Introduction
Figures and Feelings in Irish Romanticism

In the original manuscript manifesto for the Irish Literary Theatre, drafted in Coole Park in the summer of 1897, W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Edward Martyn spoke about their hope 'to find in Ireland an uncorrupted & imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory'.[1] The nineteenth-century Irish 'passion for oratory' has a long history, and this book looks in particular at the post-Union decades of 1800 to 1830 as a formative period in the cementing of Irish literature and oratory to a particular style of impassioned political speech. During these decades a number of incredibly talented Irish writers forged a recognisably 'Irish' literature which gained a new prominence at home and abroad. At the same time, a new generation of Irish barristers, politicians, and agitators mobilised the wider population on behalf of Catholic Emancipation. British and Irish writers were spurred to debate the nature of 'Irish eloquence', and Irish speech, whether in poetry, fiction, drama, or political/courtroom orations, gained a reputation for excessiveness in both emotion and figurative language. Coinciding with wider developments in both rhetorical theory and mass politics, Irish writing was a site for investigating 'proper' standards of rhetorical performance. A supposed Irish propensity for elaborate metaphor, excessive ornamentation, and extreme sentiment fed into wider debates in Britain about the appropriate levels of feeling and style in literature and oratory.

The founders of the Irish Literary Theatre might have noted that a passion for oratory marked wider Anglo-American culture in the nineteenth century. In 1873 an article in *The Times* could claim that 'we have become a nation of public speakers',[2] as audiences for parliamentary, religious, and legal oratory expanded. A nineteenth-century culture of oratory has often been occluded or understudied, but recent scholarship has begun to re-examine the 'ways in which public speaking was central to the thought and practice of public life in nineteenth-century Britain'.[3] The Irish journalist William Maginn, writing under the name Oliver Yorke, told his readers in 1831 that they were

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living at a time 'when love of talk has become the universal passion'.[4] While studies of public-speaking cultures of the nineteenth-century anglophone world have transformed traditional accounts of a decline of rhetoric in the Romantic period, there still hasn't been much discussion of the history of Irish oratory as it connects with wider currents in Britain. An excellent recent study of the myriad ways in which writers in the period theorised persuasive speech after the supposed 'demise of rhetoric' finds no room to discuss any of the Irish writers examined in this book other than Burke, even though it was precisely in the area of persuasion (alongside figuration) that Irish eloquence was most vehemently talked about.[5] At the back, and regularly in the front, of the minds of writers like Thomas De Quincey and William Hazlitt was the importation of Irish speech into Britain. As we'll see in later chapters, the new prominence of Irish writers after the Union provoked British writers to define what marked 'legitimate' eloquence from the suspect Irish variety.

The post-Union decades saw much discussion about the importation of a particular brand of oratory or eloquence associated with Irish writers, barristers, and politicians. The characterisation of Irish speech as florid, imaginative, unrestrained, and at odds with British models has often been acknowledged, but less often analysed and historically situated within the post-Union decades. In writing a memoir of the famous orator John Philpot Curran, his son William Curran noted that his father's speeches 'are generally referred to as instances of what is now denominated the Irish school of eloquence, the distinguishing quality of which is said to be the predominance of passion and imagination over solid argument'.[6] The role of passion and imagination in oratory also saw the emergence of attempts to theorise a broader Irish literature in English alongside attempts to identify the relationship between forensic and deliberative rhetoric with imaginative literature. This book is about moments in Irish writing in the period after the Acts of Union of 1800 when Irish authors situate their work between imagination and advocacy, as well as their efforts to create a language that is simultaneously aesthetic and political. Parliamentary, popular, and legal oratory was imported into Irish literature precisely at the moment 'Irish eloquence' was gaining an increased, often controversial, profile. Tom Dunne's characterisation of Irish Romantic literature as 'intensely and undisguisedly political' might need to be supplemented by a recognition that Irish political and forensic oratory was undisguisedly 'literary'.[7] In 1819 Thomas Moore wrote in his journal that 'Burke's Speeches, alone of all modern oratory, deserve to take a rank in the literature of the country',[8] thereby suggesting that there was a separation

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between 'oratory' and 'literature' that would not have been as evident to writers in the previous century. Moore and many other Romantic-period writers posited 'literature' increasingly as, in the words of Hayden White, 'writing that appeals, even fascinates, by virtue of its form alone, irrespective of its content or subject matter'.[9] However, Irish writing broke down easy generic distinctions between literature and oratory.

