

“Distant sufferers: empathy and the origins of transnational humanitarianism.” Empathy: Self, Culture, Society Symposium, Indiana University’s Poynter Center for the Study of Ethics. November, 2011.”

I want to begin with a story. On March 23rd, 1847 a meeting was convened at the Choctaw Agency building in Skullyville, Arkansas. This is the administrative center of the Choctaw nation, which had been “removed” from the east coast a little more than a decade previously. The “popular agent of the Choctaws,” Major Armstrong read aloud “a circular of the Memphis committee.” Although the Memphis committee circular itself no longer exists, we know it contained information about the extensive starvation, disease and death of the Irish people, in consequence of the failure of the potato crop in 1845. I have also found that the Irish famine was used in the American Indian press in part to critique American and British imperial expansion into the west. Seven hundred and ten dollars (which economists estimate had the purchasing power of between fifteen and twenty thousand dollars today) were collected at that meeting. A local paper reported that “all subscribed. Agents, missionaries, traders and Indians, a considerable portion of which fund was made up by the latter.”¹ Shortly thereafter, news of what the *Arkansas Intelligencer* called “the ‘poor Indian’ sending his mite to the poor Irish” began to circulate in newspapers around the Atlantic.² Reprints of the *Intelligencer* article survive in the archives of the Hartford Connecticut *Christian Secretary*; the Baltimore papers *Niles’ Weekly Register*, the *North American*, and *Baltimore Sun*; the *Trenton State Gazette*; Boston’s *Emancipator and Republican*, the *Pittsfield Sun* and the *Maine Cultivator and Hallowell*

¹ Credited to the “*Arkansas Intelligencer* of April 3.”

² Credited to the “*Arkansas Intelligencer* of April 3.”



Gazette.³ Newspapers in Ireland and Britain also made mention of the Indian donation. In the mid-nineteenth century the rules governing international obligation were being worked out. Against the backdrop of centuries of relief functioning on only a local level, potential donors were encouraged to understand their obligations to “distant sufferers” in both a local and global terms.

Today, I am going to use humanitarian responses to the Irish famine from around the world as a way into the relationship between the origins of charity at a distance and empathy. I am going to argue that the Irish famine represented a moment in which the idea of giving to “distant sufferers” became normal, because of literary and periodical conventions that encouraged empathy between observers and the starving Irish. In doing so, I am going to draw out some broad themes in the history of transnational humanitarianism and also talk about the problem of using emotions like empathy in doing this history. One of the things I’m broadly interested in is how we take historical emotions seriously. The themes I want to draw out are

- 1) The shift from a feudal model of philanthropy in which local elites were solely responsible for sufferers within their district and towards a form that made no distinctions as to responsibility on the basis of distance
- 2) The mobilization of emotional language which linked a literary and periodical culture that encouraged imagined connections between the reader and the written subject and the act of giving

³ This notice was printed in the *Baltimore Sun* of April 28th, 1847; the *Trenton State Gazette* of April 29th, 1847; the *Emancipator and Republican* of May 5th, 1847; the *Pittsfield Sun* of May 6th, 1847 and the *Maine Cultivator and Hallowell Gazette* of May 8th 1847.



- 3) The ways in which philanthropy practiced by well-off of the West in order to help those who were considered incapable of helping themselves (the enslaved, “heathens” beyond the pale of civilization, and colonial subjects who lacked the moral and intellectual resources to sustain themselves or their societies) can be read simultaneously as toxic, exploitative, beneficent or emotionally authentic.

I am going to begin with a broad caricature of the literature of nineteenth-century philanthropy, as a way to reconstruct the emotional and literary worlds that potential donors inhabited. Next, I am going to turn to the Irish famine, in order to talk about some specific practices of nineteenth-century international humanitarianism, and the ways in which empathy was mobilized to encourage people to care about starving people an ocean away. I am going to close with some examples about how conviviality was cultivated between the rural Irish and people in Dublin, London and New York.

