

YOUNG IRELAND IN CORK, 1840-1849

‘There is no such party as that styled Young Ireland’ snapped Daniel O’Connell in July 1845 in the course of a heated exchange with Thomas Davis.¹ In this he was at once both correct and mistaken. Young Ireland was never separate from O’Connellism until 1847, and yet it was much more than a ginger group within a larger movement. It was a way of thinking, of reacting (sometimes unreasonably) against the ideas of the past, and of challenging political realities with political ideals.

What was true of Young Ireland island-wide was particularly evident in the experience of that group in Cork city, where the tensions of the 1840s can be variously interpreted in terms of social class, political ideology, family rivalry and unashamed scrambling for the perks of office. This was a new era in Irish urban politics. In Cork, as elsewhere, the successive reforming measures of Emancipation (1829), parliamentary reform (1832) and municipal reform (1840) had driven protestant society into a position of permanent political minority, replacing it with a (largely) catholic elite characterised by all the self-confidence of the *arriviste*.² But such self-confidence did not go unchallenged, either by those sub-groups who had failed to make it into office under the new dispensation, or by those within the elite whose age, educational background and ideological bent made them question their own recent heritage.

Young Ireland in Cork originated within this latter group – the sons (and, to a lesser extent, daughters) of the successful elite which had helped to displace political protestantism in the city over the previous two decades. They belonged to the lower levels of mercantile society and the higher ranks of retailing. Denny Lane, for instance, was the son of a distiller, Charles Denham Murphy belonged to the prominent brewing family; Michael Joseph Barry was a merchant’s son; the Varian brothers, Isaac and Ralph, were manufacturers; and Felix Mullan was proprietor of a hardware establishment. As important as their immediate family and social milieu was their potential mobility out of the world of business into the professions *via* medical and legal

¹ T. F. O’Sullivan, *The Young Irelanders*. Kerryman, Tralee 1944, p. 14.

² Ian d’Alton, *Protestant Society and Politics in Cork 1812-1844*. Cork University Press, Cork 1980, p. 200; Maura Murphy, ‘Municipal reform and the repeal movement in Cork, 1833-1844’ in *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, lxxxi, 1976.

training. Though Lane was destined for the family business, he moved beyond the Cork commercial scene through his education in Trinity College and the King's Inns. Like Michael Joseph Barry, he was called to the bar and though neither subsequently practiced law, their Dublin experiences both in the Repeal Association and, more particularly, in the immediate coterie of Thomas Davis and the Trinity Historical Society, introduced them to a world of ideas foreign to the Cork mercantile world from which they came.³ Both Lane and Barry were part of 'the circle' from which the *Nation* newspaper emerged in 1842, and when they returned to Cork at indeterminate times between 1839 and 1843, they brought back with them the *Nation's* philosophy.⁴

Their impact on the Cork political scene was initially minimal and for at least three years after the foundation of the *Nation*, there was little or no public awareness of the existence of a body called Young Ireland, whose activities were largely confined to poetry writing, and then under cover of a pseudonym.⁵ However, they remained in constant correspondence with the Dublin 'circle', Lane corresponding with Davis, and Michael Joseph Barry with Smith O'Brien, on affairs in the southern city. From this correspondence it was clear that the Cork Young Irelanders were very much *au fait* with the issues threatening to alienate Davis's group from the mainstream Repeal Association, but that these issues had little impact on the political scene in Cork. Although Barry criticised the financial affairs of the Repeal Association in October 1844, and Denny Lane clashed with O'Connell at a private dinner over the integrity of Young Ireland, such incidents had little or no public impact.⁶ Similarly, there was very little local controversy about the Colleges Bill, for although there were differences of opinion among O'Connellites on the question of religious teaching in the proposed colleges, the exchanges were remarkably good humoured.⁷ Even the repeal issue, despite the great

³ Denis Gwynn, 'Denny Lane and Thomas Davis'. *Studies* xxxviii, Dublin, March 1949, pp. 16-18.

⁴ Richard Davis, *The Young Ireland Movement*, Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1988, p. 264; Kevin B. Nowlan, *The Politics of Repeal*. Routledge, London, 1965, pp. 46-57; *Cork Examiner* 17 May 1876.

⁵ From 1842 until 1848, all these individuals, with the possible exception of Ralph Varian, Felix Mullan and Charles Murphy contributed to the *Nation* or to its more militant successors, the *United Irishman* and *Irish Felon*. Ellen Mary Downing was 'Mary'; Michael Joseph Barry was 'M.J.B.', 'Beta' and 'Brutus'; Denny Lane was Domhnall na Glanna.

⁶ Smith O'Brien Papers, Ms. 434, letter 1258, Barry to Smith O'Brien, 27 October 1844; Ms. 2644, letters 149, 153, Lane to Smith O'Brien, 16 June 1845.

⁷ *Cork Examiner* 14, 19 May, 23 June, 9, 16 July, 5 November 1845; Slattery Papers, Cashel Diocesan Archives, 1845/9, Crotty to Slattery, 15 September 1845.

popular excitement in 1843, did not become a vital part of Cork politics until 1845 when, for the first time, a distinction was drawn in the local press between ‘repealers’ and ‘liberals’ (i.e. O’Connellites in favour of reform but not of repeal), and the question of accepting only pledged repealers for public office became a serious proposition.⁸ It was only when there was a convergence of sectional tensions, some local, some national, that the Cork Young Irelanders found themselves forming a clearly defined group. One of these sectional tensions was the increasingly bitter controversy between O’Connell and his younger followers concerning the moral justification of the use of force – a controversy culminating in the drafting of the divisive ‘Peace Resolutions’ in July 1846. By itself, this largely theoretical issue would hardly have greatly influenced the course of local Cork politics. The other – and far more important – tension which decisively split O’Connellism in Cork and brought the Young Ireland group into the open, centred not on abstract principles but on complex rivalries within the O’Connellite political elite in the city.

