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PADRAIG KIRWAN & LEANNE HOWE

INTRODUCTION

The remarkable story of the gift sent by the Choctaw to the Irish in 1847 is one that is often told and remembered by people in both nations. *Famine Pots* came to life in the bid to honor that extraordinary gift, and to provide some context and consideration; it has long been our intention to examine what might be called the deep ecology of the relationship between the Choctaw and the Irish. We hope that this book initiates conversations and considerations, not least because we believe that this connection deserves further, sustained attention. We also know that there are many ways in which our stories, and even our ways of telling stories are connected. Indeed, one has only to compare the tales told by contemporary Choctaw storytellers like Tim Tingle, and the late Greg Rodgers on one hand, and those narrated by the Irish *seanchaidh* Sean Henry and Eddie Lenihan on the other, to see some distinct connections and similarities in both style and purpose. Intensely interested in the power of verbal art and in storytelling as a dynamic form, these performers continue the folk traditions found in both communities, and place modern audiences in contact with past contexts, historic events, personal and communal memories. It would appear to be no accident, then that many of the stories told by Tingle and Henry, respectively, focus on the Trail of Tears and the Great Famine and do so as a means of recollecting, framing and even embodying past histories and contemporary relationships to place, community and language. Tingle, for his part, argues that those stories are very often about “dealing with loss and maintaining a positive, healthy outlook” (interview).ⁱ In 1980 Henry recalled his time listening to tellers such as Farrell Lavelle from Achill, and, thereafter, weaving together stories of his grandmother’s life and accounts of the famine as well as the Irish Rebellion in 1798.ⁱⁱ

We find it altogether striking that in thinking about the meandering and vital nature of stories, one of us has previously written about searching for the “unending connections [between] past, present and future” that occur within Choctaw storytelling (Howe, “The Story of America”, 47). The rhetorical space that is shaped by this type of connectedness essentially becomes the means through which “Native people created narratives that were histories and stories with the power to transform” (Howe, “Tribalography: The Power of Native Stories”, 118). Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd has suggested that this is a metaphoric cosmos or worldview, one that “locates itself initially within the particularities of Chickasaw and Choctaw structures of relationality and governance, and from there it looks out toward a

region, a hemisphere, to a world” (111). We believe that those “structures of relationality” simultaneously underpinned the Choctaw’s recognition of the Irish in 1849 and created a context in which stories might be shared, and a rhetorical space might be enlarged. We are also minded to believe that Henry’s comment on story’s function and form reveals the extent to which Irish storytellers often seek to work in a communally informed and textured way. The idea of looking beyond the self and telling shared stories is, if one thinks about it, is common to both the Choctaw and the Irish. It is no accident, then, that the gift was sent, nor that it has lived on in the minds and the mouths of both communities.

The storied and emplotted spaces explored by Choctaw storytellers such as Tingle and Philip Carroll Morgan put us very much in the mind of Seamus Heaney’s “Bogland.” That poem that not only offers one of the most arresting, disruptive and dexterous challenges to notion of untamed, uncivilized land, but which shows that “the Irish land was never empty; it is saturated with layer upon layer of human history.” Heaney’s landscape, according to Marjorie Howes and Kevin O’Neill, is “is embodied by the soft, shifting, ill-defined contours of the bog itself, a history whose uncertainties, present implications, and potential dangers are infinite” (13). Most important, however, is the reality that the landscape—and the poet’s relationship with it—reflects not only the “disparate kinds of visual imagination, historical awareness, and political tradition” found in Ireland, but also a realization that the bog, the epitome of Irish homelands in many respects, might contain “Atlantic seepage” and are “bottomless” (Knowles and O’Neill, 15; Heaney, 56). By summoning up a vision of the ancestors—“pioneers” moving “Inwards and downwards” in Heaney’s words—and by placing them in their natural relationship with the bog, before then introducing the loaded image of the Atlantic waters, the poem establishes a profoundly embodied sense of the local before moving to the international. That sense of connectedness between a specific landscape, story and ancestry (in this case Irish) on one hand, and the wider world on the other is surely a large part of what Byrd finds most momentous about Howe’s sense of “tribalography.” Heaney, like the Choctaw ancestors, looked towards “a region, [and] a hemisphere, to a world.” This is hardly surprising; the very best artists from our communities have a very particular notion of the manner in which the local represents the universal. By the same token, there is more than an echo the beliefs that the Choctaw have about their relationship to the storytellers of the past in Eddie Lenihan’s avowal that, when he’s telling a story, it’s the voice of those who have gone before: “their [*sic*] dead—but they’re not dead! While I’m telling their stories they’re still alive. And it was the same from way before” (Gentile “Stories of the Otherworld: An Interview with Eddie Lenihan”, 158). The associative and connective

