

Marjorie Howes

# Colonial Crossings

Figures in Irish Literary History



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## Introduction

In their Preface to *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly invoke the figure of the crossroads to describe the intersection of tradition and modernity in Ireland:

Today, the old rural national image is on the wane and the country currently likes to represent itself as a thriving, energetic, cosmopolitan place ... The revels of the comely maidens dancing at the crossroads of the local townland now are ended or linger only as national kitsch; the country prefers instead a corporate quick-step on a global crossroads between Boston, Bermuda and Berlin.<sup>1</sup>

The crossroads functions as a clichéd figure for an idealized conception of traditional Ireland, as a modern emblem of Ireland's place in a globalizing world, and as a sign for the meeting of the two. It also embodies much about the content and variety of some of this book's other preoccupations: forms of belonging and collectivity, migration and geographical movement, individual authors' negotiations with literary genres and intellectual traditions, the intersection of categories like gender and nationality, and the relationship between Irish studies and postcolonial studies.

All the writers discussed here were born in Ireland, all of them wrote about Ireland, and each one imagines national belonging differently. The essay on Lady Wilde examines her engagement with the nationalism of Young Ireland and offers some observations about where that nationalism intersected with, and diverged from, the nationalism of Daniel O'Connell. The chapter on William Carleton looks at his efforts to render the characteristic qualities and narratives of the Irish Catholic peasantry, proposing a re-evaluation of the role of religion and genre in those efforts. The discussion of Mary Anne Sadlier describes the forms of belonging and estrangement that characterized the Irish-American identity her works imagined for immigrants. The piece on J. S. Le Fanu sketches the contours of a troubled Anglo-Irish community and tradition. The Joyce essays argue that he critiques Revivalist nationalism and insistently imagines alternative, ambiguous forms of national belonging. And the Yeats chapter takes up that writer's engagement with the Irish people as a national public.

Theorists of the nation have often remarked that national belonging is characterized by incoherence, contradiction, or paradox, and the essays here treat nationality less as an idea to be represented than as a set of problems to grapple with. Such grappling involves recognizing that the national intersects with other categories: gender, sexuality, class, and religion. Wilde confronts the difficulties of a specifically middle-class nationalism that both needed and feared the Irish masses, and Joyce examines how representations of women inform conceptions of national community. Wrestling with the problem of the national also involves thinking about the bases for different kinds of collectivity — physical bodies, forms of feeling, or the dictates of reason. The essays on Carleton and Joyce's Gretta Conroy take up the reading of bodies in relation to national narratives, the discussion of Wilde distinguishes a nationalist erotics from other kinds of national affect, and the chapter on Yeats tracks the oscillation between reason and feeling as the basis for a national community in his work and thought.

Much of the most influential work on nationalism since Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* has come out of postcolonial studies, a field whose usefulness for scholars of Irish literature, culture, or history has been hotly contested in the last few decades.<sup>2</sup> Most of the essays in this volume are informed by those debates, but do not engage them directly. The exception is the Yeats essay, which tries to shift the terms of contemporary debates about Yeats and the postcolonial and offers an extended argument about how we might conceive of the relationship between postcolonial studies and the literature of the Irish Literary Revival differently. One impetus behind that essay lay in my sense that debates over whether or not Ireland, or Yeats, should be considered postcolonial had begun to reach the limits of their usefulness. This is illustrated, for example, in the final chapter of Stephen Howe's *Ireland and Empire*, which conducts a thorough critique of postcolonial work in Irish studies, yet concludes with an acceptance of the utility of some postcolonial models.<sup>3</sup> Most of the essays here, however, assume (rather than argue) that postcolonial work offers useful ideas and paradigms for the study of Irish culture.<sup>4</sup>

Belonging and collectivity only exist in relation to distance and separation; migration and other forms of geographical movement are major preoccupations of many of the essays here as well. Anderson's original account of nationalism observed the importance of communications and transportation systems, and the key role played by the 'creole pilgrimages' of colonial functionaries, in the creation of national forms of consciousness.<sup>5</sup> His later arguments extend that importance further, offering the claims that 'exile is the nursery of nationality' and that nationalism is 'a project for coming home from exile'.<sup>6</sup> The (now familiar) idea that nationality arises from geographical movement, and other kinds of 'displacement', rather than from rootedness, is most explicitly and extensively taken up in 'Goodbye Ireland I'm Going to Gort', which argues that in Joyce's works the nation emerges most vividly where it crosses paths with other spatial scales, such as the local, the regional, and the global. On the other hand, the overall dialectic this idea suggests between going 'away' (in some way or another) and producing ideas of 'home' (of one kind or another) informs much of the work in this volume. In retrospect,

2 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn. (London and New York, 1991)

3 See Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire* (Oxford, 2000), esp. 229–43.

4 I have pursued a more direct engagement with recent debates over postcolonial and Irish studies elsewhere; see Marjorie Howes, 'Yeats and the Postcolonial', in Marjorie Howes and John Kelly, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to W. B. Yeats* (Cambridge, 2006); 'Joyce, Colonialism, and Nationalism', in Derek Attridge, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, 2004); and (with Derek Attridge) Introduction, in Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes, eds., *Semicolonial Joyce* (Cambridge, 2000).

