A Discourse Perspective on Daniel O'Connell's Repeal Movement

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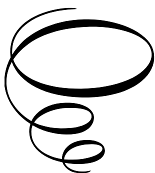
By

Davide Mazzi

Cambridge Scholars Publishing



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This book first published 2022

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-7728-7
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-7728-2

"He hailed the mixture of Protestant, Presbyterian, and Catholic, as the most powerful impulse to the great movement in which they were engaged. That was all they wanted".

Freeman's Journal, 7 March 1843

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As the time to celebrate the centenary of Irish Independence (January 1922) fast approaches, it seems fitting that studies from a variety of disciplines provide a fair reflection on the development of democracy in the country. While this inevitably implies highlighting the links between early twentieth-century advanced nationalism and the political landscape emerging after Independence, the big picture should also include the earlier tradition of constitutional nationalism established by Daniel O'Connell. This notion is what inspired the volume and led me to embark on a research quest for the rhetorical resources through which O'Connell revolutionised Irish politics, he managed to mobilise overwhelming public support like never before and indeed, he aroused fierce opposition from a unionist perspective. In an attempt to design and complete a research project aimed at combining a variety of approaches within an original work, the book took shape after crucial research periods at the Pontifical Irish College in Rome (June 2019) and the National Library of Ireland (August 2020). In particular, I would like to express heartfelt gratitude to Cezara Petrina, archivist at the College, whose expertise and kindness proved invaluable in allowing the project to gather momentum. In addition, I would like to fully acknowledge the great professional assistance I received from the National Library's staff, who reopened the doors of their iconic reading room in a most difficult period.

Chapter One

Daniel O'Connell and his legacy: Politics and the print media

1.1 What this book is

One hundred and seventy-five years after Daniel O'Connell's death, there is widespread agreement that the Liberator can be hailed as a towering figure of nineteenth-century Irish politics and arguably a founder of Irish democracy. In light of this, it is somewhat striking that no calendar date has been chosen to commemorate Ireland's "Gaelic folk hero and legendary lawyer" (Foster 1992, 157). In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that the State's relationship to O'Connell's memory has at times been ambiguous and symptomatic of official neglect. When the restoration of O'Connell's ancestral home at Derrynane was completed, there were mixed opinions about who should conduct the opening ceremony. When some suggested President de Valera, the proposal was greeted with initial scepticism: O'Connell, it was contended, had always been unpopular with twentieth-century advanced nationalism, so that Seán T. O'Kelly, a predecessor of de Valera's at *Áras an Uachtaráin*, had been zealous enough to have the Liberator's marble bust moved from the entrance hall to the basement of the President's official residence.

As Fintan O'Toole (2006) recalls from a first-hand account by Austin Dunphy, architect with the Office of Public Works who became close to de Valera as he oversaw architectural works at the *Áras*, the President eagerly accepted the invitation to perform the ceremony. After he listened to de Valera's speech praising O'Connell on the occasion, Dunphy later confessed to the Long Fellow that he had been slightly puzzled at nationalist Ireland's reluctance to commemorate O'Connell, to which de Valera (in O'Toole 2006) allegedly replied that

> [y]ou must think, you must consider our feelings at that time. We firmly believed that the Irish people could only be 'jolted' from their lethargy and Irish freedom and liberty achieved by force of arms. How then could we promote the memory of the man who achieved so much by parliamentary

> means with no loss of life? To praise him would have made it impossible for us to justify armed insurrection.

The measured, almost apologetic tone of de Valera's words arguably encapsulates the essence of much of the public debate around commemoration in Ireland, where for quite some time a notion has been entertained "of historical recollection as a zero-sum game. If you want to recall and celebrate the achievements of unarmed politics, you must ignore events such as 1916. If you think 1916 was a noble episode, you have to ignore the likes of O'Connell" (O'Toole 2006). Over the last few years, thankfully, scholarly research and popularisation (cf. O'Leary 2019) have done much to encourage more mature reflection on O'Connell's contribution to Irish politics, to the effect that his role in taking physical force off the equation and putting persuasion centre stage has been more openly acknowledged and relished.

The due prominence achieved by O'Connell as a leading figure establishing the nineteenth-century Irish parliamentary tradition has been a strong motivation for this research, too. In this book, however, a different angle is taken on O'Connell's centrality to Irish public discourse. Thus, rather than adding to the vast body of research works on O'Connell's politics or the history of Catholic Emancipation as well as Repeal, this study is intended to bring a discourse perspective on the Liberator's oratorical skills along with the general perception of O'Connell as shaped by the press of his age. In an attempt to sharpen our knowledge of how O'Connell revolutionised Irish politics and managed to mobilise overwhelming public support like never before, the volume fields the following research questions: (1) What rhetorical strategies did O'Connell implement in order to persuade the Catholics of Ireland that he was the man to make their voice heard by the British authorities?; (2) How were O'Connell's figure, his followers and his ideology assessed by the print media?; and, more specifically, (3) How did the nationalist press work as a major vehicle of communication for his ideas?; (4) What was the unionist press' reaction to O'Connell's groundbreaking work to undermine the political foundations of the Union between Ireland and the United Kingdom?

Before providing an outline of the volume in Section 1.4, it is sensible to discuss the rationale of the research in more detail. For this reason, the present chapter is devoted to a preliminary overview of O'Connell's life and politics (Section 1.2), followed by a brief survey on the Irish press around the time of O'Connell's rise to prominence (Section 1.3). Accordingly, the chapter mainly introduces readers less familiar with the Liberator to his

ideological background as well as the relationship between the periodical press and his outstanding political achievements.