strengths found within the stories told within our communities ultimately become palimpsestic, with the remembering of local and familial traditions informing the lived realities of today.ⁱⁱⁱ

Such narratological layering is, of course, informed by and reflective of the pre-historical spiritual and landscape traditions of both the Choctaw and the Irish. The tribe was amongst a number of ancient mound building civilizations in southeastern North America, and built mounds that continue to be revered sites. Nanih Waiya, located in present-day Winston County Mississippi, is the mound that the tribe holds most sacred.^{iv} Although its exact age is unknown, the large structure—which is forty feet high and has a base of approximately one acre in size—probably dates from around 500BC, and is central to the tribe’s origin. In one of the two creation stories told, the tribe—as well as the Cherokee, the Creek (Muscogee), the Chickasaw and the Seminole—emerged from Nanih Waiya, or the ‘leaning hill’. In another version of the story, the Choctaw are said to have travelled from the American West, carrying the bones of the ancestors with them to their new home. Once there they interred the remains at Nanih Waiya, a site that had spiritual, political and ceremonial importance. It is hard not to be struck by the similarities between the Choctaw site and the megalithic structures found in Brú na Bóinne in Ireland, especially Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth. Thought to date from 3,200BC the largest of these Neolithic structures is, of course, to be found Newgrange. Thirty nine feet high and also covering an acre of ground at its base, the passage tomb at Newgrange consists of layers of stone and earth, and excavations there have proven without doubt that it was a burial chamber. The archaeologist Michael J. O’Kelly has gone so far as to suggest that the people who worshipped at Newgrange were part of a “cult of the dead” (112). Long since associated with Irish mythology, particularly the story cycles of Tuatha De Danann, which tell of the divine race that populated Ireland, the mounds found at Brú na Bóinne resonate not only with the physical structures found in Mississippi and Oklahoma, but with the palpable links between place and narrative too. Although the tales told in Choctaw country and Ireland are radically different, there is, perhaps, much about the way that the inhabitants of these storied landscapes think about their worlds, ancestors and histories that can be compared. Recognition of those similarities, however fleeting and cursory, may have helped to shape the exchanges that have taken place between the tribe and the Irish to date.

Most crucial, perhaps, is the fact that those forms of exchange have endured. In May 1995 Mary Robinson became the first President of any country to visit the Choctaw Nation. While visiting the Tribal complex in Durant, Oklahoma, President Robinson met with then

chief, Hollis Roberts, and spoke about the nature and significance of the gift, telling those assembled:

This gesture by the Choctaw people, coming at a time when Ireland was facing the greatest calamity in its history, was and is extraordinarily special. For Irish people in the generations since the Famine, this wonderful donation, and the enormous generosity of the Choctaw people, has been an important part of our folk memory. This gift, so much from those who could afford so little, has given the Choctaw people a unique and cherished place in Irish history, and in the imagination and hearts of our people.

