

September 2016

## Young Ireland and Southern Nationalism

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### Recommended Citation

McGovern, Bryan (2016) "Young Ireland and Southern Nationalism," *Irish Studies South*: Iss. 2, Article 5.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/iss/vol1/iss2/5>

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## Young Ireland and Southern Nationalism

Bryan McGovern

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We have changed the battle-field,  
But the cause abandoned never—  
Here a sharper sword to wield,  
And wage the endless war for ever.  
Yes! the war we wage with thee—  
That of light with power infernal—  
As it hath been still shall be,  
Unforgiving and eternal.

Let admiring nations praise  
The phantoms of the murdered millions.  
Hark! from out their shallow graves  
Wail our brothers o'er the billow—  
“We have died the death of slaves,  
Weeds our food, the earth our pillow.”

Lo! the ghastly spectre throng,  
Shroudless all in awful pallor!  
Vengeance! who should right their wrong?  
We have arms, and men, and valour.  
Strike! the idol long adored  
Waits the doom just gods award her;  
To arms! away! with fire and sword,  
Our march is o'er the British border!

The harlot, drunk with pride as wine,  
Revels in her guilty palace,  
Thus Belshazzar Syria's vine  
Quaffed from plundered Salem's chalice.  
That very hour avenging Fates  
Rolled back thy storied tide, Euphrates;  
And thou, the Gaul is at thy gates,  
And panic smites thy pale Penates.

The brazen hypocrite who moans  
O'er others' sins, yet dares dissemble  
Her own foul guilt, whereat the stones  
Of Sodom's self might blush and tremble!

Thy power and pride shall cease below  
The scoff of every tongue and nation.  
And men thy name shall only know  
As meaning guilt and desolation.<sup>1</sup>

Richard D'Alton Williams in 1862 penned "Song of the Irish-American Regiments," the last poem he ever wrote, as an homage to Irish expatriates fighting for both the Federal and Confederate armies. The poem illuminates how Young Irelanders, a group of cultural nationalists formed in 1842 to advocate for Irish independence, attempted to adapt to their new home while continuing to embrace the cause of Ireland. For Williams and other Young Irelanders who called the American South home, finding refuge there after their failed rebellion against the British in 1848, they faced in some ways a more daunting adaptation than those who emigrated to the North and, in other ways, a more hospitable welcome from the local population, which had an affinity for the European '48ers who struggled against oppressive governments.<sup>2</sup> In the midst of sectional conflict in America and within a region divided over issues of slavery and secession, the acculturation process was difficult as they attempted to navigate various identities and social barriers. On the other hand, the similarities of Irish and Southern grievances with reform-minded evangelicals and industrial capitalists allowed them to acknowledge and nurture their brand of radical Irish nationalism. In the mostly Protestant and highly racialized South, white Catholics were deemed less suspicious and less threatening than they were in the urban areas of the North, where religious expats had insulated themselves through the establishment of Catholic institutions. Due to the scarcity of Catholic institutions in the South outside of urban areas and Louisiana, and a tradition of radicalized and, sometimes Protestant, Irish nationalism there, Irish radicals were able to link the two strains of identity (Irish and Southern) and more easily navigate the societal constructs. In the end, the contradictions of southern nationalism and the pragmatic limitations of making parallels to the South's unique situation, meant that Irish Americans would eventually assimilate through the acceptance of strict racial segregation. More than any of them, John Mitchel, the firebrand nineteenth-century nationalist who supported opening the slave trade, secession, and the Confederate States of America, illustrates the unique obstacles and opportunities that Irish nationalists faced in the South.<sup>3</sup>

Young Irelanders, mid-nineteenth century romantic and cultural nationalists who supported Irish independence, had been introduced to the polarizing dimensions over American slavery while still in Ireland. Daniel O'Connell, the leader of the movement to repeal the Act of Union, which was supported by Young Irelanders, was a humanist and abolitionist. His views on slavery, however, were controversial within the Irish-American community, especially in the South. O'Connell condemned the proslavery views of expats, and the *Nation*, Young Ireland's mouthpiece, responded, "Repeal must not be put into conflict with any party in the States. The men of the Southern states must not have their institutions interfered with."<sup>4</sup> Although most members of Young Ireland denounced slavery in general, they worried that the issue would alienate and divide Irish Americans from the nationalist movement in the homeland. When

O'Connell criticized President James K. Polk and proslavery politicians for annexing Texas to strengthen the power of the slaveholding South, the *Nation* rebuked him. Thomas Davis, the de facto spokesperson of the group, wrote, "I condemn slavery as much as it is to condemn it...but I am not prepared to condemn the Americans to the extent to which my illustrious friend [O'Connell] goes, or silently to hear the amount of censure which he so conscientiously and so consistently with his opinions casts upon them."<sup>5</sup> Young Irelanders viewed the United States as "liberty's bulwark and Ireland's dearest ally" and that it was not the Irish people's "mission to redress all the wrongs of humanity."<sup>6</sup> The United States and Great Britain feuded over territorial claims in the Oregon territory and Maine, and Young Irelanders, with the help of Irish Americans, wished to provoke that rivalry to benefit the quest for Irish independence. They also assumed that American gains in North America would weaken the British Empire as a whole. Furthermore, the British, they argued, not the American slaveholders, were the oppressors of Ireland. As the paper put it, "we have really so very urgent affairs at home—so much abolition of white slavery to effect if we can...that all our exertions will be needed in Ireland. Carolina planters never devoured our substance, nor drove away our sheep and oxen for spoil....Our enemies are nearer home than Carolina."<sup>7</sup>