From the early 1830s, the control of Cork city politics, as in other urban centres in the island, had been fought for by three main groups. Firstly, there were the Tories, progressively undermined by political reform. In the second group were those supporters of O’Connell who sought an acceleration of the reform process, but who wished to maintain the Union, while the third group comprised those O’Connellites who sought both increased reform and the repeal of the Union. Though the latter two groups were linked by their loyalty to O’Connell and together regarded the Tories with undisguised animosity, they also regarded one another with considerable suspicion. This was the case since repeal, first mooted in the early 1830s, met two contrasting responses from the more prosperous merchants on the one hand and the artisan and retailer element on the other.⁹ The latter combination, reflecting contemporary British working class radicalism, equated repeal with reform, self-help and political rectitude and pushed for the dissolution of the Union on every possible occasion.¹⁰ The mercantile element, on the other hand, consisted of those liberal merchants who, in the 1820s, had withdrawn from

⁸ *Cork Examiner* 26 November 1845.

⁹ *Southern Reporter* 26 October, 2 December 1830; *Cork Mercantile Chronicle* 19 March 1832.

¹⁰ Maura Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft: the politicisation of the skilled artisan in nineteenth century Cork*, Cork, Cork University Press, 1994, pp. 97-100; *Cork Mercantile Chronicle* 19 March 1832.

the tory-dominated Committee of Merchants in order to form their own politico-economic body, the Chamber of Commerce. A mixed denominational group which included Catholics, Protestants and Dissenters, the Chamber of Commerce was characterised by O'Connellite religious tolerance and political pragmatism. They put economic advancement before any abstract patriotism, and were more than ready to waive repeal if the commercial interests of Cork demanded it.¹¹ Between these two groupings there was constant wrangling, and the tensions became even more aggravated after the election in 1841 of a new town council under the provisions of municipal reform. O'Connellites (both reformer and repealer) flooded the Council, carrying seven of the eight city wards, and leaving the Tories in a minority of seven seats in a total of sixty-four.¹²

The O'Connellite victory was not, however, as complete as it at first appeared, for the internal divisions hitherto hidden from the public now came squarely into the open on the prominent stage of the new town council. The new councillors belonged mainly to the merchant, manufacturing and professional classes – a predictable result in a system opening local government only to citizens possessed of one-thousand pounds per annum above debt. But it excluded from office a large number of politically aspiring individuals from among those retailers, master craftsmen and unionised journeymen who had long regarded the Chamber of Commerce with suspicion and had, since the mid-1830s, organised themselves in the Cork People's Hall.¹³ This vocal group had doggedly (though unsuccessfully) pressurised public representatives into declaring for repeal and pushing it in the political arena, and their sense of exclusion following municipal reform was compounded by the new town council's lukewarm attitude on a number of issues prioritised by the People's Hall – the abolition of Ministers' Money, the establishment of

¹¹ Daniel Owen Maddyn, *Ireland and its rulers*, London, 1844, i, p. 194.

¹² *Cork Examiner* 27 October 1841. For a valuable analysis of the complexities of Cork reform and O'Connellite politics in the 1820s and early 1830s, see Fintan Lane, *In Search of Thomas Sheahan: Radical Politics in Cork 1824-1836*, Maynooth Studies in Local History (Irish Academic Press 2001).

¹³ Samuel Lewis, *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (Second Edition XXX 1842), I, 404; *Aldwell's Cork Post Office Directory 1844-45*, (Aldwell, Cork 1844). p. 80; Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers, Outrage Reports, 1835, 6/63; *Southern Reporter* 14 December 1839.

an Irish Manufacture Mart for the city, and – above all – the issue of repeal of the Union.¹⁴

However, for the city's O'Connellite elite, the uncertain benefits of repeal had, as in the two previous decades, to be weighed against the more tangible advantages of reform within the context of the Union. Like O'Connell himself, they were pragmatists – though perhaps in an economic rather than a political sense – and by the 1840s many of them were convinced that the benefits of O'Connell's 'Whig Alliance' in general, and of the upward mobility provided by municipal reform, in particular, was far preferable to the uncertainties of political agitation for the elusive repeal. As one die-hard repealer (himself a merchant and a veteran of the Emancipation agitation of the 1820s) summed it up,

There is great indisposition on the part of the people who may be called the middle classes to join in agitation for the Repeal. This is chiefly grounded on the conviction that its attainment is impracticable We have no lawyer now amongst us who will speak a word on the subject... There are offices for public prosecution, clerkships of the peace and of the Crown to be occasionally given away, and a repealer solicitor ... will be as far from fitting one of them as Yorick's head was from fitting a mitre....It is true that these observations do not apply to the humble classes of the people. They have never tasted nor do they expect to taste the fruits of public employ, and they will be as ready to hurrah for Repeal as ever... If you were here and called a meeting, a house large enough to contain your apparent adherents could not be procured. When you would have gone away, away also would go the steam of Repeal.¹⁵

It was in this atmosphere of disgruntlement with the urban elite's political caution on the repeal issue that there emerged into the open the Young Ireland group centred on the two 'young repeal barristers', Denny Lane and Michael Joseph Barry. They did not emerge

¹⁴ *Southern Reporter* 25, 28 August 1841; *Report of the Select Committee on Minister;s Money, Ireland*, H.C. 1847-48, xvii, !s. 46-7; *Cork Examiner* 20 December 1841, 3 January 1842, 1 June 1846.