1.2 "…destined by Providence to the boldest enterprise": The life and politics of Daniel O'Connell

Daniel, the eldest son of Morgan O'Connell and Catherine O'Mullane, was born in a cottage close to Carhen, not far from Caherciveen (Co. Kerry), on 6 August 1775. As was accepted practice in Gaelic society, he was fostered-out as an infant and would only return to Carhen at four years of age. The fact that his surrogate parents were a shepherd on his father's own land and his wife was to have a profound influence on Daniel's mindset. As MacDonagh (1991, 8) points out, it would later help refine his "knowledge of Irish peasant attitudes, needs, aspirations and forms of thought […]. It was, in many ways, the perfect opening lesson for a demagogue" masterfully reading the minds of ordinary Irish people. We leave it to Oliver MacDonagh, whose respected authority we shall be invoking on a regular basis in this section, to elicit biographical information about O'Connell in minute detail. Nonetheless, it seems highly relevant to discuss the Liberator's cultural upbringing before we move on to his political acumen and lasting legacy.

Interestingly, O'Connell's family was characterised by a form of bi-culturalism which was bound to have a discernible impact on him. Both his father Morgan and his uncle "Hunting Cap" used to refer to themselves as *Connell*, thereby dropping the patronymic *O*. This was seen as a wise precaution against anyone ready to identify them as Catholics. In further contrast with their parents and ancestors, they accepted to use the Irish language while working with servants, labourers and tenants, but they only spoke and wrote English among themselves. O'Connell himself was never quite pedantic about the use of Irish. Although he saw it as a means to engage people in casual conversation or decode their thought-forms, he essentially grew up in a country where the grip of the old Gaelic order had been loosening for some time.

Despite the fact that the number of monoglot Irish speakers was still considerable in Irish-speaking regions, therefore, there was little doubt that social advancement was closely associated with the use of English. This was the language of both administration, law and political circles, and literacy and letters, so that the urge to marginalise Irish as a badge of poverty and second-class citizenship would become ever stronger from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. The deep connection of aristocracy with Gaelic culture had been severed (Flower 1947; Corkery 1967 [1924]), and it was

not surprising that the Gaelic tradition was virtually only upheld by women, as far as the O'Connell household was concerned: they spent most of their lives in domestic environments and their contacts with Protestants were infrequent, at best.

In terms of his intellectual growth, O'Connell traced his roots in the early Christian era when, as the Island of Saints and Scholars, Ireland was a beacon of civilisation and a centre of learning of European reputation. Unlike late nineteenth-century revivalists, eager to reconnect to Celtic Ireland and native peasant culture, O'Connell's imagination was ignited by "Irish domination, in terms of monasteries and bishoprics, […] an empire of high and formal, instead of popular and mythic, learning, and positively Christian, not to say positively Catholic, in purpose" (MacDonagh 1991, 12).

Against this backdrop, O'Connell subsequently trained as a lawyer, a profession he entered through substantial input from the English Common Law tradition. His legal studies in London explain why his political principles and methods were to be deeply entrenched in British parliamentary conventions. The French Revolution, and with it its anti-clerical sentiment, was a seismic shift he would regard with suspicion, loyal as he was to the parliamentary tactics of the likes of Henry Grattan and the idea of a Kingdom of Ireland with its own truly reformed parliament. In his mind, this was to be no such parliament as Ireland had had before the Act of Union (1800), but rather one whose doors would be open to Catholics with the British Crown in the picture as well.

The context in which O'Connell's political career took off was that created by the abolition of the Irish legislature in 1800, when the House of Commons in College Green essentially voted itself out of existence "in the accepted manner, though patronage and bribery were used more blatantly and more extravagantly than usual" (Foster 1992, 154). With Irish MPs having to sit in Westminster, the issue of Catholic Emancipation was to resurface on the British political agenda. With the term "emancipation", reference is made to the removal of many of the restrictions imposed on Irish Catholics since the end of the seventeenth century. Although the prospect of emancipation was gradually considered by parliament, its culmination could only have been marked by granting Catholics the right to sit in parliament.

When the Act of Union was implemented, this was resolutely resisted by King George III, with Prime Minister Pitt refusing to dissociate himself from the Monarchy in a bid to remain in office. For this reason, 1801 can in retrospect be seen as a missed opportunity in that solving the Catholic question with a comprehensive settlement might have secured the Union's

political foundations. Quite the opposite, what this would arouse was a definite "feeling of disenchantment, which in time would grow into a sense of betrayal because of Westminster's failure to deliver emancipation"; such feeling was mainly experienced by the emerging Catholic middle class in Ireland pioneering "a new style of nationalism, which emerged to challenge the status quo in Ireland after 1800" (Rees 2010, 18).

With mainstream British politics dragging its feet over emancipation, liberal Protestant advocates such as Grattan were hopeful that George IV, the new king, would have a keener ear for dialogue over the Catholic cause. Nevertheless, their hopes were wrecked by stiff opposition not only from the Monarchy, but also from the House of Lords and not a few members of the ruling elite. In response to such utter indifference, Irish Catholics were at pains to put on a common front on the sensitive question of emancipation. Whereas some members of the Catholic gentry favoured a balanced approach and reaffirmed the need to cultivate a friendly relation with the British Government, an increasing number of middle-class Catholics called for more decisive action as the only way to get the Government to accommodate their demands.

Differences of opinion emerged in relation to the so-called veto controversy of 1808. When the proposal was brought forward to confer on the British State a power of veto in the appointment of Catholic bishops, acrimonious exchanges followed. On the one hand, the conservative wing of the Catholic committee seemed willing to compromise. On the other hand, the more radical exponents strenuously (and persuasively) argued that such measure, if adopted, would curtail Catholic freedom. As a result, the more progressive section of the committee was going to have the upper hand while its leading spokesperson, Daniel O'Connell, had achieved rising popularity by 1810. When O'Connell established a new Catholic Association in 1823, his leadership position initially seemed to rest on the same agenda on which previous emancipation campaigns had been coordinated. What made a major difference, however, was the Liberator's resolve to broaden the Association's popular appeal. In this respect, a core element that altered the course of events was the introduction of the "Catholic Rent" in 1824: in order for new members to become associates, a fee of one penny per month was required. This expanded membership and resulted in the first mass movement in Irish politics. First and foremost, this unprecedented move "gave the Catholic clergy an important political role, which cemented the relationship between nationalism and Catholicism"; secondly, it "allowed the Catholic masses to experience participation in a great national political struggle" (Rees 2010, 21).