5 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 114

6 Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (London and New York, 1998), 59, 65

it is this dialectic, rather than Anderson's literary interests and his well-known claims about the novel form, that has been most enabling for the discussions collected here.<sup>7</sup>

Migration and geographical movement are important to many of these essays for other reasons as well. Both Joyce chapters emphasize the complex transactions between real and imagined journeys that go into the production of literary representations of migration. And both engage with the profoundly gendered nature of geographical movement, in its real and imagined dimensions. What emerges is a set of competing national narratives; some are historically more conventional or canonical than others, and each of them structures the relationships among migration, gender, and nationality differently. These essays identify a continuum of migration that is freighted with cultural meanings about home, ranging from the movements involved in the labour of domestic servants and the travels of schoolchildren to transatlantic emigration. The discussion of Sadlier takes up the most explicit or 'classic' emigration narratives, and examines how a middle-class Catholic intellectual responded to the political and literary challenges posed by the Famine emigrants to the United States. Here again, different conceptions of geographical movement intersect. And an interest in thinking about geographical space, not just as an emptiness to be traversed, but as having its own depths and complexities, is pursued in 'Goodbye Ireland I'm Going to Gort'.

The writers studied here range from the ultra-canonical Yeats and Joyce through the somewhat canonical Le Fanu and Carleton to the largely neglected Wilde and Sadlier. The Yeats and Joyce essays seek to enter critical dialogues (or, to use a less flattering term, industries) that are full of stimulating and sophisticated scholarship. These chapters respond to particular contemporary developments in critical fields, such as the rise of interest in Joyce as a writer who engaged intensely, if ambivalently, with Irish nationalism and debates over how best to characterize Yeats's relationship to the colonial and postcolonial. Both developments sprang at least partly from the increasingly busy intersection between Irish studies and postcolonial studies. The discussions of Carleton and Le Fanu attempt to remedy perceived gaps in the existing scholarly literature. The former reads Carleton's representations of religion through some generic and formal features of his writing, rather than through the much-discussed question of his personal relation to Catholicism. The latter proposes to move beyond the opposition between Irish/political and psychoanalytic/sexual readings of the Anglo-Irish gothic by arguing that, for particular historical and colonial reasons, Le Fanu structured his anxieties about Anglo-Irish identity through representations of femininity and female sexuality. In the essays on Wilde and Sadlier I hope to generate scholarly interest in a pair of women writers who were tremendously popular in their day but have yet to be rediscovered by literary and cultural historians. Until recently, Irish studies has been fairly slow to engage in such acts of retrieval; the publication of volumes 4 and 5 of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* indicates the growth of interest in such material and demonstrates just how much there is to be uncovered and explored.<sup>8</sup> In addition, much research remains to be done on popular literature produced by and for the Irish. The questions and complexities offered by such writing differ from the questions and complexities offered by Yeats and Joyce, who were undeniably superior writers according to a whole range of criteria, but they can be equally compelling.

The lesser-known works often raise questions about the crossroads where individual writers confront the requirements of generic conventions. The essays on Wilde, Sadlier, and Carleton all

7 Jonathan Culler has pointed out that many literary and cultural critics invoke Anderson's claims about the novel's form in order to lend authority to their own very different arguments about national content and themes in literature. See Jonathan Culler, 'Anderson and the Novel', in Jonathan Culler and Pheng Cheah, eds., *Grounds of Comparison: Around the Work of Benedict Anderson* (New York and London, 2003).

8 Angela Bourke et al., eds., *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vols. 4–5, *Women's Writing and Traditions* (Cork and New York, 2002)

trace those writers' negotiations with the dominant traditions of sentimental literature. Gothic literature, millenarian thought, and oral traditions are discussed more briefly. Still, in reading these essays together, one can see that generic conventions, while often rigid in themselves, can be put to surprisingly flexible and multiple uses. Popular genres are certainly produced and consumed differently in various locations, but they are also profoundly international in their formal regularities and their circulation. Investigating the issues surrounding these genres helps place Irish writers in a global rather than a purely national frame. It is far more useful, for example, to examine Sadlier in relation to the American didactic fiction of the 'feminine fifties', and sentimental traditions more generally, than to try to confine her to a specifically Irish literary tradition. If one impulse behind these essays is the wish to examine how different writers engage with ideas about Ireland and Irishness, another, equally important, impulse emerges in the later essays: the desire to show that such engagements are best studied in comparative and transnational frames that take account of the way the local, the national, and the global all cross paths.

## Blood and Tears: Lady Wilde

Young Ireland marked the emergence of an Irish nationalism that was more ethnic and cultural than civic and constitutional. Although it fizzled out as an organization after the abortive rising of 1848, it had enduring cultural and political legacies. The poetry of Young Ireland was arguably the most popular body of literature in Ireland in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Later developments in Irish nationalism owed a great deal to the version of Ireland embodied in the verse of *The Nation*, in which the ballad and the song were the favoured modes of transmission.<sup>1</sup> David Lloyd and Seán Ryder have sketched out its major features: it was overwhelmingly bourgeois, organized around the production of identity, and heavily gendered, equating true nationalist subjectivity with masculinity.<sup>2</sup> These features, far from rendering Young Ireland ideologically simple or monologic, determined the shape of its complexities and contradictions.<sup>3</sup> The aim of this essay is to illuminate previously neglected aspects of Young Ireland's cultural nationalism.

Lady Wilde was born Jane Elgee in 1821, to a conservative, middle-class, Protestant family in Wexford. She married William Wilde in 1851, and became Lady Wilde when he was knighted in 1864. She was one of a number of nationalist poets that came to prominence after Thomas Davis's death in 1845. Under the pen-name 'Speranza', she published poetry and prose in *The Nation*; the poems were collected in 1864 as *Poems by Speranza*. By then she had secured her reputation as one of the most inflammatory writers of the Young Ireland movement.<sup>4</sup> Much of her other work has been

1 Chris Morash, Introduction in *The Hungry Voice: The Poetry of the Irish Famine* (Dublin, 1989), 30

2 For extended discussions of these features, see David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Durham, NC, 1993) and *Nationalism and Minor Literature: James Clarence Mangan and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism* (Berkeley, CA, 1987), and Seán Ryder, 'Gender and the Discourse of "Young Ireland" Cultural Nationalism', in T. P. Foley et al., eds., *Gender and Colonialism* (Galway, 1995), 210–24.