One of the more significant intersections of Irish and American views on southern slavery came when the abolitionist and former slave Frederick Douglass visited Ireland in 1845 to promote global abolitionist endeavors. While most Irish newspapers covered Douglass's groundbreaking visit, the *Nation* remained curiously silent, despite having accepted money to advertise one of his appearances. Interestingly, in the very same issue, the *Nation* printed a story of an American who freed his slaves. The story was written by an Irish American who supported the Repeal movement but opposed abolitionism. The *Nation* officially opposed slavery, and Davis went so far as to "sympathize with the struggling slave" for their condition was not unfamiliar to the Irish people.<sup>8</sup> It is possible that Young Ireland became frustrated with Douglass's alliance with and admiration of Great Britain and his voiced frustration and disdain for the American Constitution, which Young Irelanders held sacrosanct.<sup>9</sup> Douglass had also penned highly unflattering views of the Irish and even went as far to blame them for their indigent state. When Young Ireland voiced opposition to slavery in Ireland, however, it was circumstantial, ambiguous and based on national enslavement rather than the issue of individual liberty. Young Ireland's cultural nationalism, which mirrored a number of other western nationalist movements during this period, was based on the tenets of Romanticism and emphasized the welfare of a nation and its people. This differed from Douglass's and O'Connell's humanistic approaches which focused on Enlightenment notions of individual rights. O'Connell's "Cincinnati Letter," which lambasted Irish Americans for taking part in the institution of slavery, further provoked the Irish in the American South and split the expatriate nationalist community, thereby weakening the Repeal movement and highly upsetting a number of the Young Irelanders.<sup>10</sup> For Mitchel and the more radical Young Irelanders, O'Connell's abolitionism was a distraction and would make them suspicious of abolitionists before they even arrived in the South.

As a result of the Famine and the failed Young Ireland uprising in July 1848, Irish immigrants, including prominent Young Irelanders, began to arrive in large numbers in the United States. They confronted a society that was hostile to their religion (assuming they were Catholic), economic status, and culture. American notions of race, particularly when it came to the Irish in urban areas, were influenced by behavioral expectations within capitalistic, evangelical, and patriarchal structures. Many expats lived outside of the norms of expected behaviors, and Americans castigated them for their imprudent devotion to their passions, which included gambling, drinking, impudence, and idleness. Capitalistic- and evangelical-minded Protestants, mostly based in the Northeast, criticized Irish Catholics for being perpetually tardy and slothful. In short, they were thought of as children who could not control themselves, yet they served the needs of the market revolution and demonstrated the perils of not subscribing to Protestant revivalism. As the historian Ronald Takaki has argued, “As Irish immigrants crowded into growing cities and as America acquired an industrial proletariat, racial and class imagery often blurred together into a caste/class ideology and intensified anti-black antagonism even in the virtually all-white society of the North.”<sup>11</sup> In the mostly binary South, class was less of an issue for immigrants, which was one reason Mitchel and other expats preferred the somewhat antiquated, pre-industrial slaveholding society that elevated the Irish above African slaves.

Most Irish Americans, including Young Irelanders, moved to Northeast after emigrating from Ireland. The prominence of abolitionists in the North, who tended to be anti-Irish and anti-Catholic, and the political division over the expansion of slavery into western territories, forced many expatriates to choose between abolitionism and pro-slavery and did not allow for nuanced discussions of race or class. One of the earliest proponents of immediate abolition in the United States was the English immigrant and Presbyterian minister, George Bourne, who established the anti-Catholic newspaper, *The Protestant*, and was one of the founders of the American Anti-Slavery Society.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Elijah Lovejoy, the Presbyterian minister and newspaper editor who was murdered in 1837 by a pro-slavery mob in Alton, Illinois, had preached against the “sins” of alcohol, slavery, and Catholicism.<sup>13</sup> Such rhetoric alienated immigrants from abolitionism, as well as the Whig and Republican parties. Since most Irish became Democrats, the party that supported slavery and was more tolerant of Irish immigrants, Irish Americans more likely to be sympathetic to the Southern position. The Young Irelander and future Fenian leader, Michael Doherty, maintained that he was not a member of the “proslavery party” and “disavowed any desire to approve of African slavery,” but he “opposed the antislavery party because they do not dare to meet the...remotest prospect of emancipating one slave.” Doherty further asserted that the Republican Party, established in 1854 and associated with antislavery and abolitionism, were not interested in the welfare of slaves but rather political power. He concluded that Republicans, “a coalition between the Old Whigs and the Know-Nothings,” were “absolute frauds” and, thus, identified himself as a Democrat.<sup>14</sup> John Bannon, the Catholic priest and Confederate chaplain

who was born in County Roscommon and attended seminary at Maynooth, likened the Republicans to the Orange Order.<sup>15</sup>