Under these circumstances, the Catholic Association soon turned into a formidable weapon. Even without resorting to physical force, Irish rural voters deliberately refused to follow instructions from their landlords in a series of elections from 1826 onwards. This underlined the growing importance of the new Association in Irish political life and cleared the way for the defining moment of the 1828 Clare election. At the time, the Member for Clare was the Conservative William Vesey Fitzgerald, who had to run for re-election when he was offered and accepted a Government position. As a Catholic, O'Connell could not take a seat in Parliament yet he chose to oppose Vesey Fitzgerald in the election, which he won. Such historic victory represented the last stage in the struggle for Catholic Emancipation and turned into a decisive factor in getting the British Government to grant emancipation through the Catholic Relief Act 1829, which lifted restrictions on Catholics dating back to the Penal Laws.

At the same time as the Association was gaining traction, it was significant that parish reading rooms were supplied with free newspapers, while a system of local adjudication of disputes over property was developed and matters of personal or factional conflict were settled by arbitration. These would respectively signal "a deeper level of systematic indoctrination and the further spread of both the idea and practice of 'alternative government'" (MacDonagh 1991, 261). This was to play a powerful role in the context of early nineteenth-century Ireland, where the north-east of the Island experienced sustained economic growth, but the Union was far from effecting the social and political changes required by Irish society and likely to at least alleviate the suffering of the Great Famine. If, as Nowlan (1984) contends, many of Ireland's unresolved issues predated the Union, there is no denying that the post-Union period was characterised by immense and prolonged social distress.

Accordingly, it was all but unexpected that the early 1830s, and even more so the early 1840s, were marked by ever more urgent demands for the repeal of the Act of Union and the restoration of the Irish Parliament. As a central theme in Irish politics as well as this volume, "Repeal" is therefore defined as a movement launched by O'Connell and subsequently galvanised through the Loyal National Repeal Association (Sullivan 1909), whose political aim was to "overturn the 1800 Act of Union and establish an independent Ireland, while remaining loyal to the monarchy" (Andrews 2014, 18). This might have seemed a wildly ambitious target for at least three reasons. First of all, it was as hard for O'Connell as it would have been for many a man to keep campaigns running over long periods as popular enthusiasm tended to wane over time. Secondly, it was no trivial task to form a coherent party in Parliament, where MPs were unpaid and often

eager to rely on Government patronage to be rewarded. In third place, O'Connell was well aware that many people had been sympathetic to the cause of Catholic Emancipation, but support for Repeal was not as vocal, whether within or outside Parliament.

When attempts were made to raise the question of Repeal before Parliament in 1834, therefore, this appeared likely to remain an unsuccessful endeavour and Repeal was virtually abandoned between 1835 and 1840. Faced with the prospect of his Tory arch-enemy, Robert Peel, being returned to office, however, O'Connell revived the movement's confidence. Besides the traditionally Catholic members, it was notable that a number of ultra-liberal Protestants were also attracted and eventually admitted to the Association. But there was another component to strengthen support to the Repeal cause and members' motivation like never before: as we shall see in more detail from Section 1.3, this was the foundation of *The Nation* in 1842. As a newspaper epitomising a new nationalist intelligentsia, its founders included the likes of Thomas Davis and John Blake Dillon, both Trinity College graduates though one a Protestant and the other a Catholic, and Charles Gavan Duffy, an Ulster Catholic journalist. These were to go down in history as the Young Irelanders, for whom the restoration of Ireland's legislative independence was a prime objective they shared with the Liberator.

By appealing to Irish history and legend, the Young Irelanders reaffirmed the need for a cultural as well as a political nationalism. In this, they firmly aligned themselves with the tradition of romantic nationalism cherished in Germany, Italy, Bohemia and many other parts of Europe, whereas O'Connell had essentially been born of eighteenth-century Enlightenment. For Davis and the others, the nation had "a unique identity and a spiritual value which could not be compromised. They would not forego national independence for any lesser compromise": even more than O'Connell himself, "they hoped that the Repeal movement would win the support of all sections of the community, Catholic and Protestant" (Nowlan 1984, 16). Although, therefore, differences existed between O'Connell and the Young Irelanders, these would mainly emerge at a later stage. In fact, *The Nation* was instrumental in underpinning the Association in many ways: in particular, it "spoke for the young, and especially for the urban and educated or semi-educated young, from within a movement led by a man nearing seventy years of age whose primary appeal was to established respectability and the rural masses" (MacDonagh 1991, 506).

In an explosive climax reached in the early 1840s, chapel yards served as political fora along with courthouses. In addition, sensationalism and brinkmanship were implemented as aggressive strategies to bring symbolic

issues to law, while “an ‘alternative parliament’ effectively met in O’Connell’s Dublin headquarters, the Corn Exchange Building on Burgh Quay. What it amounted to was a political education for the classes outside the Ascendancy” (Foster 1992, 157). The Repeal movement gathered upward momentum in late 1842, but it was in 1843 that Repeal gained a foothold and made an enormous impact on the British Government. This is why the analysis of discourses of and on Repeal conducted in the volume mainly focuses on the first ten crucial months of that year.

