland and Québec. In March 2016, a bilingual musical production by Margaret Forrest, John Halpin, and Hubert Radoux entitled *Grosse-Île: A Choral Story / Une Histoire Chorale* was performed by a cast of fifty for a mainly Francophone audience at the *Palais Montcalm* in Québec City. The audience is implicated in the performance as the descendants of Québec's generous and welcoming inhabitants. "During the coda, Father Charles ... sends the orphans ... to their adoptive families in the audience" (Forrest, Halpin, Radoux 40). Similarly, Hopkins's *Heroes of the Black Rock* re-enacts famine orphan adoptions in Montréal as a foundational moment in a communal myth of origin. Her play was written, devised, and performed by and for local residents in the Montréal's Pointe St. Charles neighborhood. The work pays tribute to the cast's Irish ancestors and French-Canadian benefactors who cared for fever victims during the typhus epidemic of 1847. The local origins of the play are underscored by the replica of the Black Rock Memorial to the migrants that appears on stage throughout the production. As in *Les Orphelins d'Irlande* and *Grosse-Île: A Choral Story*, a French-Canadian priest stands center-stage in *Heroes of the Black Rock* beseeching his congregation to take in "the orphans of the fever epidemic ... It is not their fault... that these children were brought to us ... The Irish Catholics cannot take them all. They cannot be sent back to Ireland. There is no-one there for them" (6). In imploring his parishioners to adopt these famine orphans, he also insists that "the children will be allowed to keep their Irish names, first and last" (6). The play's emphasis on the retention of Irish surnames reinforces the primary legacy of the Famine migration as one of French-Canadian compassion, recognition of Irish cultural distinctiveness, and accommodation of diversity. Indeed, *Heroes of the Black Rock* makes clear that the Irish community and Anglophone national minority need to be recognized as an integral part of Québec society.

In an Irish context, the dramatization of famine orphan adoptions was recreated in *Flight to Grosse-Île* by Jim Minogue, which won the Confined All-Ireland theater competition in 1998. Since then the play has been revived on a number of occasions by the Mountjoy Theatre Project in 1999 and Skibbereen Theatre Society for Ireland's National Famine Commemoration Day in 2009. The play is set in Tipperary and based on the imagined experiences of a famine orphan named Catherine Kennedy, who lost her parents in Québec in 1847. Little is known about the actual Catherine, except that she was adopted into a French-Canadian family after her parents and siblings perished during the trans-Atlantic crossing. In *Flight to Grosse Île*, the play's repeated Latin refrain—*non omni moriar*—underscores its preoccupation with cultural survival in Ireland and Québec. The play develops a romantic plotline between a school master, Eoin Mac Aogáin and his pupil, the aforementioned Catherine Kennedy, whose courtship is disrupted and overshadowed by premonitions of disaster with the onset of the potato blight. As an embodiment of traditional culture, Mac Aogáin is lamented as "one of the last of bardic poets" (32). However, he seems less resilient than the more pragmatic Catherine, who accuses him of living in the past. Ultimately, Catherine and Eoin emigrate from Ireland, although only she survives the journey. The play dramatizes her memories and is elegiac in tone as she recalls the calamitous events that brought her from Tipperary to Québec.