John Mitchel was not a typical Irish immigrant, but his story represents the predicament that radical Irish nationalists faced in Ireland and the American South. The son of a Unitarian minister in Ulster, Mitchel was first attracted to Young Ireland shortly after acquainting himself with the Repeal Movement in 1843. Living in the Orange stronghold of Banbridge, as an attorney Mitchel often defended Catholics after they had been arrested in confrontations with Orange Order members involved in sectarian marches through Catholic neighborhoods. Mitchel began contributing to the *Nation*, Young Ireland's organ, and soon became one of its lead writers after Thomas Davis, the spiritual head of Young Ireland, died from scarlet fever at the beginning of the Great Hunger in 1845. With disease, death, and mass emigration ravaging much of Ireland, Mitchel began to call for more radical measures, including guerilla warfare and destruction of the railroad system, to prevent foodstuff from being exported. The mostly moderate, bourgeois nationalist members of Young Ireland's leadership found his ideas to be dangerous, and Mitchel parted with the *Nation* and started a rival newspaper, the *United Irishman*, in 1848. Parroting the ecumenical leader of the United Irish, Theobald Wolfe Tone, Mitchel penned in the first issue, "Our independence must be had at all hazards. If the men of property will not support us, they must fall; we can support ourselves by the aid of that numerous and respectable class of the community, the men of no property."<sup>16</sup> Mitchel was soon arrested by the British government and charged *ex post facto* for felony sedition, found guilty, and transported across the globe to Tasmania. Mitchel escaped in 1853 and settled in Brooklyn, where he established the *Citizen*, a paper that called for the militarization of Irish-American nationalists, rebellion in Ireland, and adaptation to America's more liberal political system. He also found himself in public confrontations with Archbishop John Hughes and the local expatriate community over his support of radical political views. Mitchel abhorred industrialism, imperialism, ultramontanism, sectarianism, and materialism. However, he also quite vocal about his support for bonded labor and even called for reopening the slave trade to make slaveholding more accessible for non-wealthy whites.<sup>17</sup>

Mitchel's subsequent devotion to the Southern cause was linked to the plight of Ireland. He saw parallels between British imperial domination of Ireland with Northern exploitation of the South. He maintained that the industrial and capitalist leaders in the North subjugated Southerners who, Mitchel argued, wanted to live a simple, pastoral life without government interference. Mitchel's romanticism, which was heavily influenced by the ideals of conservative thinker Thomas Carlyle, allowed him to accept Southern myths that exalted their regional differences over their corrupted Northern brethren.<sup>18</sup> He, like most Irish emigrants, brought to America a suspicion of free markets and wage labor that, he argued, enslaved and exploited industrial workers for the benefit of industrialists. Southern slave owners argued similar points, comparing favorably the alleged benevolent captivity of their chattel to the indigence of Northern laborers. Similarly, the

Young Irelanders blamed the Famine on the rise of the British Empire. Mitchel and other Irish emigrants even argued that slaves were treated better than both Irish tenant farmers and Irish-American laborers. The parallels between Ireland and the South, both in terms of exploited colonial victims and ideological bedfellows, led Mitchel to argue that Ireland and the South had a great deal in common. He even aspired to form an alliance between the two with the notion that they could support one another in their quest for independence.<sup>19</sup>

However, Mitchel and others severely miscalculated the practicality of any potential alliance between Ireland and the South. The South relied heavily on the British cotton market and, after the Confederate States of America (CSA) was formed, would be dependent on British war materiel. Mitchel also incorrectly surmised that the CSA was interested in the cause of Irish independence and vice versa. And like most Southern secessionists, he overestimated the consensus for independence and, more importantly, the notion that southern nationalism would persist in spite of oppressive measures by the Confederate government to fight the Civil War. This would be exacerbated by the irreversible Rebel military setback after the summer of 1863, when it became clear that the realities of chattel slavery, individual liberty, state rights, and Southern nationalism were contradictory and incompatible. The failure of the CSA was inevitable, and foreigners, particularly Irish nationalists, found it difficult to navigate an inconsistent political ideology.<sup>20</sup>

John Mitchel first moved to Knoxville in 1855 where, with the assistance of the mayor, William Swan, he established the *Southern Citizen*, a paper to publicize the region's perspective on issues and hopefully lure fellow expatriates to the region. Having arrived in the United States in 1853 Mitchel was well acquainted with the South. He had traveled extensively on lecture tours and had written extensively about the peculiarities of the region before he resettled below the Mason-Dixon line. After his tempestuous time in New York and having read Dr. J.G.M. Ramsey's *Annals of Tennessee*, he decided to move his family to the isolated mountains of the western slope of the Appalachians, an area that reminded him of the hills of Mourne in Ireland. Along the way, Mitchel was celebrated by the people of Charleston, South Carolina, for having stood up to hated northern abolitionists. However, Mitchel would soon discover that the Irish were not so welcome in the nativist stronghold of east Tennessee and that mountainous areas of the South were most hostile to calls for secession. Soon, a rumor began to spread that Mitchel was arriving to help fortify the only local Catholic Church, which was coincidentally being built when he arrived. Suspicious Know-Nothings, who opposed Irish immigration, assumed that since Mitchel was an Irish nationalist, he must have also been Catholic and, that like all Papists, he was more faithful to the Pope than he was his new homeland. They also assumed that the church being built was in reality a fortress stocked with weapons to allow a Papal army to overtake the town and subvert the liberties of local Protestants. This bizarre conspiracy theory, along with false assumptions about Mitchel's faith, demonstrated how the Irish had to adapt to their new surroundings, which were complicated by American political realities. The difference between