3 On Young Ireland's origins, development, and intellectual structures, see Richard Davis, *The Young Ireland Movement* (Dublin and Totowa, NJ, 1987); George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (London, 1991), 154–91; David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* (Manchester, 1988), 22–41; Seamus Deane, 'Poetry and Song 1800–1890' and 'The Famine and Young Ireland', in Seamus Deane, ed., *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, 3 vols. (Derry, 1991), vol. 2, 1–114, 115–208.

4 The authorities considered her anonymous 1848 essay 'Jacta Alea Est' ['The Die is Cast] seditious enough to warrant prosecution, and tried Charles Gavan Duffy as its author. When Elgee (as she then was) disrupted his trial by standing up in the gallery and claiming authorship, the government declined to prosecute her, and four different juries refused to convict Duffy. For an account of the incident, see Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (New York, 1988), 9.

forgotten.<sup>5</sup> After the failure of the 1848 Rising, both she and William became disillusioned with Irish nationalism; later she concentrated increasingly on other literary projects and on her aspirations to run a literary salon. In the late nineteenth century, she was generally acknowledged as an important, if eccentric, figure in the Dublin literary and social scene. When her son, Oscar Wilde, toured the United States in 1882, headlines in New York's *Irish Nation* lamented, 'Speranza's Son ... Phrasing about Beauty while a Hideous Tyranny Overshadows His Native Land'.<sup>6</sup> Ten years later, when W. B. Yeats wanted to praise the fiery eloquence of Maud Gonne's political speeches, he dubbed her 'the new Speranza'.<sup>7</sup>

Like many nineteenth-century women writers of sentimental fiction or parlour poetry, Wilde was considerably more visible to her contemporaries than she was to later cultural critics. Although her contributions to *The Nation* were nearly as popular as those of Davis, its most charismatic writer, she has been largely neglected by studies of Irish cultural nationalism as well.<sup>8</sup> To the extent that she has entered literary history, Wilde has done so primarily as a figure defined by her gendered 'excesses' — emotional, political, and stylistic.<sup>9</sup> These excesses are usually characterized as a surfeit of sentimentalizing emotion and an extravagant interest in violence, bloodshed and death: a constant sense that the history of Ireland was, as she wrote in a pamphlet on 'The American Irish', 'an endless martyrology written in tears and blood'.<sup>10</sup> Wilde's preoccupation with the dramatic shedding of tears and blood reveals her particular engagements with the major structures and contradictions that distinguished Young Ireland from the Old Ireland of Daniel O'Connell. In a letter to his constituents, O'Connell wrote:

My plan is peaceable, legal, constitutional; it is part of that general scheme by which I incessantly contemplate the regeneration of Ireland, and her restoration to national dignity from her present provincial degradation, without a crime, without an offence, without a tear, and, above all, without the possibility of shedding one drop of human blood.<sup>11</sup>

In Wilde's works, in contrast, Young Ireland's tenuous relation to the Irish masses, which it both idealized and distrusted, its interest in and anxieties about subject constitution, and the masculinism of its ostensibly transcendent nationalist subject, are negotiated and structured through representations of tears and blood.

5 She translated *Sidonia the Sorceress* (1847–48), a novel by Wilhelm Meinhold, in 1849 and Lamartine's *Pictures of the First French Revolution* (1848) and *The Wanderer and His Home* (1850) in 1850; she published *The Glacier Land* in 1852 and *The First Temptation* in 1853. *Poems: Second Series; Translations* appeared in 1866. In 1880 she completed and published a book her husband had begun before his death, *Memoir of Gabriel Béranger*. *Driftwood from Scandinavia* appeared in 1884, *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms and Superstitions of Ireland* in 1887, and *Ancient Cures, Charms, and Usages of Ireland* in 1890. *Notes on Men, Women, and Books* (1891) and *Social Studies* (1893) were collections of essays, all, or nearly all of which, had appeared earlier in journals.

6 Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, 195

7 'The New Speranza', in George Bornstein and Hugh Witemeyer, eds., *Letters to the New Island* (New York, 1989), 61

8 See Davis, *Young Ireland Movement*, 85.

9 Thomas Flanagan, in his *The Irish Novelists, 1800–1850* (New York, 1959), 325, quoted in Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, 18, describes her as 'the silliest woman who ever lived' and Terry Eagleton's play *St. Oscar* (Derry, 1989) pokes fun at her vehement and sentimentalizing nationalism. Her work is included in a number of turn of the century anthologies; for a list see Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine*, 112. Later in the twentieth century, however, her work was seldom anthologized. Kathleen Hoagland's *1000 Years of Irish Poetry* (Old Greenwich, CT, 1981) includes only her most famous poem, 'The Famine Year', and A. A. Kelly omits her from *Pillars of the House: An Anthology of Verse by Irish Women from 1690 to the Present* (Dublin, 1987) on the grounds that her poetry 'appears turgid to the modern ear' (19). She does not appear in the first three volumes of *The Field Day Anthology* but she is included in the fourth volume and in A. Leighton and M. Reynolds, eds., *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology* (Oxford, 1995).