After the success of the first public meetings in Clare, Cork and Queen’s County (today’s Co. Offaly), O’Connell formally launched the new year’s campaign before Dublin Corporation on 28 February 1843. Tellingly, his address was pervaded by a conciliatory attitude, so that respect for the rule of law, property and social order took centre stage alongside moderation as the key to the movement’s declared objectives. O’Connell insisted that meetings would be held merely to petition Westminster, as every British subject was entitled to do. Regardless of their size, they were to be peaceful assemblies where not a single drop of human blood would be spilt, the Liberator reiterated. Voicing though they might have the rising frustration of those involved, they would demand nothing but equality and parity for all sects and parties (MacDonagh 1991, 509). Accordingly, O’Connell’s words struck a fine balance between the view that force–although of a predominantly moral, agitatory kind–was key to wringing concessions out of the British Government, and the determination to work from within the system, as it were. Evidence suggests that the message was very effectively communicated and got across to the diverse audiences O’Connell meant to pull in.

At subsequent meetings–at Sligo (4 May), Cork (7 May), Mullingar (14 May), Charleville (18 May), again Cork (21 May), Cashel (23 May) and Nenagh (25 May), to name but a few–attendance soared and was in most cases estimated at no less than 300,000. Whether held on Sundays, church holidays or in mid-week, whether going on at historic sites or conveniently located country towns, such impressive displays of numerical strength were rightly described by *The Times* as “monster meetings”. What was most remarkable about the Repeal gatherings was their resemblance to people’s festivals and at the same time the high degree of moderation and self-restraint practised by participants.

Nowhere was the judicious mix of size, regimentation and self-discipline more apparent than at the great demonstration on the Hill of Tara (Co. Meath) on 15 August 1843. At Tara, MacDonagh (1991, 511) recalls, “the lowest published computation of the numbers present was 800,000. Such a figure may seem to us unnecessarily […] inflated, and it was of course in

O'Connell's interest that his support be represented as immense" yet it speaks volumes that the unremittingly hostile *Times* itself reported the crowds at Tara at around one million people. As the movement's support base grew, so did the Association headquarters' staff: in Dublin alone, a five-fold increase to 50 clerks was achieved, while figures from the rest of the country were proportionally calculated to be even higher.

As such unexpected developments unfolded, the Government and Dublin Castle saw no cause for alarm when they examined reports about the Loyal National Repeal Association from the first two months of 1843, including the Dublin Corporation debate. Nor would the Irish administration budge an inch when monster meetings began to take place and a grand tour of Ireland was announced on 6 April, in order to produce concrete proof of the peaceful character of Repeal demands. It would, however, be far more difficult to ignore the packed audiences and the unbroken succession of meetings of the spring, to the effect that with Irish law officers' public endorsement, the Lord Lieutenant urged Peel to introduce emergency legislation to declare the meetings illegal in early May. O'Connell had a clear mind and a tenacious attitude about the reaction this might provoke. On the one hand, he had no doubt that the Government would not easily agree to the idea of taking swift action against a movement that was strictly orderly, was doing nothing more than exerting a right to petition Parliament and could hardly be accused of preaching national subversion. On the other hand, he remained concerned that Peel would at some point accommodate the Castle's renewed demand for repression.

Peel duly obliged when, ahead of the monster meeting arranged for Sunday 8 October at Clontarf, green light was given to the Proclamation that the meeting was deemed to be an illegal gathering in open defiance of Her Majesty's Government. When, with the Association's executive committee at work, the message was relayed straight from Dublin Castle that the meeting had been formally banned, O'Connell did not hesitate to submit to the Lord Lieutenant's prohibition. "There and then," therefore, "he sat down to dictate […] an address to 'the Irish people', enjoining them to abide by the proclamation unswervingly. Within minutes, this was dispatched to the printers" (MacDonagh 1991, 521). Along with the Crown's subsequent decision to prosecute O'Connell, this pointed to his limits as an agitator once in the eye of the storm. To some, the latest incidents on the steep path to Repeal justified the conclusion that he was unable to withstand pressure, let alone resist direct repression. To others, the movement's unquestioning acceptance of O'Connell's decision to call off the meeting showed that his supporters would always dutifully follow him, even as that meant mounting no resistance.

After Clontarf, the relationship between O'Connell and the Young Irelanders became more strained. While *The Nation* initially backed O'Connell's move, they became very critical of his inclination to consider downscaling Repeal to a more modest proposal in the hope of extracting concessions from London. The contrast between O'Connell's methods reasserting reliance on peaceful means only and the Young Irelanders' proclivity to entertain the idea of physical force to achieve political ends would only enhance the cleavage, as did Peel's own manoeuvers. In 1844, he instituted a Board of Charitable Bequests to incentivise donations to the Catholic Church. In 1845, he then increased the annual grant to St Patrick's College at Maynooth by a sizeable percentage and awarded Ireland's Catholic seminary a lump sum of £30,000 to allow for building and repairs (Rees 2010).

In unison with the Hierarchy, O'Connell adamantly opposed the measures, claiming that such Government interference would undermine the Church's authority in the matter of education. Conversely, Davis approved of Peel's policies as a vital step to foster cross-denominational unity. Although Davis's own death in 1845 offered the movement a period of respite, the Liberator resented that his authority had been questioned. In 1846, he raised the issue of the Young Irelanders' growing reluctance to constitutional politics, which provided him with a pretext to have them expelled from the movement. Crucially, however, O'Connell's influence had been diminished by then. The effect of the Liberator's words was a far cry from the thunderous roars filling the air on the momentous occasions of the monster meetings of only three years before. Whatever about the added confidence and intellectual independence of a new generation of nationalists, O'Connell was no longer in a position to command mass following at the ripe age of 71 and against the background of the grim realities of the Great Famine.