History of Philanthropy

Pinpointing the origins of international humanitarianism has been a thorny preoccupation for historians and theorists of philanthropy.⁴ Irish famine donations in particular have been written about as natural, obvious responses to distant suffering, particularly in light of ubiquitous

⁴ Historians have located the first instance of international aid in the Roman Empire, the “Age of Revolutions” and post-WWI Europe, among other places. Robert Hamlett Bremner, *Giving: charity and philanthropy in history* (Transaction Publishers, 1996); P. Gleijeses, “The limits of sympathy: the United States and the independence of Spanish America,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 24, no. 3 (1992): 481–505; A. Repousis, “The Cause of the Greeks’: Philadelphia and the Greek War for Independence, 1821-1828,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 123, no. 4 (1999): 333–363; Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: humanitarian intervention in international society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).



twentieth-century international human rights campaigns.⁵ One of the things that I am arguing is that these donations were anything but obvious, and were in fact the hard-won outcome of relief groups and newspapers that dictated that people in Europe, America, the Caribbean and India should be emotionally invested in Ireland. Histories of international humanitarianism have ascribed these significant and unprecedented donations to a pervasive culture of philanthropy that “sprung up” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁶

Those who identify the nineteenth century as a new “age of philanthropy” distinguish between a modern form of giving, which consists of a feeling of obligation to distant and proximate sufferers alike, and a “traditional mode,” made up of what Martin Gorsky calls “‘personal, face-to-face relationships of patronage’ characteristic of the ‘old society’ in which alms were dispensed by ‘the squire’s wife and daughters.’”⁷ This older, “traditional” mode was replaced in the nineteenth century by a kind of philanthropy which is “part of the language of modernity.”⁸ The “old society” form of giving was deeply local. In both Britain and America in the early nineteenth-century, relief was dispensed to paupers at the level of the parish, and local elites were expected to support those in their district out of paternalistic obligation.⁹ The primary

⁵ For example, Hasia Diner’s *Erin’s Daughters in America* describes people outside of Ireland reading about the crisis: “people around the world gasped at the horrors of the Famine. Relief poured in.” Hasia R. Diner, *Erin’s daughters in America: Irish immigrant women in the nineteenth century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 3.

⁶ From the title of G. Himmelfarb, “The Age of Philanthropy,” *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 21, no. 2 (1997): 48–55. For a discussion of the “Victorian age” as a phenomenon in both Britain and the United States, see D. W. Howe, “American Victorianism as a culture,” *American Quarterly* 27, no. 5 (1975): 507–532.

⁷ Martin Gorsky, *Patterns of philanthropy: charity and society in nineteenth-century Bristol* (Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 1999), 3–4.

⁸ N. Sznajder, “The sociology of compassion: A study in the sociology of morals,” *Journal for Cultural Research* 2, no. 1 (1998): 117.; Gorsky, *Patterns of philanthropy*, 10.

⁹ David Owen characterizes this period as the “age of benevolence.” Owen, *English*



difference between this older mode of charity and what has come to be characterized as modern philanthropy was not the role played by individual members of society. In the early modern period, like today, individuals contributed considerably to philanthropic causes. In contrast however, later forms of philanthropy focused on benefiting classes of people who were not necessarily proximate. What I'm interested in is how people came to think about suffering printed in newspapers in the same framework as suffering that was more immediately accessible.

Some scholars argue that giving through philanthropy was primarily a means of social control. This control worked through the imposition of the values of the giver on the recipient in exchange for charity.¹⁰ In consequence, philanthropy is seen by proponents of the “social control thesis” as a way for the bourgeois class to exert power over means of production and over “the less advantaged sectors of the population.”¹¹ Subsequent scholars have suggested that this highly functionalist approach ignores the real emotional significance of the gift relationship. Alan Kidd noted that “charitable giving may have less to do with the wants of the needy than with the needs

philanthropy, 1660-1960. For histories of poor laws in Ireland and the United States, see P. Gray, *The Making of the Irish Poor Law, 1815-43* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2010); Michael Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (Basic Books, 1996).

¹⁰ This “social control thesis” rests, according to Thomas Haskell, on two assumptions. The first is that the bourgeoisie “have distinctive interests deriving from [their] control over the society’s predominant means of production” and that “the class will favor any measure that ensures the docility of the less advantaged sectors of the population.” The second is that “class interest is the medium – and presumably the *only* important medium – through which structural change influences developments in the superstructure.” Haskell, “Capitalism and the origins of the humanitarian sensibility, part 1,” 341–342.