As in *Les Orphelins d'Irlande*, the theatrical conventions of *Flight to Grosse-Île* are largely derived from the iconic images and communal memory associated with Québec's famine orphans. Their adoptions by French-Canadian families, the retention of their Irish surnames at the behest of their new parents, and the adoption sermon presided over by a French-Canadian priest (see King, "Remembering" 115-44) each provides a set piece in the plot's development. Catherine delivers monologues in the beginning (2), middle (22-23), and ending (34) of the play in which she reflects upon her experience after having married Edouard Caron, a nephew in her adoptive French-Canadian family, and her integration into Québec society. In her opening monologue, she recalls that it sounded strange when she heard her name in French (2). There is an emphasis on cultural resilience here, although this is undercut by the elegiac and funereal tone at the end of the play. As the lights fade out, Catherine Kennedy stands alone on stage while the ghostly revenants of her extended Irish family assemble behind her, the multitude of famine dead, against the backdrop of the illuminated Celtic Cross on Grosse Île. Throughout the play her French-Canadian husband Edouard and children never appear on stage, their ephemeral presence standing in marked contrast with the assembled Irish famine dead before the audience at the curtain's close. Her new life in Québec appears marked by the memory of the devastation of the Famine. Importantly however, as in *Les Orphelins d'Irlande*, Catherine's adoptive French-Canadian family is recalled as the custodian of her Irish identity in Québec. The retention of her Irish surname is again emphasized as a gesture of accommodation accentuated by its strangeness in French pronunciation. In her final monologue, Catherine acknowledges her role in preserving and transmitting not only an Irish, but also a French-Canadian cultural heritage to her children whom she describes as citizens of the new Canada. Having received recognition of her distinct Irish ethnicity from her adoptive family, the fully-grown famine orphan now recognizes her duty to safeguard the French-Canadian identity of her children in turn. As a parable of inclusiveness, the play suggests that the banding together of French Canadians and the Famine Irish will result in the cultural survival of both groups.

One of the most interesting performances of Minogue's play *Flight to Grosse-Île* was by the Mountjoy Prison Theatre Project in April 1999. In the production, the character of Father Cazeau, a historical French-Canadian clergyman who was known as "the priest of the Irish," was cross-racially cast and played by Tola Mohmoh, an asylum seeker and prisoner in Mountjoy. At the height of the play, Father Cazeau delivers a sermon in which he avows: "There is no Irish blood in my veins, but there is pity in [my heart] for Irish suffering" (26). What made the declaration particularly "electrifying," according to *Irish Times* columnist Mary Holland, was that the actor/prisoner playing Father Cazeau was black and that seated directly in front of him in the audience that night was Irish Minister for Justice, Equality, and Law Reform (whose portfolio included immigration), John O'Donoghue (16). It must have been a compelling theatrical spectacle, a member of a visible minority preaching to the Minister not in his capacity as a prisoner of the state, but in the guise of a French-Canadian priest invoking the specter of the Minister's own ancestors and their generous reception in Québec and beseeching him to show compassion for those who arrive unwanted "on a hostile shore": "Have we not got room? Just a little space?" (26), he implores. The meaning of his question and the ironic role reversals enacted on stage could not have been lost upon anyone in the audience.

Ultimately, the play engaged as much with the social concerns of the present as with those of the past. In its program, Tola Mohmoh contends that "It has been a great opportunity for me to be involved in a play of such magnitude, a play that deals with what the Irish went through in those hard times. Being of ethnic origin, and knowing my roots, I can relate to the 'plight of the Irish'." His statement represents a remarkable inversion of what Steve Garner has termed "the historical duty argument": the idea that Ireland's historical experience of colonization and forced emigration has made the Irish empathetic to other people undergoing similar struggles (159). Like Father Cazeau, Tola Mohmoh might not have Irish blood in his veins, but he can relate to the audience through the prism of famine memory. His "ethnic origin" has taught him compassion for the "plight of the Irish" who, like him, arrived unwanted on a "hostile shore." As the "priest of the Irish" he reminded the audience of the generosity and hospitality received by their own ancestors in Québec. Father Cazeau/Tola Mohmoh thus becomes a palimpsestic figure of converging temporalities representing Ireland's recent immigrants and iconic Irish emigrants at the same time. Both on and off stage, he implored audience members to welcome newcomers in contemporary Ireland as their predecessors had been received abroad. His sermon provided a flash of recognition that Irish orphans became model immigrants because they were accommodated rather than neglected within their host society.