By the time of O'Connell's death (May 1847), constitutional nationalism was slowly ebbing away. The Repeal movement survived O'Connell but was no longer politically relevant by 1849. As Rees (2010, 43) rightly acknowledges, O'Connell's merit was to have laid the foundations for Repeal claims to stand up as a powerful force again in the right circumstances. In Nowlan's (1984, 17) words, the Association had

> made a substantial contribution to the shaping of an Irish political pattern. O'Connell, in the eighteen-twenties and again the eighteen-forties, had shown how to organise and to use mass political pressure and in doing so had helped to bring the ordinary people into constitutional politics. This was liberalism being given effective expression on the ground. It was the beginnings of a democratic process.

Much has been written to assess O'Connell's great legacy and indeed, it is largely beyond the scope of this study to contribute to the scholarly debate on this matter. There are, however, two fascinating aspects worth addressing in the final part of this section. The first is why Repeal might have been politically controversial, while the second is how O'Connell's own influence has been acknowledged. The reason why Repeal is likely to have presented O'Connell and his followers (the Young Irelanders, among others) with a thorny dilemma, first of all, was the extent to which national claims could be compromised on in return for more immediate gains. The role of tactical considerations in negotiating Repeal was a bone of contention precisely because calling for the repeal of the Act of Union may have meant slightly different things to different people. Hence, a literal interpretation of Repeal would have implied re-establishing eighteenth-century Irish constituencies, controlled though they had been through patronage or bribes. Nonetheless, this is hardly what O'Connell had in mind. MacDonagh (1989) argues that the Liberator's politics was built on Repeal as a political instrument rather than a goal per se. Even in the early 1830s, when the project was in its infancy, O'Connell availed of Repeal to justify his associations, engage in agitation, wring concessions out of the Whigs and secure appointments. As a result, it was used to press legitimate demands in Ireland's name and at once to prove to the British establishment that he was in good faith. In other words, Repeal might have been conceived to live more at an ideal level than in reality.

In order to buttress his argument, MacDonagh (1989, 85) cites a speech delivered by O'Connell to the reformers of Bath in May 1832. It would appear from the transcript that he spoke of "the advantages which result particularly to ourselves from our union with this country". He then compared a plausible scenario for Ireland's future with constitutional arrangements in the United States. In each "of the twenty-four States of North America," he pointed out, a "separate Legislature" was in place to deal with "local business, while the general business is confined to a national assembly". "Why," he then wondered, "should not this example hold good in the case of Ireland?". When he came under outspoken attack for allegedly abandoning the Repeal cause, O'Connell retorted that he had in fact been misquoted. The phrase he had actually used was not "our union", but "our connection". As MacDonagh (1989, 85) contends, however, the fact remains that he would in any case clarify that

> [h]e saw Repeal as issuing in a federal system for Great Britain and Ireland. He proposed that a domestic legislature, consisting only of a House of Commons, should be created for each country. These legislatures should meet in the last quarter of each year, and deal with such issues as law and

> order, agriculture and commerce within their respective territories. Then in January or February, an imperial parliament should meet in London to determine matters of common concern to Ireland and Great Britain, war and peace and imperial and foreign relations.

This is arguably not the place to determine whether Repeal lacked precision. What is more relevant is that O'Connell's agitation gave voice to the prospect that a final and satisfactory settlement could be reached for Ireland from both a political and a legislative viewpoint, while at the same time preserving a special link with the United Kingdom in constitutional terms. On these grounds, Nowlan (1984, 18) emphasises that O'Connell's legacy to Irish nationalism would become apparent in Parnell's "Home Rule movement of the late nineteenth century, in many of the ideas of men like Arthur Griffith and in those compromises which made the Irish Free State possible and which, it can be said, are still relevant to-day".

As far as the public appreciation of O'Connell's influence is concerned, secondly, there is extensive evidence that he symbolised different things to different commentators and observers from across Europe, which itself testifies that he was a towering figure in Irish history. Beyond Ireland's borders and especially in Catholic liberal circles in France, Germany and Italy, O'Connell's movement was living proof that liberal principles were fully compatible with Catholic teaching. Furthermore, O'Connell was seen a prime example that there was no intimate association between liberal and anti-clerical, Jacobin or anti-monarchist ideas.

Not surprisingly, the Italian priest, patriot and liberal Gioacchino Ventura asserted that O'Connell "had united what the French revolutionaries had divided–'true religion and true liberty': for 'being at once a great Christian and a great citizen, he called religion to his aid in the sublime enterprise of giving liberty to the people'" (Gilley 1988, 157). In a broader European context, this was perceived to be O'Connell's most significant achievement, so that his fame as a liberal reformer spread even more than that of him as a nationalist. Even an Italian statesman of renown, Camillo Benso di Cavour, regarded O'Connell's agitation as a reasonable demand for good government alongside a fairer system of land tenure in Ireland, rather than a driving force behind a new, independent State.

According to Desmond Williams (1984, 100), Honoré de Balzac's statement that O'Connell was one of the very few men from the nineteenth century he wished he would have met demonstrates O'Connell's noticeable impact on European thought. This is so to such an extent that few (if any) other Irish leaders would receive as much attention from Continental Europe in modern times. The genuine interest he awakened was generated by his belief that civil liberty was no less important than religious liberty. In this,

O’Connell was a natural product of an age of revolution, although his political profile owes more to the egalitarian and libertarian doctrines of the American Revolution than France, of whose revolutionary upheavals he disapproved.

Finally, O’Connell was no less acknowledged for his moral stature than he was dreaded for his political ambition. Thus, he was hailed by Pope Pius IX upon his death “as the great champion of the Church, the father of his people and the glory of the whole Christian world” (Williams 1984, 106), while Metternich was seriously alarmed by O’Connell’s influence. This is a point he repeatedly raised with both the Vatican and Britain, sensing dangers to conservative society and expressing apprehension about the Church’s international interests. “The great master of conservative diplomacy was especially indignant over what he denounced as the intervention of the Church in Ireland on the side of popular agitation, which he naturally equated with revolutionary ideas” (Williams 1984, 104), a view he may well have shared with a number of Irish bishops.