¹⁵ Maurice O'Connell (ed.), *The Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*.. Irish University Press, Dublin 1972, vi, letter 2735. Joseph Hayes of Cork to O'Connell, 14 August 1840.

alone, but as one of two new forces in Cork urban politics, the other and larger being the newly enfranchised burgess body, drawn from the city's retailers – pawnbrokers, tobacconists, vintners and grocers. In 1841 these had formed the Cork Burgess Association, ostensibly to help the town council revise the burgess lists, but really to remove control of the council from the Chamber of Commerce merchants and transfer it to the ratepayers.¹⁶ These two groups joined ranks with the People's Hall to attack the reformed town council and the Chamber of Commerce on a number of repeal-related issues ranging from the financing of the city's Repeal Reading Room to the debate over federalism, and finally centring on the demand for a repeal pledge from candidates for public office.¹⁷ The pledge issue, something of a hardy annual in Cork politics since the 1830s, caused a furore among the city's public men. Most objected vehemently to the pledge as excessive electoral control. Others agreed with the pledge in the case of parliamentary representatives, but were less certain of its desirability on local boards where the main issues were commercial rather than political. Members of parliament, particularly the chameleon-like Dan Callaghan who represented the city since the early 1830s, managed to avoid the pledge, but popular pressure was less easily avoided in municipal government and in early 1843 a number of town councillors had been pushed (some willingly, some not) to take the pledge¹⁸

It was this pledge rather than the 'peace resolutions' which proved the flash-point in Cork politics, driving a final wedge between the mainstream O'Connellites on the one hand and Young Ireland and their supporters on the other. The issue came to a head in the summer of 1846 following the appointment of new members to the Cork Harbour Commission. Most of this body's thirty-four members were nominated by the town council. Under tory control before municipal reform, the Harbour Commission passed into the hands of the O'Connellites, but it seems that neither before nor after 1840 had it been considered a political body and, at least in theory, no man suitable for office had

¹⁶ *Cork Examiner* 12 November, 1 December 1841, 21 October 1842.

¹⁷ *Cork Examiner* 20, 22 April, 15 May, 21 November 1844, 5 February, 31 October 1845; *Report of the Repeal Association: Report on Reading Rooms 1844-5*, ii, pp. 331-2, 338-346; Day Papers, Cork Archives, 80/123; *Cork Constitution* 23 November 1844; William Smith O'Brien Papers, National Library of Ireland: Ms. 2644, letter 163, Denny Lane to Thomas Davis, 10 April 1845: 'What I long anticipated and mentioned to you long since is coming about: [Francis S.] Murphy [one of the city's M.Ps] is about taking up some namby-pamby federalism; Ms. 434, letter 1258, M. J. Barry to Smith O'Brien, 27 October 1844.

¹⁸ *Cork Constitution* 29 April, 13 May 1843; *Cork Examiner* 4, 15 September 1843.

ever been excluded on political grounds.¹⁹ As the demand for a repeal pledge for public representatives grew, however, this ‘non-political’ appointment system came under attack and when, in June 1846, a majority of the town council, elected four non-repealers to the Harbour Commission, the issue came to a head.²⁰ Those who supported the controversial vote, many of them pledged repealers themselves, defended their vote on the grounds that no repealers were available to fill the vacant places on the Harbour Board, and that, as a matter of principle, politics and commerce should be separate – a stance which infuriated the repealer groups centred on the People’s Hall. The ensuing show-down between the council on the one hand and the People’s Hall and its allies on the other was politically significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it brought to a head the long-standing tensions between the city’s new elite and the frustrated O’Connellite out-groups. Secondly, it brought into focus the dilemma facing Cork’s mercantile O’Connellites who, not for the first time, faced the dilemma between elusive political principles on the one hand and complex economic realities on the other. Thomas Lyons, a veteran repealer and one of those attacked following the Harbour Board debacle put clearly his fears regarding the stand taken by the People’s Hall:

These few demagogues in the course they are pursuing would destroy the trade and commerce of the city, and our municipal institutions.... Being at length convinced... that by aiding these mad people in their projects, I would ultimately bring ruin on our trade, our only stay in Cork, I felt bound to give way to reason and join the more prudent and well-thinking... Surely the trade of Cork need not be sacrificed to the glorious cause of Repeal... If unfortunately the people go on in their present course, the Conservatives will rule Cork again and then adieu forever to Liberalism and Repeal in the Capital of the South, and we must be their slaves.²¹

¹⁹ *First Report of the Commissioners appointed to enquire into Municipal Corporations in Ireland*, H.C., 1835, xxvii, Appendix, p. 48; *Cork Examiner* 16 June 1845.

²⁰ *Cork Constitution* 6 June 1846.

²¹ Maurice O’Connell, *O’Connell Correspondence*, vii, letter 3244, Thomas Lyons to O’Connell, 11 July 1846.