Shortly afterwards, in 1996, she reminded those assembled at a White House state dinner in her honor, quite simply that ‘we must...[have] a sense of history’ before reminding those assembled that the gift from the Choctaw “has never been forgotten in Ireland.” Robinson’s successor, President Mary McAleese paid tribute the gift on numerous occasions during presidency. In 2002 President McAleese noted that Ireland is “a first world nation with a third world memory” when addressing the crowd at the official dedication of the Irish Hunger Memorial in New York. Either consciously or unconsciously quoting Irish scholar Luke Gibbons, who made that very point in his 1998 essay “Ireland and the Colonization of Theory”, the President’s comment emanates from a similar impulse—the impulse to understand the present, and to map new futures, by charting the waters of our shared histories. On September 10, 2011 President McAleese recalled the circumstances surrounding the gift itself while speaking at National Famine Memorial Day, saying “the Choctaw tribe of native American Indians who, in 1847, donated the equivalent of more than \$100,000” (*The Irish Times*, September 12, 2011). This story of the gift has inspired more than spoken references to transatlantic connection; in 2013, the town council in Midleton, County Cork, voted unanimously to launch a competition that would lead to its commissioning of a large public sculpture that would call to mind, and honor, recognize the tribe’s generosity. That competition led to the creation of ‘Kindred Spirits’, a public sculpture consisting of nine stainless steel feathers that are twenty feet tall and arranged in a circle. The piece itself establishes various fields of interaction and the feathers can be viewed from any number of perspectives, including: either inside or outside of the circle that they collectively create; with the estuary in the background (facing north); with land in the background (facing south). That north/south axis alone is capable, therefore of summoning up either the long history of migration from Cobh, which the estuary runs past as it reaches the Irish Sea, on one hand, or the manner in which the donation arrived on Irish shores and was then distributed inland,

throughout several parishes and locations on the other. Ideally, it will be seen from both of those vantage points, as the majority of those visiting Bailic Park will move around, between and through the individual feathers. By availing of the opportunity to mimic the natural curvature of an eagle feather, and placing them in a circle, Pentak sought to allude, simultaneously, to: the shape of a food bowl; to Choctaw traditions, especially the tribe's belief in feeding and giving; to the circular nature of the connection between the discrete geographical spaces; and, finally, the strength that is inherent in the structure's steel parts, and the delicateness of the feather. "I wanted to try and create a fusion," he told one of the editors in 2016, one "that would somehow visually symbolize the history of the famine and the Choctaw donation—the humanity and tenderness in such a terrible time, amidst the horror of what was going on Ireland, but also [what had happened] thirteen years previous during the Trail of Tears" (personal interview). As an artist, he says, some of the most exciting ideas arise out of the notion of "blurred boundaries and interconnectedness" (ibid).

QUESTIONING AFFINITIES

But it is not all plain sailing, of course. What has sometimes been forgotten in Ireland, at least to some extent, are the more disquieting images of Irishness in America; the unsettling truths that trouble what can, by times, be an overly easy affinity, and which disrupts exaggeratedly tidy alliances. Accordingly, historian Kevin Kenny has referred to the need to consider "earthier, more conflict ridden narrative[s]" about the "past" (Kenny, 809). As well as reflecting on the form of profound empathy that is apparent in an act such as the Choctaw gift, Irish authors, artists and scholars are also pondering darker moments in our shared history too. Sebastian Barry's novel *Days without End* (2016), for instance, considers the cruel acts that often grew out the Irish immigrants' role in the settling of the United States. Set against the backdrop of some of the most calamitous events in nineteenth-century Irish and American history—the Great Famine, the Civil War and Indian Removal—that novel is narrated by a "hunger knower" who fled the famine in Ireland only to find himself locked in war with the Oglala, and even taking "a strange pleasure from [an] attack" on one of the tribe's villages (44, 32). The inspiration for at least some of the moments found Barry's fiction are surely the lives and times of figures such as General Philip Henry Sheridan (1831-1888). Although we cannot be sure whether Sheridan was Irish or Irish-American (he may have been born at the ancestral home in Killenkere, County Cavan, on board of the boat that carried his Irish parents to the United States, or in Albany some time afterwards), he rose to

the rank of major general while fighting for the Union during the American Civil War. Having been promoted to lieutenant general and given control of the Military Division of the Missouri in 1869, Sheridan spent his later career waging vicious campaigns in the Plains throughout the 1870s. In his book *Phil Sheridan and His Army* Paul Andrew Hutton recalls that Sheridan is reported to have spoken those enduring words, “the only good Indians I ever saw were dead” during a meeting with Comanche leader Toch-a-way at Fort Cobb in 1869 (Hutton, 180). Regardless of whether or not the story *is apocryphal*, Little Phil’s hatred for indigenous peoples is well documented and certain. As a result, we must remember that moments of great generosity can be followed by moments of horror and avariciousness. Peter O’Neill’s essay in this collection is a salient reminder of the fact that we must know the full story of our shared history. *All* settlers must acknowledge the debts that have been accrued; each of us is obliged to remember the need for reparations for all that was taken by force.