Romanticism and Oratory

White locates the decline of rhetoric as a civic art to the period traditionally aligned with literary Romanticism. A familiar narrative of this period sees it as one in which 'literature' was becoming distinct from rhetoric under a developing idea of disinterestedness. Yet after the Union, Irish literature adopted an argumentative, rhetorical stance precisely at the moment of its Romantic self-definition. While much recent discussion of post-Union Irish literature has looked at it as a moment in which a 'national literature' in English was created and conceptualised, the weight of critical interest has often focused more on the layered identity and political ramifications of the 'national' rather than attending to how Irish writers tried to think about how a supposed national genius for oratory might fit into a coalescing idea of 'literature'. Writers such as Sydney Owenson, Maria Edgeworth, Charles Phillips, Richard Lalor Sheil, Charles Maturin, Thomas Moore, and the novel-writing brothers John and Michael Banim borrowed extensively from different discourses and styles of writing to create what can seem to modern readers to be generically hybrid works, but all of them wrote deeply conscious of the fraught political arena into which they were entering, and all of them wrote conscious of a wider perception that Irish writing and speech was marked by linguistic and emotional excessiveness.

As Ina Ferris has argued in regards to Sydney Owenson's fiction, their 'primary scene . . . is the agonistic scene of public speaking'.[10] It would be remiss to suggest that Irish writers were not attentive to the pleasure of the text, and it would also be foolhardy to suggest that British literature remained aloof from public debates, but Irish writing in this period came to be defined as demonstrating an almost pathological need to bury the aesthetic delight of reading under a hectoring political stance. The boundary between poetry and forensic or deliberative oratory was at best porous, at worst non-existent, and Irish literature was notorious for slipping from imaginative expression into party political broadcast. A review of John Banim's *The Anglo-Irish of the Nineteenth Century* (1828) in *The Athenaeum*,

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for instance, regretted 'the tendency of the Irish mind to think and feel in relation merely to politics, and to use the imagination solely for writing supplements to the newspapers'.[11] In this view Irish literature was incapable of rising above contemporary political dispute, and novels and poems were infected by the need to persuade the audience of a particular interested viewpoint. This political focus shackles Irish literature, according to the reviewer, by preventing 'the appearance of a single great Irish poet . . . who, by raising up before their eyes the ideals of universal humanity, would lead [the Irish] to abhor alike the oppressors who create the disease of Ireland, and the demagogues who offer poison as a remedy'.[12]

Such a stance as *The Athenaeum* takes in relation to Irish literature could only occur within a wider notion of literature as ideally removed from immediate political engagement, that paradoxical moment that Matthew Bevis identifies as 'the nineteenth-century development in which literary writing is seen to be steadily more specialised as the political public expands'.[13] The Romantic suspicion of oratory is best represented by Immanuel Kant's distinction between poetry and oratory in *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (1790):

> I must confess that a beautiful poem has always given me a pure enjoyment, whereas reading the best speech of a Roman popular speaker or a contemporary speaker in parliament or the pulpit has always been mixed with the disagreeable feeling of disapproval of a deceitful art, which understands how to move people, like machines, to a judgement in important matters which must lose all weight for them in calm reflection.

The art of the orator, Kant wrote, was merely 'the art of using the weakness of people for one's own purposes'.[14]

The low accord given to the art of the orator by Kant is a very extreme instance of a suspicion of rhetoric's endgame, the feeling that a too-polished speaker has an ulterior motive hidden under a flow of fine words and affected emotion. An ambiguity about the proper relationship between political discussion and aesthetic appreciation marked a lot of discussions about Irish speech, and as such link into a wider issue in rhetoric and political disquisition identified by Iris Marion Young:

> Some theorists of deliberative democracy maintain a Platonic distinction between rational speech and mere rhetoric, and in doing so they often denigrate emotion, figurative language, or unusual or playful forms of expression. Rational speech, on this view, the speech to which deliberative democracy should be confined, consists of universalistic, dispassionate, culturally and stylistically neutral arguments that focus the mind on their

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> evidence and logical connections, rather than move the heart or engage the imagination.[15]

Emotion, figurative expression, and playful forms of language were all markers of Irish writing and rhetoric in the Romantic period, and so it's remarkable that Irish writers, apart from Burke, are often excluded or neglected in discussions of Romantic-period attitudes to rhetorical theory.