The controversy also brought home to the city's veteran O'Connellite reformers that the changes which they had set in motion in the 1820s with the Emancipation campaign had led to popular demands impossible to satisfy. When Richard Dowden, one of the most respected repealers in the city's elite, and a co-voter with Lyons on the Harbour Board issue, lamented that he and his generation had 'not educated the people sufficiently to hear the truth', he was expressing the dismay of the moderate liberal overwhelmed by the potentially destructive power of 'the people'.²² Finally, the divisions consequent on the Harbour Board vote foreshadowed the final confrontation between Old and Young Ireland since most of those who attacked the council on this occasion sided with the seceders from Conciliation Hall some weeks later.²³

The division between Young Ireland and O'Connellism in Cork was, therefore, a product of both national and local circumstances. As Thomas Lyons expressed it in his summing up of the Harbour Board controversy, it was a matter of pragmatism *versus* unattainable ends, of economic prosperity *versus* the will o' the wisp of repeal. It was also, though undoubtedly shaped by conflicting attitudes to the controversial 'Peace Resolutions', a manifestation of the struggle of local affairs between, on the one hand, a *parvenu* elite in the Chamber of Commerce and reformed town council, and, on the other, the upwardly aspiring retailer element, their progress blocked by an impenetrable glass ceiling in the form of property qualifications, family monopoly and patronage networks.

On the Young Ireland side, the controversy was also the expression of impatience with the perceived political caution of the older generation. While the gap between the People's Hall and the Chamber of Commerce was no simple generational one, those who supported Young Ireland were all aged from their mid-teens to early thirties, too young to understand the political climate which had shaped the political attitudes of those individuals now referred to as Old Irelanders.²⁴ They had no first-hand experience of the emergence of the Chamber of Commerce as the bastion of Cork O'Connellism, and the struggle which it had sustained in quest of municipal and parliamentary reform. The gap

²² *Cork Constitution* 20 June 1846.

²³ *Cork Examiner* 7, 14 August 1846; *Cork Constitution* 4 August 1846.

²⁴ One of the most vociferous critics of the Chamber of Commerce and Town Council was Joseph Hayes, a veteran of the Emancipation campaign and of the other reforming drives of the 1830s and 40s. By 1846, on the other hand, Lane and Barry were in their late twenties while the more militant element emerging in the following two years included, for instance, the nineteen year old Joseph Brennan.

between Old and Young Ireland in Cork was indeed a generation gap. The younger men, though generally unwilling to hurt O'Connell while he lived, and revering his memory when he died, felt that while their eyes might 'rest with fondness on the glories of the past, they must not allow its bright radiance to throw a false colouring over the actions of the present.'²⁵

But the impatient young men were to be overtaken by others more impatient than themselves – some from within their own ranks, others from a somewhat lower social milieu and a more militant mentality. Hints of this were already clear when, in January 1847, the new Irish Confederation was formed. Cork was well represented on the new body's committee, most of those involved having long been connected with the pledged repealer and Young Ireland element in Cork city.²⁶ In Cork, the Confederation had its own meeting room in the South Main Street, but its activities never reached the newspaper columns, and the general inactivity of its members was reflected in the scanty references to Cork in the Irish Confederation minute book.²⁷ The famine raging in the city partly explained this inactivity²⁸, but the stagnation was also due to internal divisions within the Confederates' own ranks, the settlement of which demanded a pragmatism which, when manifested by the town council and Chamber of Commerce only months previously, had been denounced as treachery. As Michael Joseph Barry explained to Smith O'Brien, in the bitter atmosphere following the split between Old and Young Ireland, only a softly-softly approach would succeed in 'acquir[ing] the confidence and support of the people'. He was right, as proven by the uproar at the public meeting eventually held to launch the Confederate Desmond Club in the city, when the organisers were shouted down as the 'murderers of O'Connell'.²⁹ Moreover, Barry and the leadership of the new body also found themselves – another irony – under attack also from their own more extreme followers, 'enthusiasts, [who] lack the calm reflective

²⁵ *Cork Examiner* 2 December 1846, quoting a speech by Isaac Varian.

²⁶ *Cork Examiner* 15 January 1847. Luke Shea, J. P. of Carrigaline, Denny Lane, Michael Joseph Barry, Edward Brady, and Isaac Varian were all committee members,

²⁷ Irish Confederation Minute Book, Royal Irish Academy, Ms. 23.H.40. This showed a total of only ninety-six members from County Cork, and listed none at all for the city, though this was probably due to inefficient communication between centre and provincial branch. Membership was most common among farmers, professional men (doctors and solicitors), catholic clergy and shopkeepers, though artisans, teachers and a few labourers were also present on the lists.

²⁸ *Cork Examiner* 2 December 1846.

character to give weight to their opinions' but who would pull the movement in a more extreme direction over the following eighteen months.³⁰

One source of internal discord was the Desmond Club's main thrust as a cultural and educational rather than an active political body. Building on foundations established by the short-lived Cork Historical Society of the previous year, it promulgated the teachings and philosophy of the late Thomas Davis of lectures on Irish history, culture and the revival of native manufacture, classes in drawing and the Irish language, and the facilities of a reading room where members could pursue self-education through the medium of a large selection of Irish, British and American newspapers and periodicals.³¹ The club's initial membership was quite small, but it was drawn from those radical and disgruntled groups who had formed the backbone of the People's Hall since its foundation in the late 1830s and supported the Burgess Association since 1841 – artisans, grocers, minor merchants, pawnbrokers and vintners, and many others whose non-inclusion in contemporary trade directories indicates a relatively humble socio-economic background.³² Though they willingly subscribed to the cultural programme of the Desmond Club, they were, along with the 'enthusiasts' in the leadership, looking for something stronger, and it was in response to this pressure and to the excitement generated by events on the continent that in early 1848 the Cork Confederates became more assertive.

In January, the formerly moderate repealer *Southern Reporter* was taken over by Michael Joseph Barry and Charles Denham Murphy. Although Barry confided to Smith O'Brien that an initially cautious approach was needed lest the former readers of the paper be alienated, the first few weeks of the takeover coincided with the outbreak of the February Revolution in Paris, and the *Reporter* was transformed within a short time into a

²⁹ *Cork Examiner* 22 September 1847

³⁰ Smith O'Brien Papers, Ms. 438, letter 1936. Barry to Smith O'Brien, 23 July 1847.