10 Reprinted in Horace Wyndham, *Speranza: A Biography of Lady Wilde* (London and New York, 1951), 205–39

11 M. F. Cusack, ed., *The Speeches and Public Letters of the Liberator*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1875), vol. 2, 414–15

## Tears

Wilde's nationalist poems are awash with tears — the tears of men, women and children; the tears of poets, patriots and peasants; the tears of sufferers, spectators and gods. These tears structure an important aspect of Young Ireland's construction of its project as subject constitution. David Lloyd's *Nationalism and Minor Literature* offers a ground-breaking and insightful examination of this project. While Lloyd's work focuses mainly on issues of identity and unity in the work of James Clarence Mangan — unity as homogeneity between the individual and the nation; identity as the consistency of the subject over time — another way to think about subject constitution is as the production and organization of affect. Of course, most nationalisms are primarily 'about' feeling; the question is how particular nationalisms conceptualize and organize it. In most accounts, their engagement with the question of feeling takes the form of an erotics.<sup>12</sup> This tends to produce two related narratives of the relationship between gender and nationalism, both focusing on the representation of the nation as a woman. In the first, the nation-as-woman is an eroticized lover, and her patriots worship her with an ecstatic heterosexual devotion. In the second, the nation is figured as an idealized mother whose purity secures her sons' faithfulness and mediates their potentially dangerous homosocial attachments to each other.<sup>13</sup> The distinction between these narratives is one of degree and emphasis, rather than kind; both involve suppressing homosexual desire between men and presenting heterosexual love as the appropriate model of national affect. Such narratives do form an important part of Young Ireland's cultural production, but they do not exhaust the functions of gender in nationalist writing, nor do they encompass all the ways in which cultural nationalism engaged with the question of national feeling. In addition, women writers often have an especially problematic relationship to such iconography.<sup>14</sup> While these representational patterns are not wholly absent from Wilde's work, they do not structure it in a significant way. Young Ireland also employed a different set of tropes for conceptualizing and organizing national feeling, one that was arguably more congenial to women writers. Through representations of tears, her poetry illustrates this alternative conception of cultural nationalism as subject constitution and that project's relation to gender and class boundaries.

While O'Connell wanted to achieve his political goals without shedding blood or tears, he was no less sentimental than Young Ireland; his nationalism simply imagined a different relation between nationality and feeling. O'Connell's movement relied upon a combination of feeling and reason.<sup>15</sup> His nationalism was largely a modernizing, Enlightenment project; several critics have argued that disciplined, mass, constitutional politics in Ireland and Britain originated with his movement.<sup>16</sup> He emphasized the calm rationality of his own political arguments — 'I am cool, and quiet, and deliberate;

12 The Introduction to *Nationalisms and Sexualities* observes, 'Whenever the power of the nation is invoked — whether it be in the media, in scholarly texts, or in everyday conversation — we are more likely than not to find it couched as a love of country: an eroticized nationalism'; see Andrew Parker et al., eds., *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (New York, 1992), 1. Influential books like George Mosse's *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (Madison, WI, 1985) and Klaus Theweleit's *Male Fantasies, Volume I: Women Floods Bodies History*, trans. Stephen Conway (Minneapolis, MN, 1987) take as their starting points the assumption that the feelings associated with nationalism are best conceptualized in erotic terms.

13 See, for example, C. L. Innes, *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society, 1880–1935* (Athens, GA, 1993); Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, "'Thinking of Her ... as ... Ireland': Yeats, Pearse, and Heaney', *Textual Practice*, 4 (1990), 1–21; Joseph Valente, 'The Myth of Sovereignty: Gender in the Literature of Irish Nationalism', *English Literary History*, 61, 1 (1994), 189–210; and Ryder, 'Gender'.

14 For a discussion of the Irish case, see Eavan Boland, *A Kind of Scar: The Woman Poet in a National Tradition* (Dublin, 1989).

15 As a young man, the two books he was most influenced by were William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) and Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), representing the cults of rational improvement and of sensibility, respectively; see Oliver MacDonagh, *The Hereditary Bondsman: Daniel O'Connell, 1775–1829* (London, 1988), 39.

16 See Davis, *Young Ireland Movement*, 2, and Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London, 1995), 274.

no bursts of passion sway my Soul' — and exhorted his followers to legal, orderly agitation.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, O'Connell also employed, and was shaped by, the nineteenth-century discourses of sentimentalism and melodrama. His speeches, especially at the 'monster meetings' of the 1840s, were often calculated to arouse the passions of his audiences, and did so quite effectively. Even his written effusions, in a letter to his followers, on the death of Thomas Davis aspired to the status of a spontaneous, unmediated outpouring of feeling: 'I can write no more — my tears blind me.'<sup>18</sup> The main difference between O'Connell and Young Ireland, then, was that for O'Connell, although nationalism involved feeling, feeling was not the quintessential mark of national subjectivity. This was because O'Connell had little investment in Irish culture or identity as bases for political action or arrangements; his Irish nationalism was not primarily a project of subject constitution. He viewed the decline of the Irish language with equanimity, and, as Oliver MacDonagh observes, he would have found such concepts as 'anglicization' or 'mental colonialism' incomprehensible.<sup>19</sup> For O'Connell, nationality was a matter of location rather than feeling. 'The Irish people' simply meant all the inhabitants of Ireland, and the power and legitimacy of his movement rested on its mass character, rather than on its 'Irish' character. He liked to intone, 'I speak the voice of seven millions.'<sup>20</sup>

For Young Ireland, speaking the voice of the Irish was more complicated. Many critics have remarked on the doubleness that characterizes discourses of the nation; these discourses assert that the nation already exists, and at the same time they seek to create it.<sup>21</sup> This doubleness assumed a particularly virulent form for Young Ireland. On one hand, an anti-colonial nationalism has to work harder to illustrate the pre-existence of the nation than a statist nationalism, and in the case of Ireland, sectarian division provided glaring evidence that a unified nation did not already exist. On the other hand, Young Ireland arose under circumstances that made the task of a didactic, transformative nationalist project particularly difficult, so, in addition, the possibilities for creating the nation appeared slim.<sup>22</sup> For Young Ireland, 'the Irish people' was a problematic, paradoxical entity, made up of subjects that were already, ineradicably constituted as national, and, at the same time, stood in dire need of such constitution.