In the thirteenth canto of his comic-epic *Don Juan* (1823), Byron provided a contrast between an Irish orator and a Scottish one:

> There also were two wits by acclamation,
> Longbow from Ireland, Strongbow from the Tweed,
> Both lawyers and both men of education.
> But Strongbow's wit was of more polished breed.
> Longbow was rich in an imagination,
> As beautiful and bounding as a steed,
> But sometimes stumbling over a potato,
> While Strongbow's best things might have come from Cato.
>
> Strongbow was like a new-tuned harpsichord,
> But Longbow wild as an Aeolian harp,
> With which the winds of heaven can claim accord
> And make a music, whether flat or sharp.
> Of Strongbow's talk you would not change a word;
> At Longbow's phrases you might sometimes carp:
> Both wits, one born so, and the other bred,
> This by his heart, his rival by his head.[16]

Longbow is associated with such High Romantic words as 'imagination' and symbols such as the Aeolian harp, yet what comes across most clearly are his failings as an orator. Irish oratory here doesn't so much represent a Kantian negation of the free play of poetry as a failure to control that play: it is Wordsworth's spontaneous overflow of feeling, but without the tranquil recollection that permitted proper poetic expression. As Seamus Deane argues, there is an overabundance to Irish speech, which manifested itself in attitudes to both the inflated rhetorical jargon of the bar and parliament, and the orotund circumlocutions of the peasant: 'Verbose, inaccurate, melodramatic, unreliable, in sad need of some form of sobriety, Irish speech and the Irish political condition required a rational articulation that was beyond the capacity of the national character to produce.'[17] William Hazlitt shared Byron's contrast between mechanical Scottish and impulsive Irish oratory:

> There is a class of eloquence which has been described and particularly insisted on, under the style and title of *Irish Eloquence*: there is another class

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> which it is not absolutely unfair to oppose to this, and that is the Scotch. The first of these is entirely the offspring of *impulse*: the last of *mechanism*. The one is as full of fancy as it is bare of facts: the other excludes all fancy, and is weighed down with facts. The one is all fire, the other all ice: the one nothing but enthusiasm, extravagance, eccentricity; the other nothing but logical deductions and the most approved postulates.[18]

As Judith Thomson has pointed out, the literary history of Romanticism has been marked by the period's own 'bias against speech' and the celebration of the private, written utterance, which finds its apotheosis in the lyric poem.[19] Oratory was difficult to appreciate due to its reliance on evanescent performance and topical utterance. The words of an orator deprived of delivery and topicality and printed on the page seldom impressed. Hazlitt argued elsewhere that in oratory 'a certain exaggeration and extravagance of manner covered the nakedness and swelled out the emptiness of the matter':

> The orator's vehemence of gesture, the loudness of his voice, the speaking eye, the conscious attitude, the inexplicable dumb show and noise, – all 'those brave sublunary things that made his raptures clear' – are no longer there, and without these he is nothing; – his 'fire and air' turn to puddle and ditch-water, and the God of eloquence and of our idolatry sinks into a common mortal, or an image of lead, with a few labels, nicknames, and party watchwords stuck in his mouth.[20]

William Curran made a similar point in his biography of his father, asking the reader to remember that 'though he may find the words, and even these imperfectly recorded, he finds not all those accompaniments, without which the language is but a cold monumental image of the thoughts that once glowed with living energy'.[21]

Shorn of the bodily and tonal effect of live performance, orators frequently appear in literature as bloviating nincompoops. In *Sketches by Boz* (1836) a young Charles Dickens gave a withering account of an Irish orator speaking at an evangelical charitable institution. As happens often in Dickens, political speech is reduced to a few soundbites which suggest not so much an expansive, sympathetic worldview as a retreat from the harsh realities of Victorian life into empty blustering rhetoric:

> [The Irish Orator] talked of green isles – other shores – vast Atlantic – bosom of the deep – Christian charity – blood and extermination – mercy in hearts – arms in hands – altars and homes – household gods. He wiped his eyes, he blew his nose, and he quoted Latin. The effect was tremendous – the