There are also amazingly complex moments of recognition that followed the gift. We might consider Éamon de Valera’s visit to America in 1919, when he was graciously hosted by the Anishinabeg at the Lac Courte Oreilles reservation. His apparent affinity with the tribe appears to reflect on the nuances of the experiences that they have lived through at the hand of colonial forces. De Valera’s stirring address (which is quoted at length in the first chapter of this book) subsequently builds on the powerful sense of political and cultural solidarity that the gift symbolizes; his words drew on an easy and enduring connection between the Irish the Anishinaabe. At the same time, however, Dev’s speech possibly occluded some of the complications within that relationship; the murky dimensions of Irish-American involvement in post-Revolution American nation building go unmentioned. On many levels, then, the speech and the circumstances surrounding it are testimony to the intricate nature of the gift and its various meanings. On one hand, this visit to the Lac Courte Oreilles reservation could appear as an act of political theatre that played to the gallery of international opinion in 1919; the War of Independence was raging in Ireland at that moment and de Valera and others sought the recognition of Woodrow Wilson and other world leaders. Having failed to secure a meeting with Wilson, the Irishman subsequently turned to those who had so often been out of sight and out of favor were more powerful political forces. One might regard de Valera’s move as instinctive and genuine even though it was somewhat contrived. More importantly, perhaps, the Anishinabeg’s reception of this somewhat desperate (if not comical) Irishman is proof of their generosity and their exercising of their sovereign right to practice the fine art of diplomacy and welcome the leader of a politically unrecognized foreign state to their tribal lands.

While the complications of the relationship between indigenous communities and the Irish (especially those who emigrated to the United States) should in no way diminish or tarnish the proud memory of the gift, or the enduring and deep friendship between the Choctaw and the Irish, they should be acknowledged as being part of the tapestry of stories that con-join our people. Today, as in 1847, it is vital that we go beyond the glances that may reflect an instantaneous or undemanding, fleeting, moment of recognition. As my fellow contributor Eamonn Wall—a fellow voyager on this journey of ours—has written, we must resist the “all too easy connections between Irish history and [Native American] history, between Wounded Knee and Vinegar Hill [the site where the United Irishmen were finally vanquished by English soldiers].” “It is true that they overlap,” Wall argues, before concluding: “they are not the same and can never be honestly compared” (*From the Sin-é*, 123). We must explore the depths.

Just as it is important to acknowledge some of the more violent moments in the shared histories of the Irish and countless Native American tribes, it is also imperative that we recognize the problems associated with vain attempts by Irish people to connect with, reify or—worse—appropriate aspects of indigenous spirituality, culture or identity. Sadly, this still happens today; various New Age projects in Ireland which describe themselves as sustainable living communities have sought to provide a response to the deteriorating environmental conditions of the planet by ‘playing Indian’ in both the Dublin and Wicklow mountains, and elsewhere. One such community, not far from where one of the editors grew up, promises to lead newcomers in the ‘Way of the Goddess’ via a number of shamanistic practices, including participation in sweat lodges. That community may believe that it is exploring the links between our cultures, but the fact remains that their bid to recreate ceremonies and spiritual practices that are not theirs is heartbreaking and deeply distressing to us. It is deceitful and dishonorable too. This gift across borders and between nations must remind us too of the need to respect the cultural values, the spiritual beliefs and the traditions of all communities. The appropriation of any of these amounts to nothing other than a disrespecting of the ancestors’ generosity and legacy.