The fact that O’Connell’s message resonated with so many people in Ireland and further afield inspired the work behind the first strand of the analysis conducted in the book, which sets out to explore some of the Liberator’s most effective rhetorical strategies. At the same time, this research started from an assumption underpinning a body of authoritative literature, namely that O’Connell’s success would not have been as resounding without a meaningful contribution from the press. While this aspect has been highlighted here in relation to *The Nation*, the next section is intended to discuss it in more detail.

1.3 “…joining their voices in the enspiriting cry…”: An overview of the Irish press at the time of Repeal

The history of the press in Ireland is tightly linked with the political turmoil experienced by the country at the turn of the nineteenth century. Thus, when the Act of Union was implemented and the Imperial Parliament took over responsibility to legislate for Ireland, among the first acts to be passed was a new Copyright Act (1801, 41 Geo. III, c.107). Until then, English booksellers and printers had expressed widespread dissatisfaction about the legal advantage to their Irish competitors, who were allowed to reprint books without paying copyright fees. From the seventeenth century onwards, this had expanded a fairly lively market, in which Irish booksellers thrived on selling foreign books they mainly imported from Britain, rather than producing works of their own.

By extending the provisions of earlier legislation from 1709 to Ireland, "the real impact of the 1801 Act was to secure for the British booksellers an increasingly lucrative 'overseas' market in the guise of the Irish nation" (Deazley 2008). Predictably, the harmful effects of the Act in Ireland would be noted without delay. Accordingly, while the total number of published items had increased from around 2,000 in the 1770s to almost 4,500 in the last decade of the century, figures did not exceed 3,000 over the ten-year period following the Act (Morash 2010).

At the same time, the introduction of universal education in 1831 resulted in the concomitant increase of literacy rates and a wider reading public. Data from ten years on (1841) show that about 74% of men and 67% of women aged 16-25 could read in Leinster and Ulster, although figures were lower for Munster and Connacht. Moreover, literacy rates could be observed to drop with age across the country. This was a broad measure of the effectiveness of education aimed at the younger generations, with the lowest literacy rates reported for women above the age of 66 and living in Connacht (12%). Over the subsequent decades, this brought about an extension of popular literature and the emergence of a readership including the lower classes as well.

In spite of the increase in Stamp Tax, therefore, people were ever more inclined to purchase newspapers precisely in the period when grievances over the Act of Union began to be aired and protests in the name of Catholic rights were growing strong. In response to what they perceived as a more fragmented society, the British Government thought it appropriate to exercise some control over newspaper contents. In addition to libel laws, taxation was raised. This brought a chorus of protest "against the 'tyranny of the tax-gatherer', while in the House of Commons, Richard Brinsley Sheridan spoke against 'the mean, cowardly and circuitous attempt' to control the press 'by raising the price of cheap publications'" (Morash 2010, 66). Notwithstanding impediments old and new, exciting developments were unfolding in the Irish media landscape.

The prototypical eighteenth-century Irish newspaper editor, who was very often the owner of and the only writer in a newspaper, waited for the English or Dutch papers to land on Irish shore. From such sources, they extracted news items ranging from shipping news to hangings, to which they added the occasional opinion piece, poetry and, if they saw fit, dispatches or proclamations from Dublin Castle. Pieces of investigative journalism were to remain a rarity for a few decades to come, newspaper editors being overall reluctant to search for news stories on their own initiative rather than waiting for the news to reach their premises.

What shifted the balance in favour of a different kind of journalism was the rise to prominence of Daniel O'Connell. On the occasion of the Liberator's speeches at the Four Courts, editors recognised the benefits of sending someone to report from there and maybe even make verbatim transcripts as a more proactive newsmaking strategy. Again following Morash's (2010) comprehensive study of the Irish media, this explains why the earliest use of the word "reporter" is said by the Oxford English Dictionary to date back to 1813, when it was borrowed from courtroom language.

After newspapers acquired the habit of hiring reporters that would go to courts or wherever else they could pursue local news stories, the whole face of Irish journalism changed fundamentally. In 1824, first of all, Michael Staunton's *Morning Register* was launched. A daily publication proclaimed to be dedicated to Ireland, the *Register* was sympathetic to the Catholic cause and it chose a middle ground by criticising Government while at once abiding by libel laws. Secondly, the considerable local coverage provided by papers outside Dublin resulted in a big surge of the provincial press. The number of new titles appearing across the country was soon to exceed 200, which included the *Sligo Champion* (1836), *Mayo Mercury* (1840) and particularly *Cork Examiner* (1841), which would turn into a national newspaper and is one of the sources behind the analysis in Chapter 5. With some of the papers folding and others merging with rivals, Morash (2010) avails of the 1851 *Report of the Select Committee on Newspaper Stamps* to show that between 1837 and 1850, a total of 102 titles were circulating outside Dublin.

In this context, a composite media picture emerged at three levels. From a financial point of view, to begin with, it should be pointed out that the comparatively larger readership pro-Catholic papers such as the *Morning Register* could rely on hardly meant they were well-placed to compete effectively with pro-Government media outlets, not least because some of these (e.g., the *Dublin Evening Mail*) were supported by the Castle. As for the defining traits of Irish media culture at the time, secondly, the greater complexity of an increasingly mediated Irish society could be seen from the rise of the Catholic press in the first half of the nineteenth century, compounded with head-on confrontation arising between Catholic and Protestant as well as Repealer and Unionist publications.