Wilde's representations of tears encapsulate this ambiguity. In some instances, tears are the mark of a suffering and passive populace who lack national consciousness or feeling (these two being virtually equivalent for romantic nationalism). Such tears indicate the masses' inadequate response to their own conditions of oppression, conditions that cry out for political action. One poem asks,

But can we only weep, when above us thus lour  
The death-bearing wings of the angels of power.<sup>23</sup>

Another criticizes the 'abject tears, and prayers submissive' of the people who refuse to rise.<sup>24</sup> In 'Who

17 Cusack, *Speeches and Public Letters*, vol. 2, 373

18 Quoted in Oliver MacDonagh, *The Emancipist: Daniel O'Connell, 1830–47* (New York, 1989), 272. MacDonagh, *Hereditary Bondsman*, 194, also notes that, for most of his life, O'Connell's favourite writer was Thomas Moore, famous for his tearful sentimentalities on the subject of Ireland and the Irish.

19 MacDonagh, *Emancipist*, 137

20 Cusack, *Speeches and Public Letters*, vol. 1, 517

21 See Lloyd, *Anomalous States*, esp. 'Adulteration and the Nation'; Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, esp. 'Culture and Politics from Davis to Joyce'; and Homi Bhabha's influential formulation in 'DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation', in Homi Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (New York and London, 1990), 291–322.

22 R. Radhakrishnan, 'Nationalism, Gender, and Narrative', in Parker et al., *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, 89, succinctly sums up this dilemma in the context of Indian nationalism: 'The masses can neither be bypassed (for they are the real India) nor can they be legitimated qua people.'

23 'Foreshadowings' in *Poems by Speranza*, 2nd edn. (Glasgow, n.d.), 18; volume hereafter cited as PS

24 'Have Ye Counted the Cost' in PS, 34

Will Show Us Any Good?' tears literally blind the masses to their true identity and interests:

Suffering Ireland! Martyr-Nation!  
Blind with tears thick as mountain mist;  
Can none amidst all the new generation  
Change them to glory, ...<sup>25</sup>

Tears as the sign of colonial abjection are often gendered feminine; the same poem describes a passive Ireland as the 'Saddest of mothers'.<sup>26</sup> Such representations fit smoothly into the mainstream of literature produced by other Young Irelanders such as Davis or Mangan. Another *Nation* poet put it this way:

Serf! with thy fetters o'erladen,  
Why crouch you in dastardly woe?  
Why weep o'er thy chains like a maiden,  
Nor strike for thy manhood a blow?<sup>27</sup>

Like Wilde, 'Mary' (Ellen Downing) and 'Eva' (Mary Eva Kelly) of *The Nation* also exhorted their men to nationalist fortitude by denigrating a weak and tearful femininity as the alternative; as Seán Ryder has observed, their poetry 'differs little from that of their male colleagues in its reproduction of bourgeois nationalist gender relations — the difference being that it often articulates such relations from a woman's point-of-view'.<sup>28</sup>

Not all Irish woe was dastardly; Young Ireland's writers frequently invoked the tears of the suffering to describe the brutalities of English rule and the horrors of the Great Famine of the 1840s. Mary Eva Kelly's 'A Scene for Ireland' describes a starving mother's inability to feed her baby:

She has no food to give it now  
Save those hot tears outgushing.<sup>29</sup>

But such a literature of Irish misery still equated weeping with helplessness, and thus lent itself to appropriation by a version of imperial sentimentality, exemplified by writers such as Ernest Renan and Matthew Arnold, that constructed the Irish as sensitive, romantic, and politically inept. Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies* illustrates the potential ease of such appropriations. Moore's work was sufficiently nationalist to make him a favourite of O'Connell and a target of the conservative English press. But Moore was a liberal unionist, and his poems were immensely popular in the drawing rooms of England several decades before they became well-known in Ireland. Although he sometimes took up a nationalist call to armed resistance, at other times Moore's portrait of the Irish as the nation of the smile and the tear meant that Irish cultural production expressed the suffering of the Irish with such lyrical poignancy that

Thy masters themselves, as they rivet thy chains,

25 PS, 59

26 PS, 60

27 'The Gathering of Leinster' in *The Spirit of the Nation*, pt. 2 (Dublin, 1843), 17

28 Ryder, 'Gender', 219

29 Quoted in Morash, *The Hungry Voice*, 61

Shall pause at the song of their captive, and weep.<sup>30</sup>

This image perfectly captures the classic mode and dynamics of imperial sentimentality, in which the empire nostalgically cathects that which it is in the process of destroying.