³¹ John Mitchel Papers (Hickey Collection), National Library of Ireland, Ms. 3225, pp. 9-11; *Cork Examiner* 6, 20 October, 6, 20, 31 December 1847; *Southern Reporter* 25 January 1848. The publications available in the reading room were: *The Daily News*, *Douglas Jarrold's Newspaper and Magazine*, *The Packet*, *The Limerick Reporter*, *Peter Carroll's Register*, *The Dublin University Magazine*, *The Cork Magazine*, *Howit's Journal*, *Sharpe's London Magazine*, *The North American Review*, *The Builder*, 'some northern newspapers', *The Cork Examiner*, *Southern Reporter* and *Cork Constitution*, and the *Nation*. The Irish classes, held twice weekly at a charge of sixpence, were arranged by the antiquarian, Thomas Windele.

vociferous exponent of revolution *a la francaise*.³³ At almost the same time the Desmond Club's lecture programme became appreciably more revolutionary, ditching topics like the 'Ancient Civilization of Ireland' in favour of the life of Wolfe Tone, the villainy of Pitt, the rebellion of 1798, and contemporary political movements in Europe.³⁴

This was the point at which Cork Young Irelanders-turned-Confederates made their choice between caution and culture on the one hand, and militancy on the other. Carried along by the force of his own rhetoric, Barry confided to Smith O'Brien:

I had little faith in parliament at any time – none now. I consider it to be a complete delusion to expect that from the justice or reason of an English government anything is to be had, and have no faith in any policy which does not tend to work upon their fears'.³⁵

Other younger members like the nineteen-year-old Joseph Brennan were even more excitable. Fond of slogans like '*aristocrats a la lanterne!*', he scandalised even the Desmond Club by proclaiming, when the Mayor refused to call a public meeting to congratulate the French nation, that Ireland had 'a surplus of landlords and fat altermen' and that 'blood was a commodity of which there would soon be a very lavish expenditure.'³⁶

From February to July 1848, excitement in Cork city continued to grow, partly due to the escalation of events in France, partly to national events like the arrest and prosecution of Thomas Francis Meagher, John Mitchel and William Smith O'Brien, and partly to local reactions to these events. The cheers for O'Connell and Old Ireland were a thing of the past, and the famine-exhausted city crowds, if they shouted at all, did so for the French Republic and John Mitchel.³⁷ By early April, the reported subversion of soldiers and the repetition of the hitherto inconceivable words 'To Hell with the Queen!'

³² Within a month, it had 135 members, but only the list of the first subscribers remains, so identification is difficult. *Cork Examiner* 13 September 1847.

³³ *Southern Reporter*, 25 January 1848. *Smith O'Brien Papers*, Ms. 442, letter 2374. Barry to Smith O'Brien, 22 February 1848.

³⁴ *Southern Reporter* 20, 25 January, 24 February 1848.

³⁵ *Smith O'Brien Papers*, Ms. 441, letter 2349, Barry to Smith O'Brien, 5 January 1848.

³⁶ *John Mitchel Papers*, Ms. 3225, pp. 8, 9, 22-5; *United Irishman* 18 March 1848; *Southern Reporter*, 16, 8 March 1848.

³⁷ *Southern Reporter* 30 March, 27 April 1848.

caused serious concern.³⁸ Mitchel's imprisonment a few weeks later led to disquieting scenes where mobs of men, women and boys marched through the city's streets until after midnight, and a sense of expectancy seeped through the urban crowd:

Vast numbers of idle and evil-disposed persons assemble in [Patrick Street] in front of the warehouses daily, and remain until a late hour of the evening, who are all in a state of disaffection to the present government, and who assemble for the sole purpose of discussing politics; the general subjects of discussion being the grievances which they consider this country is enduring under (as they term it) the Saxon Yoke, the right they consider that Irishmen have to sever the Union... and the probabilities of a successful attempt for the purpose with expressions of great hostility to the present government, and their desire to change it for a democracy.³⁹

At the same time, rifle clubs were formed, the open manufacture of pikes increased, the sale of firearms rocketed, and city Confederate leaders set about establishing a network of clubs throughout city and county.⁴⁰ To frightened onlookers, particularly among the protestant conservative community, it seemed that a rebellion was about to erupt – an impression fuelled by the number of club titles associated with 1798 – Wolfe Tone, William Orr, Lord Edward, Sheares, Arthur O'Connor, Oliver Bond – and by the staging in July of a huge pro-Smith O'Brien demonstration in the city park in July to which the club members marched in formation, dressed in their working clothes as a tribute to the revolutionary artisans of Paris.⁴¹

But the apparently monolithic popular movement which loyal and law-abiding citizens feared was seriously divided. For months, the local Confederate leadership had watched with some trepidation the left-ward swing in their movement. They now found themselves in same dilemma experienced by the O'Connellite elite two years earlier –

³⁸ *United Irishman* 15 April 1848; Chief Secretary's Office, Registered Papers, Outrage Reports, 1848, 6/506.

³⁹ *Irish Felon* 24 June 1848; *Cork Constitution* 13 July 1848; *Southern Reporter* 13 July 1848; Smith O'Brien Papers, Ms. 442, letter 2490, Smith O'Brien to his wife, July 1848. CSORP.OR. 1848, 6/905, 935. Address to Government from the loyal traders of Patrick Street.