What *can* we do, we might ask, and what overlapping territory *is* there to be explored? What, in short, is the work that this project might do, and what are its prospects as well as its limitations? Well, to our mind, the possible avenues for research are as exciting as they are plentiful. Borrowing from Wai Chee Dimock’s account of “deep time” we might continue the study of a transatlantic “circuit of influence” (Manning and Taylor, 7)—as Jace Weaver’s *Red Atlantic* and Peter O’Neill’s co-edited volume *The Black and Green Atlantic*

have done so well—thereby situating Irish and Indigenous presences within “far-flung temporal and spatial coordinates” (Dimock, 759).^v The existing scholarship has, in this regard, begun the task of examining the Indians and the Irish as “active agents,” to borrow a term from Weaver (xi). It has also begun to explore the “differential positioning within emerging state formations of divergent kinds”, as David Lloyd would have it (O’Neill and Lloyd, *The Black and Green Atlantic*, 3). As well as continuing the vital work of recontextualizing Native and Irish situatedness—in the Americas, Ireland, and globally—and as well as searching out what Michael Malouf describes as the cross-cultural political solidarities within overlapping diasporas, this project might also speak to who we are when we are at home (O’Neill and Lloyd, 149). As Jacki Thompson Rand’s work on the politics of international aid have recently shown, our journeys abroad and our actions there, radically shape our notion of who we are at home. As well as interpreting transatlanticism as a heuristic tool that affords us a clearer sense of patterns of movement and exchange, we might read the moment of contact—or the sending of the gift—as being crucial not only to cross-cultural synergy, but also being central to the definition nationhood, cultural ideologies, Irishness and Indigeness. We might focus on variously nuanced forms of acceptance: acceptance in the sense of taking *receipt* of \$710, as was the actual amount reported in the April 3, 1847 *Arkansas Intelligencer* that the Choctaw people collected and sent to Ireland. Today we question whether the amount was \$710 to \$170. Here we must remind readers that the history of American Indians and their money has a long history of accounting discrepancies by the federal government, Indian traders, and land speculators. So we chose to include the actual money reported on April 3. Physically and materially; acceptance in the sense of *recognizing* another community’s status within a territory and acknowledging its continuance even in the face of stark adversity; acceptance in terms of *reception* and being welcomed; acceptance in terms of the *approval* of honorable acts of selflessness and solidarity—acts that are emblemized by the \$710. We have, we are sure, a shared, and common, currency in more ways than one. Of course, this book is but one small part of it.

Accordingly, it is our hope that this book might allow us to focus on: the potential for empathy and dialogue between culturally distinct but historically comparable communities; the importance of sharing and collective wellbeing; and the interstices between academic history, popular history, oral narrative and historical fiction. Such a focus can, we believe, reveal moments of connection and reciprocity as well as the value and wider significance of such moments. We are intrigued by the possibility that the gift speaks to the conceptualization, realities, and recognition of distinct, discrete sovereignties; that it invites

reflection on processes of cultural formation within Choctaw and Irish society alike, and throws some light, perhaps, on an abiding concern with spiritual and social identity(s); that it may facilitate a fuller understanding of the historical complexities which surrounded migration and movement in the colonial world; and, finally, that it may lead to a more fruitful consideration of the ways in which Irish Studies, Native American Studies and Atlantic Studies might be fruitfully drawn together through the very kind of conversation that this book hopes to both initiate and form a part of. It is possible to think of the gift in various contexts: the significance of the gift and its place within various pre-colonial, colonial, and (in the Irish context) post-colonial discourses; the scholarly means through which a deeper appreciation of the gift might become possible; potential avenues for investigation beyond today's round table. We find ourselves simultaneously energized and challenged by the task of locating and examining what we refer to above as the "deep ecology" of the Choctaw donation to the people of Ireland. In the final event, the gift of \$710 has profound consequences regarding the possible recognition of: dynamic forms of Native-to-non-Native and nation-to-nation recognition; the vital role(s) that tribal peoples played—and continue to play—in shaping the global village; and the opportunities that arise out of processes of civic, cultural and political engagement.

Each of the essays in this book is engaged with these questions and topics. Rather than provide a purely scholarly interpretation of both the circumstances surrounding the gift and the narratives that retell the powerful story of that gift, this collection aims to blend strictly academic commentary with more creative pieces that offer a response to the Choctaw/Irish relationship. Our ambition has been to provide readers not only with some of the particulars that we have discovered during our research, but also a sense of the oral history, the shared narrative and the sense of personal and collective exhilaration that we have experienced while working on this book. Our contributions as editors, when taken together, are offered in the spirit of combining the investigation of historical sources with a slightly more imaginative speculation on the meaning of gift. The aspiration was to reveal new facts but also unfurl our growing sense of the gift's numerous relevancies. In short, as well as pondering what we already know, and adding to a specific field of knowledge, our chapters seek to prompt more questions, memories and ideas from our readers and colleagues.