Wilde's works attempt to navigate between the nationalist Scylla of tears that indicate contemptible helplessness and the imperial Charybdis of tears that indicate moving helplessness that nevertheless remains helpless by transferring the imperative to nationalist subject constitution and action to the spectator or reader. Such a transfer is implicit in Young Ireland's laments for Irish suffering and their privileging of popular forms like the ballad. It also accords with Young Ireland's project, discernible in a number of its intellectual structures, to transform the history of Irish suffering, national and individual, into a source of, and blueprint for, a gloriously victorious future. But Wilde theorized, more thoroughly than many of her contemporaries, the processes and mechanisms through which tears undergo this transformation. In her works, tears constitute a spectacle of suffering capable of generating national feeling and spurring nationalist action; they also signify that a viewer is reacting properly to that spectacle. As this description suggests, such representations of weeping are generically related to the late eighteenth-century discourses of sensibility and their sentimental Victorian descendants, though they do not coincide completely with either. Terms like 'sensibility' and 'sentimentality' are notoriously hard to define; their political implications are even more slippery. Sensibility could be organized around individualistic, democratic, and liberal principles, or it could be mobilized in the service of 'natural' social and political hierarchies.<sup>31</sup> The politics of sentimentality are similarly uncertain and in contention.<sup>32</sup> The various formulations of these discourses shared a conviction of the immediately political significance of feeling, and a concomitant conception of feeling as the basis of the social bond. Thus when Edmund Burke attacked the French Revolution, whose excesses are widely supposed to have irrevocably tainted the vocabulary of sensibility after the 1790s, he did it by claiming sensibility's terms as his own without acknowledging them, lamenting the elimination of natural sentiments and affections as the basis for a hierarchical and harmonious social order.<sup>33</sup>

Burke, Wilde, and various Victorian sentimentalists shared a double interest in feeling as a spectacle to be observed, and as the response that a particular kind of spectacle should produce in the ethically and politically enlightened observer. The tears of the suffering object and the tears of the observing subject go together; the former produces the latter. Wilde's often millenarian vocabulary tended to interchange an earthly observer with a heavenly one. One poem urges,

Let us lift our streaming eyes  
To God's throne above the skies,  
He will hear our anguish cries.<sup>34</sup>

In 'The Voice of the Poor', the speaker claims:

30 'Oh! Blame Not the Bard' in *The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore* (New York, 1852), 237

31 See Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London and New York, 1993); Claudia Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender and Sentimentality in the 1790s*: Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen (Chicago, IL, 1995); and Anne Vincent-Buffault, *The History of Tears: Sensibility and Sentimentality in France* (New York, 1991).

32 For example, Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York, 1988) argues for the reactionary nature of sentimental fiction's tendency to reinforce nineteenth-century stereotypes of women, while Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (Oxford, 1985) argues for its revolutionary potential because it relocates the crucial scene of social and political transformation in the sphere traditionally associated with women: the heart and hearth. For another discussion of Victorian sentimentality, see Fred Kaplan, *Sacred Tears: Sentimentality in Victorian Literature* (Princeton, NJ, 1987).

33 See Johnson, *Equivocal Beings*, esp. Introduction.

34 'A Supplication' in PS, 17

If the angels ever hearken, downward bending,  
They are weeping, we are sure,  
At the litanies of human groans ascending  
From the crushed hearts of the poor.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, 'Ruins' predicts that the weeping of the poor will 'Start the angels on their thrones'.<sup>36</sup> If God and the angels could be trusted to respond with the appropriate sympathetic tears to the weeping of the oppressed, members of the Protestant Ascendancy could not. 'The Faithless Shepherds' castigates the landed aristocracy for its cruel indifference to the plight of the poor during the Famine by asserting that the Ascendancy (like many contemporary descriptions of Famine victims) are the walking dead:

Dead! — Dead! Ye are dead while ye live  
Ye've a name that ye live — but are dead.

This ethico-political (or national) death-in-life manifests itself as an absence of feeling — 'For the heart in each bosom is cold / As the ice on a frozen sea' — and a lack of sympathetic tears: 'With your cold eyes unwet by a tear, / For your Country laid low on your bier'.<sup>37</sup> The absence of national feeling indicates the corruption of the current régime and presages its violent demise, just as the presence of such feeling in heaven suggests that the nationalist revolution is divinely directed or sanctioned.

'The Brothers', subtitled 'A scene from '98', presents a spectacle, an execution, and revolves around its potential ability to generate national feeling, measured in tears, and the nationalist action such tears should also produce. In so far as it is cast as an exemplary or paradigmatic spectacle, the kind of scene supremely suited to produce the desired sentiments, we might also think of the poem as Wilde's equivalent to Burke's famous description of Marie Antoinette in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. The prisoners, 'two noble youths,' are 'in pride of life and manhood's beauty' and bear their fate with exemplary heroism. Christ-like, they are 'Pale martyrs' who die for the sake of their fellow Irish. The poem emphasizes its narrative of events as a national spectacle whose significance lies primarily in its effect on its audience. The first stanza describes the 'pale and anxious crowd' which will witness the execution, before introducing the brothers, and positions the reader among the spectators: 'You can see them through the gloom.' The second stanza also insists on the importance of the crowd for whom the emotional effect of the spectacle is measured in tears:

All eyes an earnest watch on them are keeping,  
Some, sobbing, turn away,  
And the strongest men can hardly see for weeping,  
So noble and so loved were they.

The syntax equates watching and weeping, spectatorship and sympathy:

There is silence in the midnight — eyes are keeping  
Troubled watch till forth the jury come;  
There is silence in the midnight — eyes are weeping —  
'Guilty!' is the fatal uttered doom.

35 PS, 14

36 PS, 40

37 PS, 45–46

The crowd's lamentations are an index to their level of feeling, but tears alone are not enough; true national feeling must express itself in action. As in Wilde's other representations of weeping as the mark of colonial abjection, tears that do not generate politically conscious resistance are feminizing:

Oh! the rudest heart might tremble at such sorrow,  
 The rudest cheek might blanch at such a scene:  
 Twice the judge essayed to speak the word — to-morrow —  
 Twice faltered, as a woman he had been.