¹¹ For reviews of this approach, see: L. W. Banner, “Religious benevolence as social control: A critique of an interpretation,” *The Journal of American History* 60, no. 1 (1973): 23–41; G. S. Jones, “Class expression versus social control? A critique of recent trends in the social history of Leisure,” *History Workshop* (1977): 162–170; Himmelfarb, “The Age of Philanthropy.”



of the donor” but that also “due weight should be granted to agency as well as structure.”¹² The idea that philanthropy is functionalist first and “truly” altruistic second, persists, in part due to debates in the history of abolition. In particular, historians like David Brion Davis have argued that abolition of the slave trade was only accomplished when it became economically expedient for slaveholders to divest themselves of human property.¹³ Recently, Christopher Brown has argued that historians need to consider the social implications of participation in abolition campaigns in order to understand why abolition was considered a worthwhile cause in the first place.¹⁴ He contends that in addition to the financial reasons to support ending the slave trade, participation in abolition garnered a certain amount of moral and social capital. However, the pendulum appears to be swinging back towards the idea of “authentic” benevolence, insofar as scholars are beginning to take seriously the emotional lives of their philanthropists. These works do not ignore the possibility that class or personal interests played a role in philanthropic projects, but that those interests were tempered by or filtered through sentiment and emotions about helping others.¹⁵ This is the approach that I take to the history of international humanitarianism through the famine. Through the popular press, newspaper editors, writers and relief organizers created a vocabulary of Irish famine relief that turned on emotional connections

¹² Kidd, “Philanthropy and the ‘social history paradigm,’” 192.

¹³ For more on this debate, see Haskell, “Capitalism and the origins of the humanitarian sensibility, part 1”; T. L. Haskell, “Capitalism and the origins of the humanitarian sensibility, part 2,” *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (1985): 547–566; D. B. Davis, *The problem of slavery in the age of revolution, 1770–1823* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1999).

¹⁴ C.L. Brown, *Moral capital: foundations of British abolitionism* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

¹⁵ For a few examples of this shift, see: A. Lindenmeyr, *Poverty is not a vice: Charity, society, and the state in Imperial Russia* (Princeton University Press, 1996); Margaret H. Preston, *Charitable words: women, philanthropy, and the language of charity in nineteenth-century Dublin*, Contributions in women’s studies (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2004); V. Viaene, “International History, Religious History, Catholic History: Perspectives for Cross-Fertilization (1830—1914),” *European History Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (2008): 578.



between potential donors and the distantly suffering Irish. Although some specifics of this vocabulary were limited to the Irish case, the themes of empathy and imagined connections were characteristic of early transnational humanitarian movements, and were employed to textually collapse space between sufferers and relievers.

In order to access the experiences of readers, others scholars have turned to the history of emotions to identify tropes and themes in the early history of mass media.¹⁶ In the nineteenth century, emotion, and in particular empathy and sympathy, were central to information consumers' relationship to the press.¹⁷ Some historians have identified emotion as central to nineteenth-century culture. They argue that emotional language "produc[ed] or reproduc[ed] spectacles that cross[ed] race, class, and gender boundaries," and I would argue, space. These emotional spectacles were central to contemporaries' understanding of both themselves and their place in the world.¹⁸ Although much of the work on the history of emotion has focused on the Romantic period, when the idea of sympathy in literature rose to prominence, its methodology can be fruitfully applied to later nineteenth-century news media, and to constructions of

¹⁶ Among scholars of journalism, the issue of emotion is fraught at best. In their work on anger and the popular press, Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen note, "Emotions are little studied in the context of journalism because they appear on the 'wrong' side of traditional dichotomies such as rationality/emotionality, public/private, objective/subjective, serious/trivial etc. Emotionality is one of the characteristics used to separate fact-based and neutral quality journalism from popular or tabloid journalism." M. K. Pantti and K. Wahl-Jorgensen, "'Not an act of God': anger and citizenship in press coverage of British man-made disasters," *Media, Culture & Society* 33, no. 1 (2011): 106.

¹⁷ William M. Reddy, "Against Constructionism: The Historical Ethnography of Emotions," *Current Anthropology* 38, no. 3 (June 1997): 327-351; Nicole Eustace, *Passion is the gale: emotion, power, and the coming of the American Revolution* (UNC Press Books, 2008).