The opening chapter, "Recognition, Resilience and Relief" provides an interpretation of the ways in which the gift demonstrates that the tribe was not only acknowledging the Irish and their plight, but was also relating to them. Here, Padraig Kirwan hopes to show that the

recognition revealed in this moment came to be associated with the deep senses of empathy, connection, and appreciation as well as the form of political and cultural autonomy that come with sovereignty. By closely examining the newspapers of the day, and by considering the analogies and synergies that the Choctaw and the Irish often made and generated between them, he argues that the gift has become a powerful placeholder for both communities' pride in their own sense of charity, internationalism, resilience, and spirit.

Writer and Choctaw scholar Philip Carroll Morgan shows in "Love Can Build a Bridge" how being "cooperative, and forward-thinking" may have saved the Choctaws from annihilation from the U.S. government's Gatling guns that were used out west on American Indian tribes. Yet, forced removal nevertheless left the tribe crippled as a nation until one hundred and fifty-three years later when they ratified a new constitution on June 9, 1984. Morgan explains, "in plain language, the Choctaws were promised that they could remain a self-governing people, with all the rights accruing to the citizens of their old and respected society." Of course this didn't happen, and many Choctaws simply didn't survive. "Precise record keeping," writes Morgan, "during this most chaotic transition period, which spanned two harsh winters and a cholera epidemic, was impossible, but the total population of the Choctaw Nation in 1830 is accurately estimated at 25,000. The (conservative) estimate of 2,500 Choctaws who died during the exodus from Mississippi means that at least one Choctaw of every ten died during the fall of 1831 through the winter of 1832-33. This figure does not include the 600 men, women, and children who died in the epidemic after the Arkansas River flooded in 1833, during the Choctaws' second summer in Indian Territory."

Christine Kinealy's contribution, "An Ocean of Benevolence", provides much-needed and extremely welcome insight into the charitable efforts that were being made in the United States in 1846 and thereafter. Her work dexterously maps out the differentiated landscapes upon which news of the Irish famine travelled; Kinealy helps us to gain an understanding of the involvement of protagonists such as the Quakers and the General Relief Committee of New York, thereby framing the Choctaw gift in a thoroughly useful way. In many respects, this chapter reminds us not only of the amounts dispersed, but, far more importantly, of the motivations and the means that were behind each act of giving. It is impossible not to be haunted by fact that the poorest often gave the most, as Kinealy reminds us.

Choctaw storyteller Tim Tingle writes through his personal relationships with the Irish as an invited storyteller to Ireland in "I Should have Known." He writes of the many similarities between Irish and Choctaw peoples and their ways of surviving heartbreak and happiness. He says, "The strength and power of belief, of never allowing tragedy to rule your

vision, is both Irish and Choctaw, and feeds families and individuals with a taste of hope. We also share an eerie understanding of life's arc—the expectation of tragedy. My grandmother warned us ‘to see the world through Choctaw eyes only sometimes, when you are surrounded by family and friends.’ Though the Trail of Tears and the Irish Famine are often ignored in our teachings, to avoid the pain they carry, we know that we are meant to endure sorrow, and we use whatever tools we can to light those tiny, flickering flames of joy.”

In “Ima, Give”, Howe’s essay makes clear that “giving” is a Choctaw cultural lifeway, one that was practiced with the French in the eighteenth century when rainfall and flooding wiped out the French settlement. She cites other modern examples of Choctaw giving such as the 2018 event when the Choctaw Nation came to the aid of another nation, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in North Dakota. The people of Standing Rock were protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline across waterways near the reservation. Tribal members from the Choctaw Nation brought them firewood, sleeping bags, generators, propane heater, tents, thousands of gallons of water, and other supplies to North Dakota.

In his consideration of Irish and Native American literary traditions and contemporary writing practice, Eamonn Wall seeks out some of the connections between the two. In particular, he examines some of the more significant ways in which writers from both communities meditate on, and write about, their relationship with place and with identity. In focussing on the work of the late Choctaw-Cherokee-Irish scholar, Louis Owens, this chapter searches out the numerous—and, by times, nearly numinous—territories in which we explore and come to know what Owens once referred to as “our larger selves.” Wall teases out the complexities of belonging via his treatment of indigenous and Irish literatures, and suggests that the analogous histories of the Choctaw and the Irish create moments of rich dialogue as well as moments of “negotiation, accommodation, and trade.”