The judge is moved, but the inadequacy of his feelings, which manifests itself as feminine weakness, is structural as well as personal, springing from his position as the imperial official presiding over the brothers' conviction and execution.

Wilde's poem thus explicitly rejects, in conventionally gendered terms, the imperial sentimentality of a writer like Moore, which figures the captors weeping over the chains of their victims as a positive conception of national feeling or identity. The penultimate stanza juxtaposes the crowd's passive weeping with the active intervention imagined by the narrator, a more advanced nationalist who sounds oddly like Burke:

Yet none spring forth their bonds to sever  
 Ah! methinks, had I been there,  
 I'd have dared a thousand deaths ere ever  
 The sword should touch their hair.  
 It falls! — there is a shriek of lamentation  
 From the weeping crowd around;  
 They're stilled — the noblest hearts within the nation —  
 The noblest heads lie bleeding on the ground.

The crowd's tears cannot prevent the spilling of the heroes' blood. For the first time in the poem, the spectacle is in the distant past. At the same time, the execution scene is presented as a kind of perpetual present, embodied in the heads that refuse to decay and in the continued appeal of the spectacle to nationalist sensibilities:

Years have passed since that fatal scene of dying,  
 Yet, lifelike to this day,  
 In their coffins still those severed heads are lying,  
 Kept by angels from decay.  
 Oh! they preach to us, those still and pallid features —  
 Those pale lips yet implore us, from their graves,  
 To strive for our birthright as God's creatures,  
 Or die, if we can but live as slaves.

Having transferred the burden of reacting properly to the scene from the weeping but passive crowd to the narrator, the poem then transfers this burden to its readers. The poem itself, as well as the events it features, exists as a permanent national spectacle, waiting for the reader in whom it will inspire sentiments and actions like the narrator's. Wilde locates the power to constitute the subject of Irish nationalism simultaneously in the timeless spectacle, which should produce it automatically in anyone,

and in the contingencies of the poem's particular readership.<sup>38</sup>

Weeping is thus a figure for the doubleness of the nation; it can signify either the plenitude and force of the spirit of the nation, or its devastating absence. As a way of structuring Young Ireland's anxieties about cultural nationalism as subject constitution — defined as the production and organization of feeling — this ambiguity generates a problematic that differs substantially from the problematics produced by an erotics of nationalism. The erotics of nationalism raise the threat of homosexual (as opposed to homosocial) bonds between men, the possibility that the patriot will choose his wife over her sexual rival, the nation, and the spectre of the woman-as-nation whose sexual betrayal or rape is equivalent to colonial conquest. The tearful strand of nationalism exemplified in Wilde's work, however, grapples with the danger that the signs of national feeling are ambiguous, their meanings contingent on who displays them. Wilde's work manages this ambiguity by constructing taxonomies of feeling based on gender and class distinctions. Thus Young Ireland's representations of tears also occupy the intersection between its drive towards a transcendent national unity and its need to maintain the divisions that unity supposedly transcended.

### Men and Women; Leaders and Peoples

Wilde's work is structured by two hierarchies of tears — the tears of men over the tears of women, and the tears of patriot leaders over the tears of the masses. While O'Connell's movement was largely for and populated by men, he was well aware of the potential intersections between feminine sentimentality and political reform. He was passionately opposed to slavery, and once claimed that Thomas Moore's *Captain Rock* was to the struggle for Catholic Emancipation what Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was to the abolition of slavery.<sup>39</sup> Maurice R. O'Connell has argued that the logic of Young Ireland's romantic cultural nationalism, which emphasized the uniqueness of peoples, militated against its sharing O'Connell's Enlightenment, universalist concern with American slavery and other instances of oppression outside Ireland.<sup>40</sup> I would add that this emphasis on identity, whose supposedly ungendered national subject was actually a male subject, also militated against Young Ireland embracing Stowe's 'feminine' brand of reform. Like Stowe, Wilde insists that political change begins with and depends on conversion, a change of heart. Unlike Stowe, however, Wilde does not locate this change in the feminine, domestic sphere of the hearth, or give women any special power to effect it. In Wilde's taxonomy of tearfulness, the most ethically and politically laudable tears are mainly the privilege of middle- and upper-class men.<sup>41</sup>

Wilde's acceptance of Young Ireland's equation of true nationalist subjectivity with masculinity meant that while weeping as a sign of powerlessness or a lack of political consciousness is often feminized in her work, tears as evidence of positive national feeling are associated with masculinity:

Meekly bear, but nobly try,  
Like a man with soft tears flowing.<sup>42</sup>

38 PS, 7–9

39 MacDonagh, *Emancipist*, 17

40 Maurice R. O'Connell, 'O'Connell, Young Ireland, and Negro Slavery: An Exercise in Romantic Nationalism', *Thought*, 64, 253 (1989), 130–36

41 Similarly, Johnson, *Equivocal Beings*, 14, argues that, rather than feminizing culture, politics, or men, the late eighteenth-century discourses of sensibility entailed the masculinization of formerly feminine traits; those traits were legitimized only because and only in so far as they were recoded masculine.