Whereas Fennario's *Joe Beef* seeks to remake the community whose history it recreates through the cultivation of class consciousness, in *Flight to Grosse-Île*, *Heroes of the Black Rock*, *Grosse-Île: A Choral Story*, and *Les Orphelins d'Irlande* we see the transmission of communal remembrance as a story of social acceptance. Fennario's play, by contrast, contests the inculcation of a minority ethnic identity amongst immigrants who want simply to belong within their host society. Yet his repudiation of cultural nationalism does not explain Fennario's exclusion from discussions of national performance in Québec. Indeed, Fennario was the best-known Anglophone playwright on Montréal's professional English-language stage long before he became a community theater practitioner in writing *Joe Beef*. In particular, he was acclaimed as the author of *Balconville* (1979), a bilingual dramatization of life in working-class Montréal. Yet in Francophone circles Fennario remains relatively unknown, despite his comparable career trajectory with that of the celebrated French-language playwright Michel Tremblay (see Moyes 12). He is the best-known representative of Québec's English-speaking national minority that Bouchard argues must be included in endeavors to define the Québec nation and its national performance.

In an Irish context, the exclusion of Fennario as Québec's most renowned English-language playwright from its repertoire of national performance makes him a cautionary figure. Irish theater scholars should learn from his example how blind spots can arise in their own conceptions of national performance and canon formation that fail to include (im)migrant, minority ethnic, and national minority theater

practitioners as with the Anglo-Québécois in Québec. There is little danger of Ireland's national minority of Protestant theater practitioners being omitted from the Irish national repertoire like their Anglophone counterparts in Québec, given the importance of Lady Gregory, Yeats, and Synge in establishing Ireland's National Theatre Society and Abbey Theatre in the early twentieth century. Ireland's national Abbey Theatre has proven less receptive, however, to the experiences of immigrants and "new Irish" communities, as reflected in the controversy surrounding Bisi Adigun's and Roddy Doyle's second production of *Playboy of the Western World: A New Version* in 2008 (see King, "Contemporary" 67-78; McIvor and Spangler 1-2). The play recounts the struggles of a seemingly orphaned newcomer to gain acceptance in an isolated Irish community that embraces and then expels him for failing to conform to its insular self-image. When it was first adapted by Irish-born Doyle and Nigerian-born Adigun in 2007, the new version of *The Playboy* was celebrated for its intercultural artistic collaboration and commercial success. A year later relations deteriorated between its co-authors and Adigun took legal action against Doyle and the Abbey Theatre for depriving him of royalties and for unauthorized script changes when they mounted a second production without his consent. As a national performance, this new *Playboy* controversy exposed entrenched inequalities and a lack of recognition and respect for minorities at the heart of the Irish theater industry. By contrast, theorists of national performance in Québec appear receptive to recent immigrants, but oblivious of the long-standing national Anglophone minority including its sizeable Irish community.