Mitchel's welcome in Charleston compared to his lukewarm reception in Knoxville make evident that the South was not monolithic when it came to accepting immigrants or in their views on slavery and secession. As a radical Irish nationalist hoping to recreate an exalted and mythical past in the foothills of the Smoky Mountains, Mitchel soon experienced the vagaries of American politics in the South.<sup>21</sup>

Mitchel was certainly the most prominent Young Irelander to move to the South, but other important Young Irelanders, notably William Smith O'Brien and Thomas Francis Meagher, visited the region and involved themselves in its contemporary debates. Mitchel and Swan had moved their newspaper to Washington, D.C. in 1858 hoping to reach a more influential audience and persuade the nation's lawmakers as the sectional conflict grew. O'Brien, a descendent of Brian Boru and the leader of the 1848 rebellion, visited Mitchel in 1859 on the latter's request. On one evening, Mitchel hosted a party to introduce O'Brien to powerful Senatorial figures such as the Tyrone native and General James Shields (Minnesota), John Crittenden (Kentucky), Stephen Douglas (Illinois), William Seward (New York) and Georgia Senators Alexander Stephens and Robert Toombs. Clearly, Mitchel wanted O'Brien to promote the potential of an alliance between the United States and Ireland against the British. Southern Senators saw this as their chance to change the abolitionist O'Brien's views on slavery, and Senator Stephens later introduced him and Mitchel to President James Buchanan.<sup>22</sup>

O'Brien tried to avoid the sectional fray that simmered in the United States, but he originally denounced slavery and opposed secession. Although he deplored slavery in theory, he maintained that slaves in the United States were treated better than Irish peasants back home. He did visit slave plantations, including Alexander Stephens's, during his three month, 7000 mile trip (he also visited Canada) and commented that it was not as bad in practice. Maunsel White, a Limerick man who arrived in the United States in the 1790s and fought as a colonel in the War of 1812, owned Deer Ridge Plantation in Plaquemines Parrish outside New Orleans. O'Brien visited the plantation for three days in 1859, surveyed the slave quarters and, according to White, was "altho [sic] not approving of slavery in the abstract...was I think obliged to acknowledge from what he saw that the slavery of the Negroe race in the South was obliging to them and as he said himself a patriarchal institution."<sup>23</sup> It appears that O'Brien's tour of the South and Mitchel's rhetoric convinced O'Brien that Southerners were being oppressed similar to the Irish back home. In correspondence with the Irish-nationalist, P.J. Smyth, O'Brien began to use terms like "subjugation" and "domination" to describe the North's economic superiority over the South. After secession, O'Brien asserted his desire for Confederate victory, although he continued to oppose slavery in practice. Smyth responded that the Irish had more friends in the North, had greater influence there, and queried, "Am I utopian in believing that the reconstruction of the Union means Irish Freedom?"<sup>24</sup>



The Waterford-born New Yorker, Meagher, had traveled the United States on a lecture tour and landed in New Orleans in 1854 and toured throughout the South. Like a number of the Young Irelanders, Meagher used his celebrity to earn a living while also publicizing his views on Irish independence. The Dublin Quaker and humanist, James Haughton, had publicly called on Meagher to use his status to convince Irish Americans of the ills of slavery. Meagher responded that since “he is not yet a citizen” of the United States, “he postpones till then his declaration of opinion regarding African slavery in America, and every other question affecting the joint compact and constitution of the several States.”<sup>25</sup> Meagher was likely unwilling to take a controversial stand which might harm his stature within the Irish-American community and reduce his financial opportunities. Meagher, like O’Brien, might have been uncomfortable with certain aspects of Southern culture, namely the institution of slavery, but did identify with Southern nationalist grievances which seemed to mirror those in Ireland.

Meagher had also visited the nation’s capital on a number of occasions as an attorney for Edward Sickles, who was accused of shooting Francis Barton Key, son of Francis Scott Key. Sickles had murdered Key for having an affair with his wife. Meagher, other than the New York attorney and politician Richard O’Gorman, was the Young Irelander who probably best assimilated into American society, had ingratiated himself to the political elite of New York. Unlike O’Gorman, however, Meagher maintained his nationalist credentials, which he would use to further his own ambitions. More than anyone, perhaps, Meagher represented Thomas Brown’s thesis that the Irish used nationalism to climb the American social ladder. Meagher toured the nation, speaking to various Irish-American groups about his exploits in Ireland and Tasmania. He also made money writing for various Irish-American newspapers and magazines, but he became highly critical of the insular Catholic community that Archbishop John Hughes had established to protect the Irish from nativist pressures. According to Meagher, these Catholic institutions precluded expatriates from embracing “liberality, decency, truth.” The Catholic Irish press particularly infuriated Meagher, which led to “infinitely more bigotry and intolerance in this country amongst our countrymen, than ever I was sensible of in Ireland.”<sup>26</sup>