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> Latin was a decided hit. Nobody knew what it was about, but every body knew it must be affecting, because even the orator was overcome.[22]

Dickens was always at his most polemical when dealing with other people's polemics, and ever on the watch for cant phrases that stood in place for thoughtful argument. The depiction of the Irish orator instantly indicates the author's suspicion of those who lecture, and of those who ignorantly allow themselves to be swayed by such a performance. Dickens's working notes for *Sketches* indicate that he had a particular orator in mind: a reference to 'Exeter Hall' and the first edition name of 'Mr Mortimer O'Silly-one' identify the speaker as Mortimer O'Sullivan (1791–1859). O'Sullivan's lectures in Exeter Hall in 1835 were fervid and almost eschatological accounts of the Protestant situation in Ireland and growing fears of papal influence, and part of the increased political and sectarian tension of the 1831–36 'Tithe War'. One member of the audience would later recollect that 'were it not for two or three passages in that address, I should have said he was more of a wag than an orator':

> [But] there were bursts of true Irish eloquence, lofty flights of fancy, and touches of pathos, which quite established his fame in the latter character; while the spirit-stirring Protestant conservatism of the whole address, drew the immense auditory two or three times from their seats, with hats and handkerchiefs flying, as though they had all been roused by magic.[23]

Depending on your point of view, of course, a speech could be rote commonplaces or startlingly original, an audience receptive and thoughtful or sequacious and manipulable, a speaker emotionally sincere and stirring or cynically posturing and buffoonish.

The speeches O'Sullivan delivered were later reviewed in their printed form by the Protestant *Dublin University Magazine*, for which he was a leading contributor, which acknowledged that party politics made any just estimation of an orator's talents impossible: '[While] in every other department of mental exertion the aspirant after fame may look for the unbiased suffrages of all who can appreciate his efforts, the man who brings the highest faculties to the contest of political strife, must wait until that strife has subsided, for the full tribute of his genius.'[24] Political strife doesn't allow for disinterested aesthetic judgement, and for many observers in the nineteenth century Ireland was marked by unending strife. As so often, the reputation of 'Irish eloquence' arises. '[Those] who disparage our national genius assert', wrote the reviewer, 'that the Irish orators mistake passion for reasoning'. However, against this claim there is a defence that Irish eloquence and oratory combines rather than reinforces the reason/

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passion duality: 'Enthusiasm is by no means an impediment to the process of correct deduction. It is when the mind is excited that even the reasoning powers are most acute, and in the midst of strong feeling the judgement will be the more ready to perceive the connexion between the trains of thought.'[25] Bryan Garsten has suggested that 'the modern suspicion of persuasive rhetoric is rooted in a crisis of confidence about the human capacity to use judgement in politics',[26] and we can see the reviewer here explicitly feeling the need to state that Irish oratory, alternately famed and castigated – as we shall see – for both linguistic and emotional exuberance, was not incapable of appealing to reason while at the same time indulging in enthusiastic sentiment. However, not long before O'Sullivan's lectures at Exeter Hall the Irish journalist Dennis Murphy (1801–1833) complained that 'the speech-making mania has reached its acme in Ireland':

> The conversational tone in which men were wont to address one another is excited into the forensic manner of the bar, or the exalted style of the senate. People no longer talk in plain and friendly terms; they exaggerate their opinions, or sophisticate their commonplace ideas into unintelligible nonsense. The sock of unpretending life is discarded for the buskin of pretended feeling.[27]

Murphy's description of an Irish orator as someone who 'disgorges poetry gone-mad, and prose run-riot, in which nought can be discerned but mystic images, unintelligible phrases, and compound figures'[28] is echoed in many different articles and texts in the period, with 'Irish eloquence' seen as uncontrolled verbiage and questionable feeling.

It's not unusual to find in comments about rhetoric, oratory, or eloquence a nostalgia for a culture of refined speaking that has been lost, and we might place these comments about the aridness of parliamentary speech in the context of a public sphere that was thick with rhetoric. The readiness with which commentators were willing to proclaim the death or decline of oratory was matched by the feeling that the public interest in political speech was increasing exponentially. The post-Union period saw the increased development of public scrutiny of parliamentary debate, initially with William Cobbett's *Parliamentary Debates* starting in 1802 and then passing on to the Hansard family in 1812. Publication of forensic oratory similarly increased in these years, prompted by the publication of collected editions of John Philpot Curran and Thomas Erskine, and the period saw the systematisation of the adversarial model of the courtroom that placed greater emphasis on the persuasive abilities of barristers.