In third place, there was more to the Irish media world than political polarisation–a dominant element guiding our choice to focus on the nationalist and unionist press coverage of Repeal over Chapters 5 and 6. Equally noteworthy was the diversification of titles into specialised journals of various sorts. These ranged from theatrical journals (e.g., *The Theatrical*

Observer and *The Drama*) to medical and other scientific publications including the *Dublin Journal of Medical and Chemical Science* and *Journal of the Geological Society of Ireland*, from religious magazines (e.g., the *Christian Examiner*) to the prestigious *Dublin University Magazine*, established in 1833 and publishing "historical, topographical and antiquarian writing by leading Irish scholars, as well as serial fiction by Charles Lever and Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu […], and poetry by James Clarence Mangan" (Morash 2010, 71).

Such far-reaching changes were indeed made possible by a number of elements that turned the tide in the evolution of Irish media. These mainly concerned the speed with which news travelled, so that by the end of the 1830s, publications had started incorporating some of the features that would become conspicuous in the twentieth century. This was in stark contrast with newspapers and periodicals between the 1820s and the early 1830s, which had much in common with their equivalents from one hundred years before. Not only had roads not substantially improved from the previous few decades, but the standards of the Irish Post Office left a lot to be desired. Morash (2010) recalls that complaints were often raised in relation to the corruption and inefficiency with which postal services were operated, not to mention the habits of many a rural postmaster to court the favours of the Head Office in Dublin by tucking game into the postbag along with letters, which not infrequently left these covered with blood.

When Ireland fell within the remit of the Postmaster General for the United Kingdom in 1831, results became tangible in a matter of years, with the volume of Irish post increasing almost threefold between 1839 and 1842 (Morash 2010, 73). In addition, the way the Irish people looked at the world would change in many other respects, too. The first Irish railway was inaugurated in December 1834, getting people to marvel at the palpable sense of speed this conveyed even at the measured pace with which trains travelled on the line between Kingstown (today's Dun Laoghaire) and Dublin. In the same decade, the need to capture and fix images led to the development of new techniques and devices instantiated by the daguerreotype, a photographic process meeting with wholehearted approval soon after its introduction owing to the unparalleled opportunity it provided to see people's faces regardless of their distance in time or space.

Finally, the printing process itself underwent a rapid transition smoothed by the iron press, which promoted the technical innovation of stereotyping. The possibility of imprinting a page on a plaster–and later on a metal sheet–to be used time and again enabled editors to produce almost cost-free reprints (Morash 2010, 76). To put things in perspective, the combination of such different sources of innovation caused the Great Famine of the

1840s to turn into a unique media event. Not only were the scale and duration of the tragedy of the Famine unheard of, therefore, but the news coverage of it was truly comprehensive. As Morash (2010, 79-80) argues,

> [w]ithout in any way minimising the enormity of what took place, the events of the 1840s were able to etch themselves on a public consciousness–both at the time, and subsequently–because they took place under an unprecedented glare of media attention. A writer like Adair may speak of discovering what is hidden–peering into darkened cottages, travelling to remote villages–but in fact little of what took place was hidden. The Midland Great Western Railway was built during the worst of the Famine, and was open as far as Mullingar by 1848; by 1851, it was possible to travel from Dublin to Galway by rail. While conditions in Donegal, for instance, may have still been off the map, the correspondent who wished to report on deprivation in Connemara was still only a day away from Dublin.

In light of this radical transformation, the discrepancy between Irish newspapers until the last decade of the eighteenth century and those from the mid-nineteenth could not be greater. While the former were mostly targeting a readership of English-speaking Protestant upper- and middle-class individuals, the pattern was to change owing to both the alternative scenarios outlined earlier on and Daniel O'Connell's high public profile as the leader of Irish Catholics. With the Liberator to spearhead the nationalist movement, the nationalist narrative was no longer that of late eighteenth-century United Irishmen's radical newspapers. Rather, it took new forms in that Catholic Ireland obtained representation from a constitutional nationalist press. In particular, the role of what Ann Andrews (2014) aptly describes as the "Repeal press" became crucial when, after the project of a strategic alliance with a Whig ministry to achieve reform was abandoned in the 1830s, attempts were made to revitalise Repeal. Recruitment initially stagnated, but the appearance of *The Nation* in 1842 proved to be a turning point.

As we began to see in the previous section, this newspaper pledged its loyalty to the flourishing Repeal movement yet its columns were also the sounding board from which Young Irelanders propagated their own theory of Irish nationhood. People like Davis believed in education as a primary means to sharpen the Irish people's sense of nationality. Claiming as they did the rightful inheritance of Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen in their pursuit of parliamentary reform, the Young Irelanders celebrated Irish nationhood as conceptualised through residency in Ireland rather than a reductionist approach to national identity determined by a shared, homogenous cultural background. In an article published in November

1842, accordingly, the newspaper was unwavering in its political commitment to rejecting distinctions "of blood as well as of sect. The Milesian, the Dane, the Norman, the Welshman, the Scotchman, and the Saxon, naturalised here, must combine, regardless of their blood" (in Conneally 2014, 162; but cf. also Litton 2018), which they considered as desirable as the mixture of Catholics and Protestants.

The germ of this idea developed in ways that would play in the hands of O'Connell's Repeal movement, which needed to expand its scope well beyond lower-class Catholics. The vigorous campaign to have the Act of Union overturned required that different elements in Irish society be organised into a coherent whole. In this regard, *The Nation*'s appeals provided a strong encouragement to inclusivity, which the Liberator sorely needed to boost the appeal of the cause with respect to both class and creed. Not only the necessity, but also the opportunity of envisaging a future for Ireland where the common good of Catholics and Protestants would be paramount was later to be grasped by other nationalist newspapers of the nineteenth century. Yet it was thoroughly understood by *The Nation* in the first place, with decisive effects on the mobilisation of public opinion. Although the newspaper did not immediately sustain the momentum generated by the first issue (Andrews 2014, 23),

> *The Nation* became the highest circulated newspaper in Ireland, not just in terms of copies sold, as evidenced by stamp returns during 1842-43 […], for Charles Gavan Duffy has estimated that with its distribution from hand to hand 'till it was worn to fragments', and its extensive availability in reading rooms, readership could have surpassed a quarter of a million.