When it came to the increasingly divisive issue of slavery, Meagher attempted to remain neutral. He agreed to partner with Mitchel to produce the *Citizen* and had written a few articles for the paper (but overall showed little commitment to the project), in which he maintained that slavery was an American constitutional issue. Despite his prominent role in the Democratic Party, he continued to maintain his indifference to the issue, but he mostly supported the South on other issues. He blamed Protestant evangelicals and abolitionists, who he asserted were transplanted descendants of Cromwellian Puritanism, for unnecessarily dividing the nation over the issue. Meagher became disabused of the notion that the South was backward and inferior after visiting in the mid-1850s. In an essay in the *Irish News*, titled “Glimpses of the South,” he wrote, “The general impression of the South, in the minds of the Northern people, is a sort of mingling up of bowie-knives, revolvers, slave-drivers with broad-brimmed hats and long whips, shrieking

negroes, blood and murder.” Meagher was surprised, however, to find “none of the horrors that I had been taught to believe existed among them. I found the range of intelligence considerably more extensive than one is apt to meet within the country districts of the North.” Instead of witnessing corruption and ignorance, he “found a people sober, intelligent, high-minded, patriotic, and kind-hearted.” Like many Southern sympathizers, he also maintained that he “saw no poverty” as he observed with “the squalid misery of the laboring classes of the North.” He also noted what he called the lack of “penchant of isms” and the scarcity of “long-haired fanatics preaching a millennium of free-love.” As an Irishman who had faced the wrath of the American party, he also asserted that the South was free of Know-Nothings.<sup>27</sup>

However, Meagher was incorrect with many of his assertions about the South. He had visited Charleston, a relatively urbane city which included a number of Irish immigrants and well-to-do families. He missed or omitted the conditions of the slave quarters, the poverty of the poor white menials, the evangelical revivalists, the anti-Irish political lackeys who identified with the Know-Nothing Party, and the ideological pathos of the racist secessionists that all existed throughout much of the South if not in Charleston. Charleston was very different from much of the South, which Meagher failed to recognize. Still, South Carolina, and Charleston specifically, had been a hotbed of political angst and paranoia since the Denmark Vesey slave rebellion conspiracy in 1822, if not the Stono Rebellion of 1739. Since a majority of its population consisted of African slaves, South Carolina, more than any state, positioned itself as victim of allegedly tyrannical Northern abolitionist powers. Thus, the Nullification Crisis of the early 1830s and the threats of secession were as much about maintaining the hegemony of aristocratic slave owners as they were opposing high tariffs. It was no coincidence that South Carolina was the first state to secede from the Union after Abraham Lincoln was elected President. Meagher ignored or misled his readers because he identified with an antiquated system where a small group of wealthy, educated families wielded power. Even though Meagher recognized that “slavery is bad,” he viewed it as just another “dark” world system that could not be remedied by the people or institutions. To Meagher, it was a better arrangement than the northern labor system or the imperial British subjugation of the Irish people. He also maintained that the American Constitution and “higher law” outweighed the evils of the peculiar institution, which he asserted could be alleviated through unspecified remedies but not eliminated. Meagher, who would lead the 69<sup>th</sup> New York Infantry Regiment during the Civil War, might have eschewed the radical elements of Southern nationalism that led to the establishment of the CSA, but he certainly embraced its more moderate tenets that excused if not elevated the more insidious elements of Southern culture.<sup>28</sup>

Other lesser known Young Irelanders, namely Richard D’Alton Williams and Joseph Brenan, made their homes in the American South. Both were radical Young Irelanders who sided with Mitchel on various issues, notably the culpability of not only the British Government in Ireland, but also the roles of British industrialists and landowners in causing the Famine. They joined the

group after reading Mitchel's writings, and continued their support for the fomentation of revolution. Williams was the illegitimate son of Peter Count Dalton, a wealthy land owner in County Tipperary and an estate maid, Mary Williams. Mary married James Williams, the manager of the estate, but Dalton made sure that his son received a first-class Jesuit education, and D'Alton Williams became a doctor and poet. He became familiar with Young Ireland's newspaper, the *Nation*, while he was a student at St. Patrick's College in Carlow. The nationalistic sentiments of Young Ireland influenced Williams, and he soon published his first poem, "The Munster War Song," on January 7, 1843, under the pseudonym "Shamrock." The poem recounted a romanticized depiction of Gaelic tribal leaders uniting to defeat the invaders from the East. Considered perhaps the greatest of the Young Ireland poets, the *Nation* asserted that Williams's "sympathies take in the whole range of human affections, and his humour is irresistible. We think, indeed, that 'Shamrock' excels all his contemporaries in imagination and humour."<sup>29</sup> His sentimentalizing of war continued with other poems such as "Lord of Hosts (An Irish War Song)" and "Fall, Flag of Tyrants." However, his religious piety was evident in titles such as "Sister of Charity" and "Before the Blessed Sacrament." He and Kevin Izod O'Doherty assumed the place as leader of the radical wing of Young Ireland after Mitchel was arrested for treason-felony for distributing anti-British propaganda and threatening rebellion in the *United Irishman*. The two young medical students established in 1848 the *Irish Tribune*, a weekly paper that called for rebellion as a solution to the Great Famine that had continued to ravage the island. The *Tribune*, unlike the *Nation*, allowed for men and women in Young Ireland to demonstrate their more militaristic aspirations. However, the British government also suppressed the paper after five issues and arrested both proprietors. O'Doherty was sentenced to ten years in penal servitude in Tasmania while Williams was acquitted and continued his medical studies in Scotland. He later emigrated to Mobile, Alabama, in 1851, where he received a professorship of Belles Lettres at Spring Hill College. He married Elizabeth Connolly in 1856 and relocated to Thibodaux, Louisiana, about 60 miles west of New Orleans, where he recommenced practicing medicine.<sup>30</sup>