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All in all, the period from 1800 to the 1830s saw the increasing proliferation of voices contending for political and legal recognition, whether those voices belonged to Catholics in Ireland or working-class voices in Britain. Irish writers and orators were not the only ones bringing a florid, passionate, and potentially incendiary oratory into the public arena, and events such as the Spa Fields Riots of 1816, the Westmorland Election of 1818, the Peterloo Massacre of 1819, the Scottish Radical War of 1820, and the Merthyr Tydfil Rising of 1831 all contributed to concerns about the role oratory was having in instigating radical politics and popular assemblies. As Judith Thompson has argued, it was 'precisely the democratic range, power, and immediacy of the spoken word, its capacity to unite and move, educate and empower the body politic, that posed a threat in a revolutionary era'.[29] The polite audience of sociable gentlemen that was predominantly imagined by eighteenth-century rhetoricians and elocutionists was transforming into an unruly mob led by provocative demagogues. For some conservative commentators, public speech was increasingly disturbing of the peace. Addressing the Westmeath Assizes in 1819, the Earl of Norbury lauded the tranquillity of the country: '[A] prospect of a fine harvest; a likelihood of a plenteous crop; every thing composed from Derry to Dingle; fine corn fields, and not a single *orator*'.[30]

Ivan Kreilkamp notes the shift from eighteenth-century imaginings of political oratory as tied to a longer tradition of patriotism and civic humanism. A noble image of a unified political community being moved to action through the performance of the orator gave way to a suspicion of public speech to crowds which 'became linked to the threat of disruptive or dissident orality'.[31] Debates about Irish eloquence and its increased public prominence after the Union were connected to this increasingly cacophonous public sphere, with liberal writers wondering if Irish oratory could be considered 'legitimate eloquence', and suggesting that while such a brand of oratory might be 'admirably fitted for home consumption', it was unsuitable for a British setting.[32] Irish speech was, according to one reviewer of the speeches of John Philpot Curran, 'misapplied declamation, figurative bombast, and caricature'. '*Irish eloquence* is therefore', they concluded, 'an expression of rather equivocal import'.[33]

An anonymous novel from 1809 gave a representation of this importation in concrete terms; in *Letters from an Irish Student in England to His Father in Ireland* the eponymous narrator shares a cabin on the boat to Holyhead with Henry Grattan, a perfect synecdoche of the movement of Irish brands of forensic and deliberative oratory from Dublin to London. A year before that novel was published, reviewing the speeches of John

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Philpot Curran, Henry Brougham in the *Edinburgh Review* noted 'something very peculiar . . . in the character of Irish eloquence':

> More vehement, and figured and poetical than any that is now attempted in this country, it aims almost always at dazzling the imagination, or enflaming the passions at least, as much as at enlightening the understanding. On almost every subject, it aspires at being pathetic or magnificent; and, while it adorns what is grand, or kindles what is interesting with the rays of its genius, is apt to involve in the redundant veil of its imagery, what is either too low or too simple to become such a drapery. Being the natural language of fearless genius and impassioned feeling, it will not always be found to express judicious sentiments or correct reasoning; but will generally lead to lofty principles, and glimpses of great theory. It is sometimes coarse, and frequently noisy and redundant; but it has usually strength in its coarseness; and, for the most part, fancy if not reason in its extravagance. Though the design and the drawing may frequently be faulty, the colouring is always brilliant, and the expression, for the most part, original and powerful.[34]

For Brougham this style, introduced to the British public by Edmund Burke, 'has been naturalized and transfused into the recent literature of our country; but it was of Irish origin, and still attains to its highest honours only in its native soil'.[35] The Burkean influence on post-Union Irish writing will be considered in more detail in Chapter 3, but for now it is worth attending to Brougham's contention that Irish eloquence is a recent import into the literature of Britain, and worth thinking about how an eighteenth-century legacy of polite style created the grounds for identifying the exuberant nature of Irish speech. The flowers and figuration of Irish speech were both a consequence of, and alternative to, the development of belle lettres and the 'New Rhetoric' of Irish and Scottish rhetoricians.