Jacki Thompson Rand’s essay, “Reconciliation”, considers the nineteenth century newspaper accounts of the Choctaw donation to the Irish and international aid. She suggests the inclination of these historical reports creates the impression that colonized Indians would give charity to the very same people that brutalized them. (After all, President Andrew Jackson’s family had recently emigrated from Ireland). Rand writes, “Subsequent Irish expressions of gratitude found in print and commemorative practice intimate a kind of political solidarity between two oppressed peoples upon whom colonial powers inflicted terrible traumas leading to land the population losses.” This essay prompts us to acknowledge, and honor, the price that Choctaw diplomacy and charitableness came at. Rand

also reminds us, affectingly and powerfully, of the opportunity for reconciliation and true understanding that the memory of gift brings to us all.

Peter O’Neill’s “Famine Irish Chapters” also challenges readers with a sometimes thorny, but always necessary, consideration of the vicissitudes and vagaries of the relationship between America’s indigenous communities and the Irish; vicissitudes and vagaries that we may often shy away from if we refuse to consider the part that certain Irish immigrants played in nineteenth-century colonization. Like Rand’s, O’Neill’s contribution unambiguously states that some of those fleeing an Gorta Mór became, over time, violent settlers. He recalls the fact that former subjugated Irish Catholics subsequently played wholly disconcerting roles during the process of what scholars describe as U.S. nation building. More specifically, O’Neill offers a deft study of the sermons of Father James Chrysostom Bouchard, S.J., a Catholic priest of Leni Lenape ancestry and hailing from the tribal homelands on the east coast. In doing so, he suggests that leaders from indigenous and Irish communities sometimes found solidarity through anti-immigrant rhetoric and riots; ultimately, and controversially, he argues that neither group were impervious to the solidification of racial hierarchies in the nineteenth century, nor did the better angels always prevail.

Each of these interventions and contributions are interpolated—or, more properly, enriched—by the poetry of LeAnne Howe and Doireann Ní Ghríofa. In 2016 LeAnne and Doireann entered into a long and sustained conversation about the connections that exist between the Choctaw and the Irish. While considering various aspects of those links, these two poets have turned to the dynamic nature of language, and have pondered the enduring nature of ancestral voices and languages. The poems offered in this book form a part of the ongoing conversation between the Choctaw and the Irish, and comprise, in Ní Ghríofa’s words, a call and response. It is surely worth quoting the Irish poet’s description of this collaboration at some length, since it is a salient reminder of the work that this collection aims to do:

Over many months, we wrote poetry that became a collaborative pamphlet in ‘call and response’ mode. It is, in many ways, a conversation across the Atlantic, across cultures, and across time. In other ways, it is a song. As LeAnne says, these are “poems dedicated to our ancestors, the Irish and the Choctaws who lived and died through the hunger years, suffering at the hands of colonialism.” The poems themselves are trilingual, allowing English to form a bridge between our own native languages.^{vi}

We hope, along with Doireann and Phillip Carroll Morgan, that we can help to build that bridge.

Finally, there are numerous images of pots dispersed throughout the prose herein. Several of these are pots that have been found in Ireland and are often colloquially known as famine pots. Designed to hold sufficient food to cater for a large number of people at one time, these pots were often provided and stocked by charitable foundations and groups. They were often all that stood between life and death. They have a somewhat controversial place in history too; many commentators have accused religious missionaries of providing soup in return for promises of conversion. Others point out that these pots were sometimes placed at the workhouses that tenant farmers were herded towards in some famine-struck parts of Ireland. One of the pots included was pictured at the famine cemetery at Bodyke, County Clare (courtesy of Mark McGowan and John McManus). Its position at a mass grave speaks volumes. However we interpret the story of these pots, the fact remains that their very existence reminds us of strife and endurance, hunger and charity, death and survival, want and plenty. They are a powerful emblem of the Great Famine. Meanwhile, the Choctaw bowls and pots that are pictured contain foods that might be deemed traditional staples of the tribes— tofulla or corn soup. Like the nourishment provided in the famine pots, this dish was often made of simple, homegrown ingredients. The recipes for tofulla, pashofa and banaha usually come out whenever certain occasions are imminent: family gatherings, birthdays, and reunions. Pashofa, in particular, is cooked in huge outdoor pots and then shared amongst those gathered, and is traditionally served when the healing pashofa dance takes place. However, those traditional foods have not always associated with times of celebration; there have been moments in Choctaw history when one pot fed many who were on the brink of starvation and death too. Just as the Irish relied on the potato in the nineteenth century, the Choctaw were heavily dependent on corn as part of their staple diet. A drought in Indian Country in 1860 and an ensuing poor corn harvest in 1861 meant that many of the people within the Choctaw Nation went hungry.^{vii}