Nearby in New Orleans resided Joseph Brenan, the Cork-born poet and journalist who was also a Mitchelite. As a contributor to Mitchel's *United Irishman*, a paper Mitchel formed in 1848 after disputes with the more conservative members of Young Ireland, Brenan echoed Mitchel's calls for rebellion. After Mitchel's arrest, Brenan continued to advocate for independence in a tract entitled, the *Irish Felon*, which was edited by Mitchel's good friend, John Martin. In the *Irish Felon*, Brenan urged the Irish Confederation, Young Ireland's political organization that continued to advocate for repeal of the Act of Union, "to defeat the strongest Government and to liberate the most degraded country that ever existed. It undertook to give – to a province – to strike the chains off millions of slaves and, if necessary, to wash out the iron moulds in blood."<sup>31</sup> He later edited the *Irishman*, another radical nationalist paper. Brenan traveled in close circles with John O'Mahony and John Savage, Young Irelanders who later became prominent Fenians. Brenan was arrested and incarcerated for participating in the '48 rising. Only in his early

twenties at the time, Brenan assumed leadership over the emaciated Young Ireland group after James Fintan Lalor, who Brenan had often clashed with, left Dublin to raise support for the group. After being released, he continued to call for rebellion and took part in the attack on the Cappoquin police barracks in County Waterford in 1849. Brenan was forced to flee the country or face more time in jail, so he emigrated to the United States.<sup>32</sup>

Joseph Brenan arrived in New York on June 8, 1850, on the *Marion*, and he eventually moved to John Savage's house on 13<sup>th</sup> Street, where he married John's sister, Mary. He soon began writing for a number of different journals – Horace Greeley's *Tribune*, Thomas Devin Reilly's *People* and the *Newark Enquirer*. William E. Robinson procured Brenan a job with the *New Orleans Delta*, where he became an ardent secessionist. He eventually was struck ill and moved to New York City in 1854 where he eventually assumed a similar position with Mitchel's the *Citizen*.<sup>33</sup>

Brenan more than any other Young Irishman, attempted to utilize the model of Irish nationalism in the South, best evinced by his poem, "A Ballad for the Young South":

Men of the South! Our foes are up  
 In fierce and grim array;  
 Their sable banner laps the air  
 An insult to the day!

The saints of Cromwell rise again,  
 In sanctimonious hordes,  
 Hiding behind the garb of peace  
 A million ruthless swords.

From North, and East, and West, they seek  
 The same disastrous goal,  
 With CHRIST upon the lying lip,  
 And Satan in the soul!

Mocking, with ancient shibboleth,  
 All wise and just restraints.<sup>34</sup>

Similar to Mitchel, Brenan made parallels between Irish and Southern nationalism, comparing the evangelical abolitionists of the North to the Puritan Cromwellians who plundered and pillaged Ireland in the mid-seventeenth century. Written in 1856, Brenan's admonition to his fellow Southerners reflected fears that arose from the bloody conflict in Kansas between abolitionists and proslavery forces. Although secession had not yet occurred and the Civil War had not officially begun, violent conflict had already commenced over the extension of slavery to western American territories. One can even trace the violence that stemmed from the slavery issue to the 1837 murder of Elijah Lovejoy for promoting abolitionist views in his newspaper. In another version of the poem (probably the original), Brenan also refers to prominent Southern

politicians John C. Calhoun and Andrew Jackson (“And by the fame of John Calhoun – To honest truth be true – And by Old Jackson’s will – Now do what ye can do!”) as exemplars of Southern attitudes and behavior. It is interesting that he includes them together since they both grew to despise one another soon after Calhoun became Jackson’s vice president. Calhoun changed course politically from nationalist War Hawk during the War of 1812 to extreme Southern nationalist who defended slavery and its extension on constitutional arguments. His role in the Peggy Eaton affair and then, more importantly, the Nullification Crisis led to a falling out between the two men, as Jackson defended the nationalist position that nullification and secession were illegal. Abraham Lincoln would later adopt Jackson’s position, including the use of national force, if necessary, to force states to comply. As with Mitchel’s position that the South and Ireland should find common cause against the industrial capitalists of the United States and Great Britain, Brennan seemed to misunderstand the realities of the situation. The South relied too heavily on British trade to lead to any type of alliance with Ireland, and the extolment of Jackson as the Southern ideal ignores that, while he supported the institution of slavery, the seventh President of the United States deeply opposed secession. Brennan, unlike Mitchel, did not live long enough to witness the firing at Ft. Sumter. Brennan lived the final year of his life completely blind, and he died on May 27, 1857, from consumption at the young age of twenty nine and was interred at St. Patrick’s Seminary. He left behind his wife and two young children. Brennan had perhaps been the most eloquent of the Young Ireland poets who emigrated to the United States. James Clarence Mangan, the most respected of the Young Ireland poets, once wrote that Brennan had been “endowed with all of Shelley’s soul!” Brennan, who compared the abolitionist Senator Charles Sumner to a “snarling pet poodle,” had been feted by Southerners as the heir to the United Irish exiles. Southern nationalists had embraced his rhetoric as a link to the European revolutions of 1848, but Brennan would never see the culmination of these ideals manifest itself in a Southern revolution.<sup>35</sup>

