THE COFFIN SHIP: LIFE AND DEATH AT SEA DURING THE GREAT FAMINE. By Cian T. McMahon. Pp 328. New York: New York University Press. 2021. US$35.00.

When describing the suffering of those fleeing the Great Famine, the evocative trope of the 'coffin ship' is ubiquitous. Its near omnipresence has in many ways obviated the need for careful exploration. Of course, it is assumed, emigrants weakened by malnourishment in desperate straits would suffer astronomical and disproportionate death rates during the crossing. Obviously, we surmise, those passengers were unmitigated victims of unscrupulous shipping companies, of both landlords and landsharks, of inhumane British governance, of dogmatic *laissez-faire* political economy, or — at the very least — of nature and providence. Cian T. McMahon convincingly calls into question all of these assumptions and expectations with this well-researched and beautifully-written monograph.

In five well-paced chapters, McMahon follows emigrants through the entire arc of their journey from preparation and embarkation, to the onboard experience itself, and finally to what awaited them upon arrival at their destination. Utilising a diverse collection of sources including journalism, guidebooks, reports, letters, diaries, shipping notices and, most interestingly, notes and marginalia written on prepaid tickets, the reader is taken inside the emigration experience in illuminating ways. By detailing the larger process, McMahon demonstrates the myriad ways in which emigration relied on existing and transnational infrastructure of the modern world: roads, canals, postal services, credit, money and print journalism. Far from being lost or directionless peasants thrust into an unknown world, Irish emigrants drew on both existing relationships, systems of knowledge and skill sets to navigate the momentous journey.

Importantly, McMahon persuasively argues that by focusing on the actual journey itself, we can understand better the manner in which emigration was instrumental in the construction of the global diaspora that has come to define Ireland's place in the post-Famine world. Networks that were developed and exploited to enable emigration became the foundation of larger webs of ethnic solidarity and outsized Irish influence in the world.

One particularly welcome aspect of the book is the choice to extend the scope beyond the traditional chronology, arguing that while the blight may have largely disappeared after the 1851 harvest, emigration did not return to pre-Famine levels until 1855. Likewise, the inclusion of both emigrants and transported convicts to Australasia sheds new light on the relative hardships endured by the Famine Irish emigrating to North America. Stories of intentional law-breaking in order to be transported away from the tragedy of the Famine — and the ironic fact that often these convict ships were safer than commercial ships on the much shorter transatlantic journey due to greater regulation — shed light on the complexity of would-be emigrants' agency.

While *The coffin ship* is not a Marxian history, it does repeatedly bring to mind Marx's famous dictum from *The eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* that 'men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past'. A major and compelling theme of McMahon's work is the question of Irish agency despite the most difficult of circumstances. He shows us not one-dimensionally helpless victims, but people making choices, weighing costs and benefits, and assessing risks and rewards. By diving deeply into the process of Famine emigration, the author illuminates the seemingly endless set of decisions — often from a range of bad options — that Irish emigrants had to make: whether to emigrate in the first place, where to go, how to get there, what to bring, whom to trust? In doing so, the amorphous collective of two million Irish who fled Ireland in the decade after 1845 are rendered as fully living, breathing, conscious individuals.

McMahon notes that the term 'coffin ship' predated the Famine, but did not come into wide usage until the 1880s when it was adopted as a powerful rhetorical device for Irish nationalists during the Land War and has been used liberally ever since. The lack of a detailed exploration of the growth in popularity of the term in this later period and beyond was the one significant shortcoming in my opinion. An in-depth history of the 'coffin ship' narrative would be a welcome addition to already rich literature on memorialization and commemoration, as well as nationalist rhetoric's use of the past for political purposes.

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In conclusion, McMahon has given us a colorful and insightful social and cultural history of the emigrant experience that expands our understanding of an iconic image of Irish popular history. Emigration, we are told, was clearly a form of relief during the height of the Famine, but it was simultaneously a tool of recovery, born of a changing world view in which a collective identity increasingly based on collective experience displaced one based on shared kinship.

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Mary Hayden: Irish historian and feminist, 1862–1942. By Joyce Padbury. Pp. 362. Dublin: Arlen House. 2020. €25.

This first full-length biography of Mary Hayden is long overdue given her prominent leadership and activism in overlapping circles and movements that shaped late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century Irish life. Joyce Padbury's study is chronologically based and divided into eleven chapters, each dealing with Hayden's contribution to education, feminism, social reform and nationalism.

Hayden's life from 1862 to 1942 spanned a period of change, opportunity and disappointment for women. Born into a middle-class Victorian family living in Dublin, as a woman she soon realised that she was expected to conform to social mores, that women had fewer rights, roles and opportunities than men, and that women were considered to be subordinate in a patriarchal society. Education, travel and the early death of her mother, Mary Ann (née Ryan), shaped her independent character and growing awareness of the anomalies of women's lives. Sometimes Hayden expressed a 'wish to be a man' (p. 52), and the author convincingly argues that Hayden's pursuit of the education available to men was her way of dissenting against the inadequacy of marriage and motherhood assigned to most women at the time. Impatience with such narrow conventions was a continuous theme in Hayden's life.

In October 1884 Hayden was in her second year studying modern literature when the first women graduated from the Royal University of Ireland, locating her at the centre of the expansion of educational opportunities for women which offered them the possibility of careers and financial independence. Her teaching career began in the respective Dominican and Alexandra colleges preparing women for the Royal University examinations. Hayden was also moving towards an academic career in history. She was one of the first two women to win the junior fellowship of the university in 1895. That initiated her path up the academic ladder detailed in five chapters of the book. In 1909 she became a lecturer in Irish history in University College Dublin (U.C.D.) and the first professor of modern Irish history in 1911. While this scholarly career gave her a sense of security and status, it was also marked by resistance and discrimination against women academics and students, and sexist attitudes, not greatly expanded on here.

During the late nineteenth century Hayden showed little interest in the land reform and home rule campaigns then dominating Irish politics. But the Irish literary revival interested her and soon she became active in both the National Literary Society and the Gaelic League. Membership of these organisations awakened her national pride and nationalist sympathies but unlike her friends, such as Patrick Pearse, did not lead her into militant republican circles.

Reformist concerns also interested Hayden. She visited the Magdalen Asylum in High Park in Drumcondra, Dublin, where she lamented the 'sad waste of human life' and the double standard that consigned a 'fallen' woman 'to shame and … a bitter expiation' while the man was applauded for his 'gallantry' or mildly condemned for his 'peccadillo' (p. 93). Improving conditions for poorer women and children awakened her social conscience and led her towards feminism, suffrage and women's rights. By 1914, parallel to her work in U.C.D., she was heavily engaged in the suffrage campaign. She believed that education