Persuading and Convincing: Rhetoric and the Figure of Speech

Classical rhetoric since Aristotle had separated oratory/rhetoric into three categories: the deliberative, the forensic, and the epideictic. Deliberative oratory/rhetoric was associated with the senate and debating the course of action that should be taken in a given situation. Forensic oratory/rhetoric was associated with the law court and concerned with persuading a jury or judge either about the course of past events or the justice of a particular claim. Epideictic rhetoric was a more open form, associated with celebratory occasions and the praise or blame of a person. The deliberative and forensic, or, as the Irish barrister Daniel Crimmin translated the latter, the 'advocative'[36] overlapped in the classical world even if Aristotle saw them as

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being involved in distinct processes: '[A] deliberative interest is common to each individual who debates it, every hearer judging for himself. Consequently, simple demonstration of the truth is alone necessary. It is otherwise with the *pleader*, who must go further, and attempt to turn his auditors to his side.'[37] The collapse of the deliberative into the advocative was pronounced in post-Union Irish politics, where the ranks of political agitators for Catholic Emancipation were drawn from the Irish Bar. As such, deliberative speeches in Ireland were often more concerned with establishing interpretations of past events and pleading a claim rather than speaking towards an evidence-based course forward. Similarly, advocative oratory often broadened into investigating constitutional matters or casuistically moving from the individual pleader to a wider national claim. As Colin Reid has pointed out, the nineteenth-century courtroom could be 'used as a public forum to condemn British constitutional rule in Ireland',[38] with lawyers central to political thought, and the grounds for this were established in the early decades after the Union. In a libel trial of 1813, Daniel O'Connell spoke about how he 'will never volunteer to mingle our politics, whatever they may be, with our forensic duties'[39] – but he regularly did just such a thing. The traditional characterisation of the period between the Acts of Union and Catholic Emancipation as one of decline belies the emergence of an extraordinary body of writing that crossed divides between the deliberative, the advocative, and the imaginative.

For Aristotle, rhetoric was the art of considering the capability of 'persuasion' on every subject, and, being general in its subject, 'assumes a right to attempt conviction in any'.[40] In order to persuade, the orator must be eloquent and skilled in the use of language, and capable of reading the emotional state of their audience. It was particularly important in deliberative oratory to impress auditors with a favourable opinion of the speaker's character, while in advocative/forensic oratory it was important 'to make a certain disposition of [the audience's] minds to receive it'.[41] At the heart of rhetorical theory was a debate as to whether eloquence was functional, aiming for a specific end, or whether, in the Ciceronian tradition, it had an intrinsic moral and ethical character.[42] The art of rhetoric required an understanding of the passions and the manner in which audiences could be moved. The relationship between the passions and reason became important in subsequent writers on rhetoric, with the development in the eighteenth century of a 'New Rhetoric' incorporating a greater role for passion while retaining an ideal of rational argumentation.

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Hugh Blair, in 1783, elaborated on the distinction between 'persuasion' and 'conviction':

> This leads me to observe, that convincing and persuading, though they are sometimes confounded, import, notwithstanding, different things, which it is necessary for us, at present, to distinguish from each other. Conviction affects the understanding only; persuasion, the will and the practice. It is the business of the philosopher to convince me of truth; it is the business of the orator to persuade me to act agreeably to it, by engaging my affections on its side. Conviction and persuasion do not always go together. They *ought*, indeed, to go together; and *would* do so, if our inclination regularly followed the dictates of our understanding. . . . Conviction is, however, always, one avenue to the inclination or the heart; and it is that which an orator must first bend his strength to gain; for no persuasion is likely to be stable, which is not founded on conviction. But, in order to persuade . . . he must address himself to the passions; he must paint to the fancy, and touch the heart.[43]

The persuasion/conviction duality explains the significance of the manner in which the barrister Charles Phillips characterised Irish oratory in the first anthology of Irish speech, *Specimens of Irish Eloquence* (1819): 'Persuasion, rather than conviction is [Irish Orators'] usual object.'[44] The emphasis on the role emotion played in Irish eloquence was advanced and argued by British and Irish writers on rhetoric and literature, and coloured the reception of Irish writing in the period. An excess of emotion, alongside an excess of figuration, came to be seen as the marker of Irish eloquence: a retreat from rational argumentation to sentimental appeal; a move from a clear literal style to one abounding in metaphor and effect. As such, Irish writers and orators situated their work in relation to a reputation for forms of excess, either stylistically or sentimentally.