Williams and Mitchel both lived long enough to witness eleven states secede from the United States. Williams, however, died in 1862 of tuberculosis; while Mitchel experienced the death of two of his sons who fought for the Confederate States of America. When Mitchel returned from France as a Fenian financial agent, he secured employment at the Richmond *Enquirer*, the political arm of the Jefferson Davis administration. Like most Southerners, Mitchel and the *Enquirer* supported the war aims of the administration. As the war prolonged, Mitchel, like most Southerners, became critical of President Davis and the centralization of the war effort. As inflation in the Confederacy grew out of control, necessities became scarce, and battle victories less prevalent, Mitchel and his fellow Southerners, particularly the Irish, accordingly became disaffected by the direction and purpose of the war. He then moved to the Richmond *Examiner*, a staunch critic of the administration, where he remained hopeful for Confederate victory but decried the onus that the poor whites of the South had to bear. He blamed the leaders of the CSA for incompetent leadership that focused more on patronage than the welfare of the soldiers and civilians. Mitchel also began to advocate for a French-Confederate alliance. The French had

invaded Mexico in 1862 and installed Maximilian, an Austrian Hapsburg, as emperor of Mexico. Mitchel had in the past attempted to persuade the French government to assist Irish nationalists in their quest for independence. Again, Mitchel misread the political realities of the time. The French were no more interested in Irish independence, except to weaken the government in London, than they were in the Confederate revolution. Napoleon III was more interested in European affairs, as well as establishing trade routes through Central America. While more conservative members of his government did support the Confederacy, a number of his ministers and much of the French populace supported the Union. More importantly, Napoleon III realized that a war with the United States would be disastrous without the assistance of more powerful allies, especially England.<sup>36</sup>

The Civil War, as it had the nation, divided Young Irelanders. While they identified with the aims of Southern nationalists, particularly their various grievances against the American government which paralleled their objections to the British government, only the most radical Young Irelanders supported the Confederacy. The Civil War proved particularly disastrous for Mitchel. He moved to New York after the war but was soon arrested for continuing to write Confederate apologist pieces in the *New York Daily News*. He was subsequently confined to a cell next to Jefferson Davis at Fort Monroe in Virginia. He had always struggled with his health due to asthma, and it declined rapidly as a result of his incarceration. In a letter to a good friend, he confessed his family's involvement in "that Confederate business...although a good cause, I must admit that I grudge it what it has cost us—the lives of our two sons in a defense of a country which, after all, was not their own."<sup>37</sup> He moved back to New York after his release in October 1865, started a new paper (the *Irish Citizen*), and began to focus more on events in Ireland. Although Mitchel continued to defend the tenets of Southern nationalism, he had concluded that the extremism that manifested itself into Confederate nationalism had not served its purpose. The failed Confederate experiment had perhaps even moderated his views on Irish nationalism as well. Mitchel later moved back to Ireland, where he ran for a seat in Parliament and died in his family home at Dromalane in Newry. Most Irish immigrants in the former Confederacy did not have the luxury of moving to the North or going back to Ireland. Their jobs, homes, and families were now subject to Reconstruction and a new social structure that included the emancipation of four million blacks. The Irish, most of whom were not seen as loyal to the Confederacy due to their lower level of participating in the war proportional to their population, as well as their high desertion rates, faced the daunting task of integrating into a Reconstructed South. The war loss forced Southerners to rethink their identity, while immigrants within the New South faced an even more complex prospect of acculturation.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> P.A. Sillard, *The Poems of R.D. Williams* (Dublin, 1894), 85-86.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Quigley argues that Southern nationalists viewed their movement “within broader intellectual and cultural frameworks” and incorporated “exports of European romantic nationalism” to fit their version of American nationalism. Paul Quigley, *Shifting Grounds: Nationalism and the American South, 1848-1865* (New York, 2011), 30, 52.

<sup>3</sup> For more on Young Ireland, see Richard Davis, *The Young Ireland Movement* (Dublin, 1987). W. Jason Wallace argues that Northern evangelicals demonized both Southern evangelicals and Catholics out of fear that the latter two would destroy their millennial dream of establishing a Kingdom of God on earth. As a result, Catholics and Southern evangelicals forged an uneasy political alliance in which they defended one another from “unfair attacks.” W. Jacob Wallace, *Catholics, Slaveholders, and the Dilemma of American Evangelicalism, 1835-1860* (Notre Dame, IN, 2010), 94-95. For more on Catholicism in the antebellum South, see Randall Miller and Jon Wakelyn, eds. *Catholics in the Old South* (Macon, GA, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> *Nation*, January 13, 1844.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, April 5, 1845.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, April 12 and May 31, 1845.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, February 6, 1847.