¹⁸ S. Samuels, *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1992), 4.



humanitarian obligation in particular.¹⁹

Famine as case study

First, I want to say something about why I think the Irish famine is a useful window into both the history of philanthropy and the relationship between international philanthropy and empathy. The Irish famine presented a relatively new kind of crisis in the context of international aid. Unlike political revolutions in North and South America, Greece or Europe, that had piqued international interest in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the precipitating cause for interest in Ireland was not an overtly political one. The Irish famine also stood in marked contrast to contemporary conversion missions to the “New World” and to Africa, or the campaign to abolish slavery insofar as the crisis in Ireland was relatively acute.²⁰ In many places, the potato literally failed overnight, with farmers reporting sound crops one day, and rotten fields the next. The immediacy of the Irish crisis garnered a new kind of international attention.²¹

In 1845 an estimated half of the Irish potato crop failed. In 1846, farmers lost three quarters of the meager crop that they had managed to sow after the 1845 harvest. In October of that year,

¹⁹ J. Howard, “What Is Sentimentality?,” *American Literary History* 11, no. 1 (1999): 72.

²⁰ Scholars of disaster have noted that an important difference between famines and other natural events is that although nineteenth-century observers certainly linked natural disasters like floods, earthquakes and droughts to a disapproving god, even today famines occupy an uncomfortable middle ground between natural and man-made causes. Observers of famine often feel implicated, or at least question their own wellbeing in the face of abject suffering. N. Middleton and P. O’Keefe, *Disaster and development: the politics of humanitarian aid* (Pluto Pr, 1997).

²¹ In his history of international aid and America, Merle Curti notes “The Irish famine called forth the most impressive, and in a sense the first truly national campaign to relieve suffering in another land without respect to political and nationalistic considerations.” M. Curti, *American philanthropy abroad* (Transaction Publishers, 1988), 64.



the first deaths from starvation were reported.²² Losses in 1845, 1846 and 1847 meant that even though the blight made little appearance in 1848, seed potatoes were scarce and the crops yields were very small. When the blight returned in 1849 the quantity of food produced was still disastrously low. Historians estimate that in 1845 typical Irish mortality was around 6.4 percent. By 1847, that rate had almost tripled.²³ By 1852, when most scholars agree that the effects of the potato failure had abated, Ireland's population was reduced from where demographers predicted it should be by three million.

During those seven years, over one million people emigrated out of Ireland, and over one million more died from starvation. Thousands of articles described the failure of the Irish potato crop and the starvation, disease and death of the Irish people in newspapers around the world. These newspapers forced consumers of information across the globe to bear witnesses to Irish suffering.²⁴ Simultaneously, relief groups collected over one million dollars, and nearly one million pounds' in donations to save the Irish people.²⁵ A surprisingly wide range of people contributed to famine relief, from unnamed donors of one penny or one shilling, to President Polk and Queen Victoria.

²²“Replies to Inspector General of Constabulary's Circular, 19 August, 1846”, August 19, 1846, National Archives of Ireland.

²³ Kinealy, *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine, 1845-52*, 168.

²⁴ The population of people exposed to the news in the mid nineteenth century was far greater than those who were literate, or who were financially able to subscribe to newspapers on a regular basis. Richard Altick suggests that pubs and coffee houses might have leant out copies of newspapers almost one hundred times each day, so that even those who were illiterate were able to access the news by being read to. Richard Daniel Altick, *The English common reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

²⁵ These donations took the form of money, food and clothing. Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine, 1845-52* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1994), 157–67.



Though the famine was in many ways produced as a crisis befitting international attention by the popular press (I can talk more about that), public acceptance of that idea was codified in donations to Irish famine relief. If people had not responded as widely and generously as they did, it is likely that the potato failure of 1845-52 would not be remembered as the “Great” Irish famine. In the 1840s there was scant historical precedent to dictate who should give, to whom, how much, or even how to feel in response to a foreign population suffering an acute crisis. Although interest in the famine was piqued and sustained in different ways in different locales, in all of them Ireland (or in the case of Dublin, rural Ireland) was rhetorically treated as a dangerous cautionary tale; a place in which a number of very important processes had gone catastrophically wrong. Newspapers used the motif of Ireland as a worst-case scenario in order to comment on the dangers or benefits of local concerns, like nationalism, slavery, free trade, imperialism or tenant rights. Each of these perceived failures was not unique to Ireland, but in aggregate they made Ireland’s story applicable to a wide range of local interests. These links to local interest, in turn, encouraged readers to imagine connections between themselves and the Irish.