In conclusion, the commemoration of famine orphan adoptions in theater productions I discuss celebrate Irish ancestry and cultural diversity, while often eliding the ethno-religious, linguistic, and political tensions between Québec's French-Canadian and Irish communities. Hopkins's, Minogue's, and Forrester's plays re-enact the orphan adoptions as a communal myth of origin. Their dramatization of Irish historical memories of migration recall the orphans' arrival in Québec as a foundational moment of Irish acceptance, integration, and national belonging within an open and welcoming host society. The community cast members in these plays also express their desire for recognition as the descendants of Irish immigrants and as members of Québec's Anglophone national minority. By contrast, Fennario conceptualizes Irish community theater as a rehearsal for class struggle rather than cultural survival in which the Famine migrants and their descendants re-enact the history of labor exploitation in English-Canada and Québec. Yet his exclusion from Québec's repertoire of national performance seems all the more striking given his stature as one of its most distinguished English-language playwrights, a critical voice of the Anglophone national minority. The lack of recognition of playwrights such as Fennario in Québec and the side-lining of "new Irish" theater companies like Adigun's Arambe productions in Ireland expose the limitations of national performance as currently conceived in the two societies.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.
- Bouchard, Gérard. *Interculturalism: A View from Québec*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2015.
- Bouchard, Gérard, and Charles Taylor. *Building the Future: A Time for Reconciliation*. Québec: Commission de Consultation sur les Pratiques D'accommodement Reliées aux Différences Culturelles, 2008.
- Clare, David. "Wilde, Shaw, and Somerville and Ross: Irish Revisionists, Irish Britons, or Both?" *Irish Studies Review* 22.1 (2014): 91-103.
- Dowd, Patrick. *Objections and Remonstrances against the Dismemberment of the Ancient Parish of Montreal, and the Proposed Erections of the Parishes of St James and St Patricks, made at Meetings held in September and November, 1866*. Montréal: John Lovell, 1867.
- Fennario, David. *Balconville*. Montréal: Centaur Theater Company, 1992.
- Fennario, David. *Joe Beef: (A History of Pointe Saint Charles)*. Vancouver: Talon Books, 1991.
- Forrest, Margaret, John Halpin, and Hubert Radoux. *Grosse-Île: A Choral Story / Une Histoire Chorale*. Unpublished ms. (2016).
- Gale, Lorena. *Je me souviens. Memoires of an Expatriate Anglophone Montréalaise Québécoise Exiled in Canada*. Vancouver: Talonbooks. 2001.
- Garner, Steve. *Racism in the Irish Experience*. London: Pluto P, 2004.
- Holland, Mary. "The Most Important Play seen in Dublin for Some Time." *Irish Times* (1999.04.15.): 16.
- Hopkins, Peggie. *Heroes of the Black Rock*. Unpublished ms (2014).
- Hurley, Erin. *National Performance: Representing Quebec from Expo 67 to Celine Dion*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2011.
- King, Jason. "Contemporary Irish Theatre, the New *Playboy* Controversy, and the Economic Crisis." *Irish Studies Review* 24:1 (2016): 67-78.
- King, Jason. "Remembering Famine Orphans: The Transmission of Famine Memory between Ireland and Quebec." *Holodomor in Ukraine and Great Famine in Ireland: Histories, Representations and Memories*. Ed. Christian Nock, Lindsay Janssen, and Vincent Comerford. London: Anthem P, 2012.115-144.
- Les Orphelins d'Irlande* (1991): <<https://www.historicacanada.ca/fr/content/heritage-minutes/les-orphelins-dirlande>>).
- McAndrew, Marie. *Fragile Majorities and Education: Belgium, Catalonia, Northern Ireland, and Quebec*. Trans. Michael O'Hearn. Montréal: McGill-Queens UP, 2013.
- McIvor, Charlotte and Matthew Spangler, eds. *Staging Intercultural Ireland: New Plays and Practitioner Perspectives*. Cork: Cork UP, 2014.
- Minogue, Jim. *Flight to Grosse-Île*. Unpublished ms. (1998).
- Moss, Jane. "Je me souviens': Staging Memory in Anglo-Québécois Theater." *Journal of Canadian Studies / Revue d'études canadiennes* 46.3 (2012): 60-80.
- Moyes, Lianne. "Fitful Colloquy. Une occupation difficile des lieux." *Journal of Canadian Studies / Revue d'études canadiennes* 46.3 (2012): 5-27.
- O'Gallagher, Marianne. *Grosse Ile: Gateway to Canada, 1832-1937*. Québec: Carraig Books, 1984.
- Olson, Sherr, and Patricia Thornton. *Peopling the North American City: Montreal, 1840-1900*. Montréal: McGill-Queens UP, 2011.

Stevenson, Garth. *Building Nations from Diversity: Canadian and American Experiences Compared*. Montréal: McGill-Queens UP, 2014.

Stevenson, Garth. *Parallel Paths: The Development of Nationalism in Ireland and Quebec*. Montréal: McGill-Queens UP, 2006.

Taylor, Charles. *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994.

Author's profile: Jason King is an Irish Research Council Postdoctoral Researcher at the Moore Institute of the National University of Ireland Galway. His interests in research include interculturalism, migration, cultural memory, and Irish literature and theater and performance. In addition to numerous articles, King's recent book publications include the single-authored book *Irish Famine Migration Narratives* (2017) and the edited volumes *Interculturalism and Performance Now: New Directions?* (with Charlotte McIvor, 2017) and *Irish Global Migration and Memory: Transnational Perspectives of Ireland's Famine Exodus* (with Marguerite Corporaal, 2016).
E-mail: <jking@yahoo.com>