<sup>8</sup> Davis, *The Young Ireland Movement*, 209.

<sup>9</sup> Elisa Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America* (Chicago, 2007), 187-95.

<sup>10</sup> “Letter of Daniel O’Connell on American Slavery (1843),” Johns Hopkins Archives, <https://archive.org/details/letterofdanieloc00ocon>, accessed December 10, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 2000), 115-16.

<sup>12</sup> David S. Reynolds, *Waking Giant: America in the Age of Jackson* (New York, 2008), 186-87.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Doheny to William Smith O’Brien, August 20, 1858.

<sup>15</sup> David Gleeson, *The Green and the Gray: The Irish in the Confederate States of America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 171.

<sup>16</sup> *United Irishman*, February 12, 1848.

<sup>17</sup> See McGovern, *John Mitchel*.

<sup>18</sup> For more on Carlyle and his influence on Young Ireland, see Walter Waring, *Thomas Carlyle* (Boston, 1978), Fred Kaplan, *Thomas Carlyle: A Biography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), and Charles Gavan Duffy, *Conversations with Carlyle* (London, 1892).

<sup>19</sup> McGovern, *John Mitchel*, 119-54.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*; David Gleeson, “‘To live and die (for) Dixie’: Irish Civilians and the Confederate States of America,” *Irish Studies Review* 18 (May 2010): 139-53. For more on Frederick Douglass’s visit to Ireland, see Tom Chaffin, *Giant’s Causeway: Frederick Douglass’s Irish Odyssey and the Making of an American Visionary* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2014).

- <sup>21</sup> McGovern, *John Mitchel*, 144-50; William Dillon, *The Life of John Mitchel* (London, 1888), 2:80.
- <sup>22</sup> Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, 2:126-129.
- <sup>23</sup> Maunsel White to John Mitchel, April 10, 1859, Meloney-Mitchel Papers, ms. 466.
- <sup>24</sup> P.J. Smyth to William Smith O'Brien, date unknown, Meloney-Mitchel Papers, ms. 448.
- <sup>25</sup> Michael Cavanagh, *Memoirs of General Thomas Francis Meagher, Compromising the Leading Events of his Career* (Worcester, MA, 1892), 342-43.
- <sup>26</sup> Thomas Francis Meagher to Charles Gavan Duffy, January 17, 1853, Charles Gavan Duffy Papers, National Library of Ireland, ms 5757. For more on Brown's argument, see Thomas Brown, *Irish American Nationalism* (New York, 1966).
- <sup>27</sup> *Citizen*, January 7, 1854, and April 8, 1854; *Irish News*, April 12 and October 18, 1856, and November 1, 1856; John Mitchel, *Jail Journal* (Dublin, 1913), 371-77; Cian McMahon, "Ireland and the Birth of the Irish-American Press, 1842-1861," *American Periodicals*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2009, 15-17.
- <sup>28</sup> *Irish News*, October 18, 1856. For a history of Charleston, see Stephanie Yuehl, *A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2005).
- <sup>29</sup> *Nation*, July 26, 1851.
- <sup>30</sup> Richard Davis, *The Young Ireland Movement*, 154; O'Sullivan, *Young Irelanders* (Tralee, 1944), 524-29.
- <sup>31</sup> Quoted in T.F. O'Sullivan, *The Young Irelanders*, 34.
- <sup>32</sup> Michael Doheny, *The Felon's Track: A Narrative of '48* (New York, 1867), 77-82; Richard Davis, *The Young Ireland Movement*, 155-66.
- <sup>33</sup> New York Port Arrival Records, 1846-1851; Michael Cavanagh, *Young Ireland* (Dublin, 1885); T. F. O'Sullivan, *The Young Irelanders* (Tralee, 1944), 353-5.
- <sup>34</sup> *New Orleans Crescent*, February 1861; originally printed in Brennan's paper, the *New Orleans Delta* in 1856, month unknown. David Gleeson included a somewhat different version of the poem in *The Green and the Gray* that features references to Southern politicians Andrew Jackson and John C. Calhoun. Gleeson found that version in the *Charleston Mercury*, July 23, 1856. Gleeson, *Green and the Gray*, 133, 251, n. 63.
- <sup>35</sup> *Times-Picayune*, New Orleans, May 28, 1857; O'Sullivan, *The Young Irelanders*, 355; Louise Imogen Guiney, ed., *James Clarence Mangan: His Selected Poems* (Norwood, MA, 1897), 319; Kieran Quinlan, *Strange Kin: Ireland and the American South* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2005), 65; David T. Gleeson, *The Irish in the South: 1815-1877* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001), 70.
- <sup>36</sup> *Richmond Examiner*, March 2, 1864; Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederate Nation: 1861-1865* (New York, 1979), 186-87; Thomas Schoonover, "Napoleon is Coming! Maximillian is Coming?: The International History of the Civil War in the Caribbean Basin," ed. Robert E. May, *The Union, the Confederacy, and the Atlantic Rim* (West Lafayette, IN, 1995), 101-30.
- <sup>37</sup> John Mitchel to Mary Thompson, January 31, 1866.



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