I want to talk a bit now about the kinds of appeals for aid that were leveraged. While broad appeals to “all who can contribute, and who can feel for the sufferings of their famishing fellow creatures” –a phrase which relied on the idea that anyone reading about Ireland would be sure to remotely “feel” Irish suffering – were certainly part of an extant philanthropic vocabulary, pronouncements of general obligation did not function alone.²⁶ These catholic appeals were always paired with a local valence, which tied the interests of a particular place with those of Ireland. So, while people were encouraged to “feel for the sufferings of their famishing fellow

²⁶ *London Times*. October 23rd, 1846; *New York Herald*. August 1st, 1847.



creatures,” they were also being asked to imagine more concrete links between themselves and the people in rural Ireland.

Now a bit about how the news was spread. In the mid-nineteenth century, news, carried by horse, mail coach or rail, could travel from Cork to Dublin in four days. From Dublin, the London and British provincial papers might receive copies of Irish newspapers and print news from Ireland as little as two days later, while steamships might take up to two weeks to deliver news from Europe to American port cities. This practice of borrowing and re-printing news was so common that in November of 1846 the *Cork Constitution* complained “some of our Dublin Contemporaries frequently quote from other Papers articles of news which have been pilfered from the *Constitution*. May we request their attention to this? The pilfering process is continued from month to month, an acknowledgement being sometimes conceded to perhaps one paragraph to cover the dishonesty practiced on the others.”²⁷ (This did not, notably, prevent the *Constitution* from doing the same thing) This borrowing – or pilfering – of news meant that newspapers in Arkansas, for example, might print articles that had been gleaned from reports published in the New York papers, which relied on articles originally published in newspapers in Cork, which in turn drew on the reports of people who were actually experiencing the potato failure and the effects of famine. Although these articles might have been printed for the first time up to three weeks before they were read by Americans (or a week before they were read by Londoners), they often conveyed an immediate need for action. It was conceivable to readers that, even if the precise events reported in the article they were currently reading were weeks past, similar events – and for the purposes of appeals similar destitution – were taking place at

²⁷ *CC*. November 1st, 1846



that very moment. An example of this immediacy and re-printing is notable in the *Cherokee Advocate* of May of 1847, in an account of “the condition of Ireland” that drew on the *Cork Examiner*, the *Cork Reporter* and the *Christian Observer* in which was reported that “All accounts agree that the distress in Ireland, and the sufferings of the population are unmitigated, and surpass all that imagination can picture” and that “In the midst of appalling scenes of destitution and death, food is pouring into the country from all parts of the world, yet without seeming to arrest the famine.”²⁸ This article represented that destitution and starvation were happening “now” and that despite wide-spread relief efforts, the effects of famine were unmitigated. *The Dublin Nation* described a part of Cork in which could be found “men arraigned for stealing horses that they might feed on them - Christian mothers in the frenzy of want, committing cannibalism - the Christian dead eaten by dogs, within the shadow of the spire whose pastor, too, lies a stark corpse.”²⁹ More evocative still was an account written by a visitor to Skibbereen, which described, in a house afflicted by famine: “sitting by a few sods of turf in the corner, was a miserable looking girl, who had only that day risen from off her fever bed and crying madly and frantically, was the remaining daughter, who had three times relapsed into fever. With an expression of grief and frenzy, she rushed out of the cabin, tearing her hair, screaming wildly ‘my father and my mother are dead - and I am left alone!’...To witness the husband a perfect skeleton, still warm, to see his wretched wife extended by his side, ignorant of his fate and indifferent to her own, and to hear the feeble cries of their expiring offspring asking for a morsel of food - was altogether a scene as indescribable as it was deplorable.”³⁰ Through these reports, readers were made acutely aware of the exact nature of the suffering their

²⁸ *CA*. May 20th, 1847

²⁹ *TN*. April 8th, 1848

³⁰ *MC*. January 9th, 1848



donations would mitigate. We might imagine how readers would have responded to these evocative descriptions and accompanying appeals. Even today, in a well-lit room and in the safety of the twenty-first century, descriptions of the “feeble cries” of a woman’s “expiring offspring” or the “warm skeleton” of her husband are chilling. I think we must consider what these articles would have meant for people who could be reasonably sure, while reading, that if the particular people described were no longer suffering – people similar to them were.

Newspapers also piqued interest in Ireland by drawing similarities between what was happening in Ireland and local issues. I want to give a few examples of how these connections were effected. This is by no means an extensive list, and I hope you will forgive my somewhat broad-stroke characterizations.