⁴⁰ *Cork Constitution*, 4, 11, 13, 18 April, 23 May 1848; *United Irishman* 5 May 1848; *Southern Reporter* 23, 30 May, 1 June 1848; CSORP.OR 1848, 6/397, 405, 424, 464, 447, 489, 505, 574, 634.

⁴¹ *Southern Reporter* 15 July 1848.

unable to control a popular movement which they had themselves unwittingly unleashed. The new clubs, radiating out from the recently established Cork Citizens' Club in the city, represented the desperate attempts of a rhetorically revolutionary but actually very nervous leadership to control the spiralling popular excitement. This comes across in the proposed structure of the club network – a veritable model of order, central control and decorum – the latter summed up by the (hardly revolutionary) prohibition of smoking 'or any other objectionable practice'.⁴²

Among the cautious leaders, Michael Joseph Barry stood out, though perhaps less because of the degree of his caution than because the contrast between his public rhetoric and his private fears was preserved for historical scrutiny in the local press and his regular correspondence with Smith O'Brien. For all his flamboyant editorials, he was a bourgeois revolutionary, cautious at heart, and despite his bombastic editorials in the *Southern Reporter*, replete with references to 'duty', 'people's will', 'fair fight', 'despotism' and 'liberty', he was no militant.⁴³ As early as February 1848 he expressed regret that the militant and 'mischievously foolish' John Mitchel was fast becoming the darling of the crowds and of the Cork Confederates, claiming to 'see evidence of a more levelling and ultra-democratic spirit amongst them than I like.'⁴⁴ A month later, in the middle of a eulogy of the French people, he paused to warn that

a revolution is like Saturn, it sometimes devours its own children.

Patriots, like Frankenstein, by breathing life into an inanimate mass,
raise it up, it may be, to be a power which hunts themselves to death.⁴⁵

Other leading lights in the Confederation agonised less than Barry about the discrepancies between revolutionary idealism and reality. We know little of what Denny

⁴² *Southern Reporter* 23 May 1848. Each club was to be founded with the co-operation of four members of the Citizens' Club, regular reports of progress were to be made to that club, and the district clubs were to abide by a set of rules issued by the Citizens' Club. The rules of the clubs were as follows: (1) Members were to devoted themselves to achieving National Independence by every practicable means. (2) Discussion of sectarian and party topics was to be prohibited. (3) The club was to be governed by a committee of twelve, and a president and vice-president were to be elected for six months and enabled to frame necessary bye-laws. (4) Clubs were to remain open from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. (5) A chairman (the president, vice-president or committee member) was to preside at discussions and silence was to be observed at all other times. (6) Smoking 'or any other objectionable practice' was to be forbidden, and infringement of this rule to be reported to the committee.

⁴³ *Southern Reporter* 6 January, 7, 18 March, 23, 30 May, 1 June 1848.

⁴⁴ Smith O'Brien Papers, Ms. 442, letter 2374. Barry to Smith O'Brien, 22 February 1848; letter 2429, Barry to Smith O'Brien, May 1848.

Lane thought, as most of his political correspondence had been with Davis (dead for almost three years at this stage) and he did not communicate with Smith O'Brien as Barry did. He did, however, take a leading part in organising the Mitchel Defence Fund, and was instrumental in inviting Thomas Francis Meagher and Smith O'Brien to Cork, making a rousing speech at the ensuing public meetings.⁴⁶ Others like Isaac Varian, John Walter Bourke and John O'Brien did not commit their thoughts to paper, but continued to organise clubs in and outside the city, and it was during such a drive at Crossbarry in July, when they made use of 'scandalous and seditious words' that the authorities seized their opportunity to nip potential disturbance in the bud. The Crossbarry trio were arrested on 18 July, two days later Cork was proclaimed, and extra police were drafted into the city.⁴⁷

The immediate reaction of the city's Confederate leaders to the proclamation showed more than anything how illusory had been the fears of revolution. Some resigned immediately, and the rank-and-file who had been primed for 'a blow in defense of their country' were now advised to 'be tranquil... and attempt no violence. If your officers are arrested, elect new ones in their stead, and await for the advice of those you trust and know.'⁴⁸ Though political excitement continued, peaking with the news of the Ballingarry affray, the leadership and followers had already parted ways. Warnings of caution were ignored as club members prepared to defy the proclamation and begin the rebellion, but the excitement lasted for only one night. Seditious songs were sung and the proclamation placards smeared with mud, and as the police searched for arms, they were followed by crowds of women who cursed them loudly, wishing that 'the black sickness will whip away all those bloody infernal peelers' and called on the menfolk to 'pull the bloody peelers to pieces'.⁴⁹ But the leaders had left the scene. Denny Lane, Michael Joseph Barry, Ralph and Isaac Varian, Charles Denham Murphy and Felix Mullan had been lodged in gaol; others of less importance were said to be emigrating to America; and

⁴⁵ *Southern Reporter* 14 March 1848.

⁴⁶ *Southern Reporter* 30 March, 25 April, 3 June 1848; *Cork Examiner* 18 March, 30 May 1848; Smith O'Brien Papers, Ms. 442, letter 2476, Denny Lane to Smith O'Brien.

⁴⁷ CSORP.OR. 1848, 6/872, 973, 990, 998; *Cork Constitution* 6, 25 July 1848; *Southern Reporter* 18 July 1848.

⁴⁸ CSORP.OR. 1848, 6/866; *Cork Constitution* 27 July 1848.