Thanks to *The Nation*, new life pervaded the Agitation, whose spirits were lifted to an extent that may not have been reached through O'Connell's own talent, only. Even more importantly, the contribution made by the newspaper to the cause invigorated other Repeal papers, in Dublin and beyond. Among others, these included the publications from the *Freeman* group of papers, whose daily *Freeman's Journal* was also included in the analysis performed in Chapter 5, and the *Cork Examiner*, a tri-weekly newspaper that would act as a vocal supporter of the campaign for tenant rights in the 1850s alongside the Dublin press. It is fair to say that the Dublin nationalist press had been active in the emancipation campaign, but the sheer energy exuding from *The Nation* was to enhance its ability to compete for readership, even for those papers whose owners were commercially motivated.

With *The Nation* at the helm, so to speak, the Repeal press consequently managed to draw people from both the middle as well as upper classes, and

the lower classes closer to the Loyal National Repeal Association. On the one hand, scrupulous care was taken to improve the knowledge and literacy standards of the lower classes through reading societies and Repeal reading rooms. On the other hand, it was vital to cultivate an image of respectability to seek support from the higher classes, whose wealth and status were rightly perceived as beneficial to Repeal. In this vein, the Repeal press was meticulous in giving wide publicity to both the proceedings of the Association's weekly meetings at the Corn Exchange, and the demonstrations intensifying the campaign across the country and overseas. As Andrews (2014, 28) notes, news reports were keen to stress that Repeal "leaders were able to express its policies articulately and intelligently, while providing the appearance of an efficient, well-structured and highly-motivated organization that" transacted its business in the most professional manner.

O'Connell was delighted when people from the upper echelons of Irish society such as Protestants or aristocratic landlords supported or joined the organisation. His conception of respectability, however, was broader than that and developed well beyond the privileged status of the elite members. Crucial to the idea of respectability was also the peaceful nature of the movement. In this regard, the Repeal press was emphatic in renewing O'Connell's calls for non-violence and making plain his aversion to open as well as conspiratorial physical force groups.

Furthermore, affirming the belief that adherence to the rule of law would ultimately shield the Repeal Association, in which *The Nation* was highly instrumental, was essential to enlist support from the Catholic clergy. This was true as much at a grassroots level, with local priests becoming actively involved in the movement, as it was in terms of a ringing endorsement from the Hierarchy. The value of the Catholic Church's support has been questioned. There is no denying that Catholic backing brought clear advantages to the Association on the grounds that most people placed their trust in priests. Nevertheless, effective engagement on the part of bishops, some of whom had actually applied for membership, fuelled the perception that Repeal mainly served Catholic interests. As will be apparent from evidence presented in Chapter 6, this was to be deliberately exploited by the unionist press to alienate prospective Protestant supporters and shatter unity of creed, a major goal the Young Irelanders and *The Nation* were striving for.

Despite such potential shortcomings, the harmonious relationship between people connected with the nationalist press and the Repeal Association proved extremely fruitful in the momentous years of 1842 and 1843. Not only did the publication of free supplements devoted to news stories about the Association's business reflect the sympathetic attitude of editors and

journalists, some of whom also sat on the Association's General Committee. What was also remarkable was the successful outcome of press coverage: the more Repeal meetings were mentioned in the news, the grander meetings seemed to become. As we saw earlier on, even *The Times* had to draw the inescapable conclusion that the movement was now holding no small gatherings, but rather monster meetings, while "the radical London *Morning Chronicle* was of the opinion that during 1843 Repeal was 'one of the most formidable organizations that ever yet menaced the integrity of this empire'" (Andrews 2014, 71).

From a practical point of view, the fact that monster meetings were given a platform to share the Repeal ideology strengthened the impression that Repealers from across Irish society were both a real and an "imagined" community (cf. Anderson 1996 [1983]), as it were: a movement energised by a much deeper sense of unity and solidarity than would have been the case without the significant input of the press invigorated by *The Nation*. "For the thousands of persons attending them," Andrews (2014, 40-41) highlights, "hearing the speeches without the assistance of modern day technology would have proved difficult, and it was therefore useful that they were printed" across Repeal media outlets. Even though there was a sustained effort on the part of the nationalist press, with Dublin titles at the forefront of media attention, *The Nation* might be defined as the most important link in the informational chain between O'Connell's politics and Irish society.

Notwithstanding the lingering bitterness created by the split with the movement as the fallout of the Proclamation and Clontarf (Section 1.2), *The Nation* remained consistent in its passionate commitment to informing while forging a national identity. Accordingly, the paper was fully aware of the need to thoroughly report on the Famine by publishing first-hand accounts from the reporters employed by local papers from all over the country. Moreover, it was keen on an idea of nationhood that formed as shared history and culture to be transmitted through the modern medium of print. This was why *The Nation* devoted some of its pages to poetry as well. In his memoir of Thomas Davis, Charles Gavan Duffy (1890) remembered entertaining this possibility with Davis and Dillon: open as they seemed to the suggestion, some of Davis's own verses were published in the third issue. Although Dillon was unimpressed and looked wary of renewing the attempt, he would change his mind after Davis submitted his "Lament of Owen Roe O'Neill", a ballad of great power. As Duffy (1890, 93-94) put it,

> [t]he enthusiastic reception of this ballad by friends whose judgment he [Davis] trusted was like a revelation to him. He came to understand that he possessed a faculty till then unsuspected. He could express his passionate