In Manchester the famine was framed as both a failure of policy in the form of the Cork Laws, and as part of a larger failure of metropolitan interests to care for those at the periphery of Britain, leaving those peripheral Britons to look after each other. Donors were encouraged to give – in this case to the relief of Irish immigrants in Britain – because the metropolitan government, with characteristic “heartless cruelty” had left the relief of the Irish to “overseers of Liverpool” who could not “send the poor creatures back without exposing them to imminent risk of starvation.”³¹ [CONCLUDING SENTENCE]

In London the question of whether Ireland was a part of the empire colored famine relief rhetoric. If Ireland were simply another part of the empire, and not a flawed appendix of the

³¹ *MG*. December 12th, 1846



United Kingdom, it was the responsibility of all Britons – both metropolitan and colonial – to care for the suffering “others” under the umbrella of British imperial citizenship, and the responsibility of Londoners, who were both morally and financially the heart of the empire, to lead the way. Newspapers like the *Morning Chronicle* emphasized the closeness of Ireland and London, cultivating “the most intimate acquaintance manifested with its [Ireland’s] internal condition.”³² The *London Times*’ Irish commissioner, famous for his scathing critiques of Irish moral character published a series of articles on “the condition of the people of Ireland” which described the living conditions of Irish paupers in depressing terms. Describing a cottage in Cork, the *Times*’ commissioner wrote “it was scarcely thee yards square. I had to stoop nearly double to enter the doorway, out of which the peat smoke was issuing, there being no chimney. Inside this cottage I could not stand upright by a foot. The roof was not drop dry, and this hole worse than any pigsty, was the only living and sleeping room of the labourer, his family and his pig when he had one.”³³ These descriptions brought Londoner’s closer to Ireland, and we might imagine how they would have worked with appeals to Londoners’ imperial obligations. Certainly, considerable donations came from the British capital. While the donations of the British army in India, and of the slaves of the British West Indies were lauded, never, in any of the prominent papers was it suggested that those on the periphery should take more responsibility for the relief of Irish suffering. Instead, Londoners accepted a multifaceted status, as metropolitans, as Britons, and as a moral and philanthropic core for the empire.

In New York, the condition of Ireland was linked less with the inherent character of New

³² Quoted in J. S North, “The Morning Chronicle,” in *The Waterloo directory of English newspapers and periodicals, 1800-1900* (North Waterloo Academic Press, Waterloo, Ont., 1997).



Yorkers than it was with the immediately pressing issue of land reform. Ireland was often invoked in free soil debates as an example of the inevitable, but terrible outcome of bad land policies. This invocation reinforced an idea common among different places' reporting of the famine, that the state of Ireland could happen anywhere if certain (detrimental) policies were encouraged. In early 1846, the *New York Tribune* noted that "this [land] monopoly is the overshadowing curse of the famished millions of Great Britain and Ireland."³⁴ Throughout the 1840s, repeated references were made to the link between poor landlord-tenant relations and the crisis in Ireland. In February of 1847, the paper argued that "the moral of famine" was that "So long as a few proprietors and these mainly non-resident, are the landlords of populous Ireland, so long must the multitude groan in misery and find no relief but the grave."³⁵ The paper pointed both to the system of landholding, and to the character of landlords, adopting in many ways the rhetoric of the Dublin press on the problems with Ireland. The paper made that position explicit in July: "Every year's delay in this great matter leaves us a stride nearer to the fearful condition of Ireland."³⁶ In emphasizing the similarities between the experiences of Irish and New York paupers, papers like the *Tribune* encouraged imagined connections and empathy. The *Tribune* noted "that the nearness to which the Old World and the New are brought by steam navigation, making the trans-Atlantic cry for food strong in our ears as though it came from some distant member of our own confederacy." Further, that nearness "facilities for extending relief which cannot rightfully be disregarded."³⁷ The *Herald* echoed this sentiment a few weeks later, "the spirit of benevolence is as general as the information (thanks to the American newspaper press,)

³⁴ *NYT*. June 25th, 1846

³⁵ *NYT*. February 6th, 1846

³⁶ *NYT*. July 17th, 1847

³⁷ *NYT*. February 16th, 1847



respecting the distress of our transatlantic brethren.”³⁸

³⁸ *NYH*. March 11th, 1847