⁴⁹ *Cork Constitution* 20, 27 July, 8 August 1848.

the disaffected in the city were soon quietened by a show of force by the fleet.⁵⁰ The release of the local Confederate leaders four months later caused little stir. Felix Mullan and Company, who had openly displayed and advertised firearms all through 1848 had, since August, confined their advertising to the realm of spoons, forks, drawing rooms grates and kitchen ranges, and by September the People's Hall, that nucleus of Cork repeal fervour and Young Ireland nationalism, had been taken over by a dealer in old clothes.⁵¹

Young Ireland in Cork gave its last kick in 1849, when the *Southern Reporter* clashed with the catholic bishop, Dr. Delaney, over a proposed collection in aid of Pius IX, then in exile. The *Reporter*, while expressing sympathy and admiration for the pontiff, maintained that Ireland would not be justified in sending money abroad while here people were starving at home. Young Ireland came worst out of the dispute, Delaney having denounced them as the church's 'inveterate and bitter opponents [who], professing Young Ireland principles... perhaps think themselves bound to sympathise with all the revolutions of all times and all countries.'⁵² By now, however, the term 'Young Irelander' was an anachronism. Many of those so termed joined in the loyal scramble to welcome the Queen when she visited Cork in July 1849. But as the town council prepared an address to Her Majesty, and prominent citizens jostled to offer their residences for the entertainment of the royal visitors, a few faint squeaks of protest broke through the loyal clamour. There were some signs behind the scenes that the remnants of the Confederate Clubs planned to break any windows illuminated for the royal visit.⁵³ On the town council, Edward Brady, one of the most vocal Irish Confederates in Cork in 1847 and 1848 demanded unsuccessfully that the council's address to the Queen include a reference to repeal and the release of the state prisoners, while James Dwyer made cynical suggestions that Her Majesty should be entertained in the dining hall of the Cork Union Workhouse.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ *Cork Constitution* 27 July 1848; CSORP.OR. 1848, 6/1025-6.

⁵¹ *Southern Reporter* 15 August, 7 September, 14 November 1848.

⁵² *Southern Reporter* 2 January, 20 March 1849; Slattery Papers, Cashel Diocesan Archives 1849/29, Delaney to Slattery, 10 May 1849.

⁵³ CSORP.OR. 1849, 6/575, 582.

⁵⁴ *Cork Constitution* 5, 14, 25 July, 4 August 1849.

Parliamentary and municipal politics resumed their accustomed even tenor. In the city by-election of 1849, the Tories and erstwhile O'Connellites put forward only one candidate each and consequently divided the representation between them, while the town council returned to dominant issues of civic patriotism and commercial enterprise, without the unwelcome disruption caused by repeal.⁵⁵ The young men whose ideas had disrupted city politics from 1845 onwards were not even heard of. Those who had been imprisoned for their seditious activities emerged from prison as highly respectable citizens and either returned to their family businesses or left the city for successful careers elsewhere. The decade-long Young Ireland interlude was over.

So what, if any, was the long-term legacy of Young Ireland generally, and of the Cork Young Irelanders in particular? Their journalism and their literary work, mostly poetry, were characteristic of that 'ideological stockpile' of romantic nationalism, militancy and religious devotion which became the hallmarks of this formative period.⁵⁶ It is difficult to assess the popular influence of these writings in their own time. There is no doubt that they made a considerable impression on the immediate readership of the *Nation*, many of whom emulated such sentiments their own poetic attempts and sometimes moved on from poetry to a more active political consciousness. In the Cork context, one such emulator was the young Ellen Mary Downing ('Mary' of the *Nation*) who briefly emerged from her sheltered bourgeois girlhood as daughter of the Fever Hospital's resident medical officer to write rousing pieces like 'Forget Our Wrongs?' and 'The Logic of a Blow' and engage in a brief courtship with the young Joseph Brennan.⁵⁷ Among the broader public, and further down the social scale, the Young Ireland poets' influence is less tangible. Some of their poems certainly met a response among the public, sold on broadside soon after their appearance in the newspaper, but Young Ireland's high-minded patriotism and exalted religious toleration proved no match among the ballad-singing public for the sectarian sentiments and millenarian hopes which characterised the most successful broadside compositions.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ *Cork Constitution* 2, 16, 18, 23, 30 October, 10, 13 November 1849.

⁵⁶ Davis, *Young Ireland Movement*, p. 244.

⁵⁷ O'Sullivan, *Young Irelanders*, pp. 117-118.

⁵⁸ Maura Murphy, 'The Ballad Singer and the Role of the Seditious Ballad in Nineteenth Century Ireland: Dublin Castle's View'. *Ulster Folklife*, vol. 25, 1979, pp. 97-98; O'Sullivan, *Young Irelanders*, p. 312.

The influence of Young Ireland's romantic nationalism was really most powerful after the demise of the movement itself. This influence stretched on for well over a century, carried forward by a series of song-books like the *Spirit of the Nation* (including such numbers as Michael Joseph Barry's 'Step Together' and 'The Green Flag' and Lane's 'Kate of Araglen'. Early in the following century, Father Walsh's *Songs of the Gael* re-popularised these numbers, while in the 1940s T. F. O'Sullivan published extracts not only from Lane and Barry but also from Isaac Varian and 'Mary'.⁵⁹ Preserved and expanded upon by (partisan but valuable) personal memoirs like those of Gavan Duffy and Michael Doheny⁶⁰, the songs' potent ideological mixture of cultural self-respect, militancy and heroic failure was also perpetuated by generational transmission in those families involved in the heady events of 1848 and 1849.⁶¹ It also passed into formal education to underlay the history and literature textbooks published by the Christian Brothers from the 1850s onwards.⁶² It permeated academic historical writing in the 1940s when scholarship and centenary commemorations fused in a number of works by Denis Gwynn, T. F. O'Sullivan and others.⁶³ Even as late as the 1960s, it shaped the primary school history textbooks published in independent Ireland, the tedium of date-saturated chapters being relieved by stirring political verses from Davis, Ingram or 'Speranza'.⁶⁴ Ironically, however, the most long-lived Young Ireland song, at least in the Cork context, was only subliminally political. This was Denny Lane's 'Irish Maiden's Lament' (better known as 'Carrigdhoun') which still continues to figure in the song repertoire of the older generation in the city. Why did it maintain its appeal? It did so precisely because it omitted *passé* political references, and because its pervasive nostalgia for a real place and for lost love allowed it to transcend time.