42 'Man's Mission' in PS, 26

Similarly, while the tears of the populace often reveal their despair and pre-political stupor, the tears of patriot leaders embody the riches they can offer the nation:

And woe to you, ye poor —  
 Want and scorn ye must endure;  
 Yet before ye many noble jewels shine  
 In the sand.  
 Ah! they are patriots' tears — even mine —  
 For Fatherland!<sup>43</sup>

This impulse towards hierarchy and differentiation within the boundaries of the nation was the inevitable companion to Young Ireland's drive towards various kinds of unity — political, aesthetic, and ethical. Since the nation was always in the process of being forged, the nationalization of the masses was always incomplete. This was particularly true for Young Ireland, given its relative lack of organic connections to the Irish masses. O'Connell's movement, in contrast, had been more genuinely popular, with the emergent Catholic middle classes, particularly in cities and rural towns, as its backbone of support.<sup>44</sup> Young Ireland never achieved the popular following that O'Connell enjoyed; the enormous early success of *The Nation* depended in part upon O'Connell's Repeal Association, which distributed it. In addition, although O'Connell continued to have a popular following, the Famine destroyed his political machine.<sup>45</sup>

Accordingly, a number of scholars have read Young Ireland's project as an attempt to create in culture a unity that did not exist in the political sphere.<sup>46</sup> Thus Young Ireland's founding premise of a unified spirit of the nation located in the Irish masses arose as the chances of it achieving such unity and politicizing the masses were actually receding. But this compensatory response created its own contradictions; it is less often observed that nationalization had to be incomplete, or it risked undoing some of cultural nationalism's other founding premises.<sup>47</sup> Its healthy respect for property and general economic conservatism (with a few exceptions) set limits on Young Ireland's unifying, assimilative ideals, and led it to privilege the leading role of the bourgeois intellectual. As Wilde wrote in an essay on an anthology of Irish songs, 'The utterances of a people, though always vehement, are often incoherent; and it is then that men of education and culture are needed to interpret and formulate the vague longings and ambitions of the passionate hearts around them.'<sup>48</sup> For Young Ireland, the relationship between leaders and peoples demanded both that the masses assimilate themselves to the model of the leaders, and that this assimilation remain perpetually deferred.

As a result, the figure of the nationalist leader carries enormous weight for Young Ireland, embodying both an ideal of unity and the continued significance and the superiority of the bourgeois intellectual. Wilde's work is obsessed with leaders — the current dearth of effective national leaders, the qualities and techniques associated with leadership, the nature of the relationship between leaders and peoples.

43 'Our Fatherland' in PS, 99

44 R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600–1972* (London, 1988), 300, observes that O'Connell's origins, which 'blended Gaelic clansmen and local Catholic gentry', allowed him to assert his organic connection to them successfully.

45 Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland*, 171

46 See, for example, Deane, 'Poetry and Song 1800–1890', 1, in which he argues that 'The political rhetoric could not be translated into action because it bespoke a unity of purpose that did not exist.'

47 The fact that this formulation echoes the ambivalence Bhabha has identified in imperialist discourses of native assimilation reminds us once again of cultural nationalism's formal similarities to imperialism. See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York, 1994), esp. 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse'.

48 Quoted in Wyndham, *Speranza*, 160

Her poems refer to leaders with epithets such as ‘poet-prophet’, ‘poet-priest’, ‘prophet-leader’, and ‘patriot leader’; her leaders are heroic, Christ-like, or God-like.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, her works constantly return to the faults of the masses who have failed to assimilate themselves to the model offered by such leaders. ‘Have Ye Counted the Cost?’ sneers,

Let the masses pass on scorning,  
Seek not courage in their mind;  
Self-devotion, patriot fervour,  
Spring not from the craven kind.<sup>50</sup>

When she became frustrated with the national movement, she blamed the populace, writing to Duffy, ‘I do not blame the leaders in the least. In Sicily or Belgium they would have been successful.’<sup>51</sup>

Along with other Young Irelanders, Wilde subscribed to Thomas Carlyle’s dictum that the history of the world is a series of biographies — the biographies of great men. She wrote biographical essays about a number of figures, including Thomas Moore and Daniel O’Connell. David Lloyd has explored Young Ireland’s preoccupation with biography and autobiography, arguing that for Irish cultural nationalism the hero’s biography represents a repetition of the nation’s history, prefigures its destiny, and asserts the seamless continuity of the individual with the nation.<sup>52</sup> Wilde’s essay on O’Connell exemplifies this pattern. His life, she wrote, was

one long gladiatorial wrestle against oppression and bigotry in which every step was a combat, but every combat a victory. ... The life of O’Connell is, indeed, the history of Ireland for nearly a century ... He lived through all, incarnated all, and was the avenger, the apostle, and the prophet of her people.<sup>53</sup>

This view of Irish history as a series of gladiatorial triumphs was, to say the least, counter-intuitive, and may seem particularly perverse in the wake of the Famine. In contrast, for O’Connell, the history of Ireland was a history of Irish patience and reason in the face of British cruelty and provocation. O’Connell’s life, for Wilde, was part of the incomplete process of resistance, as well as an image of its successful completion; it embodied a history of suffering and defeat and provided a diagram of victorious revolution. The contradictions that inhabit such a formulation are compounded by the leader’s relationship to the people, whom the leader must both represent and exceed.

Wilde’s works foreground the question of the leader’s success or failure in transforming the masses, invariably imagining this transformation occurring when the leader breathes the spirit of the nation into the populace through his passionate oratory. Thomas Davis’s essays emphasized the skill of past Irish orators and encouraged present would-be leaders to study the character of their audiences and the techniques of oratory. Wilde described O’Connell’s powers as an orator using a language of the mythical and the magical:

Never, perhaps, since sirens gave up sitting and singing upon rocks, did such witch-music fall on the ear of listener. The effect was magical — it acted like some potent spell; ... Men were charmed,

49 PS, 25, 28, 39, 53

50 PS, 34

51 Quoted in Wyndham, *Speranza*, 31

52 Lloyd, *Nationalism and Minor Literature*, 59–60

53 Wilde, ‘Daniel O’Connell’, in *Notes on Men, Women and Books*, 180–97