These pots, some of which are historical artifacts and some of which remain in use today, have a symbolic as well as a material significance. It is no coincidence that the artist Alex Pentak describes his enlivening sculpture ‘Kindred Spirits’ as an arrangement of feathers that take the shape of a bowl or pot (it also resembles a cupped hand, possibly suggesting a hand of friendship). As we wrote we thought, more often than not, of the sustenance that these pots provided for our ancestors, and may continue to provide for us. We thought of the act of giving, of sharing meager rations, and of the moments when our people

have relied on the help of others. We also thought of the moments that our people have been in a position to provide help. And we were called upon to remember the want and the privations felt by the Choctaw and the Irish, as only we could. In the final event, we hope that this book honors and endorses collective moments of recognition and acts of sharing, charity, and compassion.

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ⁱ In-depth Written Interview, August 9, 2011. Online. <https://www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=96&a=1>. Accessed June 12, 2019.

ⁱⁱ *Western Journal*, June 27, 1980, 25. It is important to note too, as Declan Kiberd has, that the “‘seanchaí’ told his story as if he himself had witnessed it” (‘Story-Telling: The Gaelic Tradition’, in *The Irish Short Story*, ed. Terence Brown & Patrick Rafroidi [Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe 1979], 15).

ⁱⁱⁱ Lenihan is keen to point out that “a person who knows a small area...can go back 300, 400 or 500 years”, and recalls being astounded when a storyteller, in “2000 or 2002”, pointed to an empty field and told him the name of the young girl who had babysat in a long-since vanished house that had stood there during the famine years. Interestingly, and standing in variance to the type of knowledge that Lenihan describes, non-traditional story tellers (very often not from Ireland) have sought to assume or create an Irish or Celtic identity for themselves. In his essay “Celticity and Storyteller Identity: The Use and Misuse of Ethnicity to Develop a Storyteller’s Sense of Self” Patrick Ryan has pointed out some of the ways in which these contemporary storytellers often perform a form of Celtic identity and imply “that everything ‘Celtic’ is also ‘indigenous’ or ‘aboriginal’” (*Folklore*, Vol. 117, No. 3 [Dec., 2006], 317). In considering the similarities between both the Choctaw and the Irish storytelling traditions, it is wise to in no way suggest that they are somehow intertwined, or amount to the same thing. At the same time, and somewhat ironically, it is possibly worth pointing out that a general propensity to treat identity and tradition in a reasonably superficial way has affected artists from both communities. Writers and storytellers from both cultures been also disserved by those who choose to play at being Native or Irish, either for financial gain or perceived cultural esteem.

^{iv} Several other mounds, such as Spiro Mounds in Oklahoma, are of great importance to the tribe too.

^v Peter D. O’Neill and David Lloyd eds, *The Black and Green Atlantic. Cross-Currents of the African and Irish Diasporas* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Jace Weaver, *The Red Atlantic: American Indigenes and the Making of the Modern World, 1000–1927* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

^{vi} This quotation appears on Doireann’s website, and can be accessed at: <https://doireannnighriofa.wordpress.com/2017/07/11/singing-still-a-libretto-for-the-1847-choctaw-gift-to-the-irish-for-famine-relief/>

^{vii} Kevin Z. Sweeney, *Prelude to the Dust Bowl: Drought in the Nineteenth-Century Southern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016). 98.