⁵⁹ *The Spirit of the Nation, or Ballads and Songs of the Writers of "The Nation"*. Dublin, James Duffy & Co., 1911, pp. 220, 228, 278, 326; Ab t-Athair Padruig Breathnach, *Songs of the Gael*. Browne and Nolan, Dublin, 1922.; T. F. O'Sullivan, *Young Irelanders*. pp. 572-3, 546,

⁶⁰ Charles Gavan Duffy, *Thomas Davis: Literary and Historical Essays*. Dublin 1846; *Young Ireland: A fragment of Irish History 1840-45*, Dublin, 1884; *Young Ireland: Four Years of Irish History 1845-49*. Dublin, 1887; Michael Doheny, *The Felon's Track*. Dublin, 1918.

⁶¹ Padraig Eric Mac Fhinn, *An tAthair Mícheál P. Ó hIcheadha*. Sáirséal agus Dill, Baile Atha Cliath, 1974, pp. 22-23.

⁶² Barry M. Coldrey, *The Christian Brothers and the Development of Irish Nationalism*. Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1988.

⁶³ Denis Gwynn, *Thomas Davis and Young Ireland*, Cork XXX, 1949; 'Denny Lane and Thomas Davis' in *Studies*, Dublin 1949; M. J. McManus (ed.), *Thomas Davis and Young Ireland*, Thom, Dublin 1945.

⁶⁴ *The Educational History of Ireland*, Parts I and II. Educational Company of Ireland, Dublin, 1960.

Outside the realm of song writing and romantic nationalism, the legacy of Young Ireland in Cork was one of re-awakened political realism. This realism was clear at opposite ends of the political spectrum – among those who continued to support revolution and among those who deliberately turned their backs on it. The first group were to be found among the Confederate rank-and-file disappointed by the fiasco of 1848. From then onwards they put their faith in a more militant and less bourgeois-dominated movement, fenianism, and it was significant that some of the most tenacious city fenians in the 1860s were men who had cut their political teeth in the Irish Confederation⁶⁵ The second group, the leaders, mostly returned to their natural milieu of the family firm, the town council and the Chamber of Commerce. Some, like Denny Lane and Joseph Ronayne could never shake off their experience of political excitement and cultural revival in the 1840s and either involved themselves in the politics of Home Rule or in the continued literary promulgation of Young Ireland ideas on cultural identity, industrial revival and religious tolerance.⁶⁶ Others completely abandoned the ideas of the 'forties. Micheal Joseph Barry was one such: on his release from prison, he returned to journalism to support thereafter a policy of reform within the context of the Union, and briefly took the position of a Divisional Police Magistrate in Dublin in the 1870s.⁶⁷

Contemporary judgements on the Cork Young Irelanders varied from contempt to adulation. In 1848 the *Cork Constitution* condemned them as 'fellows who have been deluding the populace into conspiracy and crime' while disappointed followers used the term 'renegade gaol martyrs'.⁶⁸ In the 1850s, those condemned were now praised for their 'calm and temperate spirit', while their obituaries in later decades, culminating in that of Lane in 1895, were veritable panegyrics laden with reference to their fairness, generosity and purity of purpose.⁶⁹ The truth was, of course, that Cork's Young Irelanders were neither renegades nor heroes. They were products of their immediate family and economic background, some prosperous retailers in their own right, others the sons of Cork businessman, residing in the salubrious area of Blackrock, or Wellington

⁶⁵ Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft*, pp. 156-157.

⁶⁶ Maura Cronin, 'Denny Lane'. *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, vol. 100, 1995, pp. 1-15; vol. 101, 1996, pp. 143-157.

⁶⁷ O'Sullivan, *Young Irelanders*, pp. 318-319.

⁶⁸ *Cork Constitution* 20 July 1848; Fr. Mat Horgan Papers, Royal Irish Academy, Ms. 12.G.15, November 1850.

Road, educated in diocesan seminaries, Trinity College or the King's Inns and (had the exciting events of the 1840s not interposed) destined for a successful career in law or in the middling or upper ranks of local business. Their wish for the regeneration of national self-respect and their genuine belief in the moral justification of physical force stopped short at the actual use of such force, and when they were overtaken by the horrors of the famine and the snowballing excitement of 1848 they did not know what to do. In the event, though the more enthusiastic in their ranks and among their followers disagreed, they did the best thing – nothing. If, like their friend Smith O'Brien, they had allowed a rebellion to go off at half-cock, they might have gained a place in the nationalist pantheon, but they would have brought havoc on their city's trade and people. In the end, whatever their rhetoric, they proved themselves true sons of the Cork mercantile elite – cautious, pragmatic and with an understandable mistrust in the forces of uncontrolled democracy.

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⁶⁹ *Cork Examiner* 22, 23 May 1876, 24 January 1889, 30 November 1895.