Crucially, the changed political contexts between Blair and Phillips led to a much more complicated and troubling association between passionate speech and political action. The trauma of the decades following the French Revolution, the United Irishman Rebellion, and the domestic discontents that followed decades of Napoleonic conflict led to a much less sanguine response to emotional oratory in the post-Union period. While Blair may have imagined his audience as a collection of polite gentlemen, the orator of the early nineteenth century could as easily be addressing a mob. As Mary Fairclough points out, by the period in which Irish writers and orators are becoming increasingly prominent in the British literary and political scene, 'collective sympathetic communication is viewed not as a curiosity but as a threat'.[45] Phillips's characterisation of Irish eloquence was the culmination of a three year dispute between him

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and a number of British reviewers who took issue with his style of florid, bombastic rhetoric and the potentially pernicious effects it could have on an audience. Elsewhere, the glitter of Irish eloquence could be seen as simply wrongheaded from a practical point of view.

In *An Essay on Irish Bulls*, Edgeworth has a Scottish traveller to Ireland quote from *Deinology, or the Union of Reason and Elegance*, a rhetorical guidebook for barristers published in 1789 which has a 'long list of tropes and figures; amongst them . . . apologies for every species of Irish bulls'.[46] The actual text of *Deinology* warned against the overuse of figures, as a speech with too many tropes risks straining the reader or auditor's attention, turning them away from the matter of the speech to the manner:

> Tropes are the riches of a language, but as the ill use of riches renders them fatal to the owner, so a profusion or misapplication of tropes is the perversion of a language. A speech, by which the mind is perpetually drawn aside to artificial meanings, exhausts the attention, or turns it from the main object, to wander in a region of correlatives.[47]

Overly figurative language might dazzle the mind of the auditor/reader, but it eventually leads to fatigue and a loss of effect. This would have been a familiar point after the important developments in rhetorical theory in the eighteenth century. A broad suspicion of metaphor informed a tradition of British empiricism throughout the century.[48] John Locke's *An Essay on Human Understanding* (1689) had accused 'all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented' as 'perfect cheats', designed to 'insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgement': '[Therefore], however laudable or allowable oratory may render [figures] in harangues and popular addresses, they are certainly, in all discourses that pretend to inform or instruct, wholly to be avoided.'[49] Locke introduced his own simile, comparing eloquence to 'the fair sex': '[It] has too prevailing beauties in it to suffer itself ever to be spoken against. And it is vain to find fault with those arts of deceiving, wherein men find pleasure to be deceived.'[50] The link between feminine seductiveness and figuration would occur in the reception of Irish oratory, and we'll see later how early nineteenth-century critics contrasted an overly florid Irish eloquence with more 'chaste' examples of British speech.

The suspicion of figuration was continued and qualified by British rhetoricians later in the eighteenth century. Joseph Priestley, in *A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism*, suggested that figurative language could be 'indicative of a person's real feelings and state of mind, not by means of the words it consists of, considered as *signs of separate ideas* . . . but

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as *circumstances* naturally attending those feelings which compose any state of mind'.[51] However, figurative expressions should only be used when 'the situation of the person who uses them is such as will render those feelings and sentiments natural'. If unconnected to authentic feeling, Priestley argued, figures run the risk of becoming '*naked absurdity*'.[52] Priestley's lectures were originally delivered in 1762, the same year that in his lectures on rhetoric and belle lettres the moral philosopher and economist Adam Smith argued for the importance of 'perspicuity' as the chief aim of style: 'What are generally called ornaments or flowers in language, as allegoricall, metaphoricall and such like expressions are very apt to make one's stile dark and perplex'd.'[53] The mistake earlier interpreters of classical rhetoric made was concluding that speeches containing figures were beautiful because of the figures rather than the aptness of their deployment. For Smith, then, previous treatises on rhetoric that focused on lists of figures and how to deploy them were wrongheaded and naïve: ''Tis however from the consideration of these figures, and the divisions and subdivisions of them, that so many systems of retorick both ancient and modern have been formed. They are generally a very silly set of Books and not at all instructive.'[54] However, in opposition to a British empirical tradition that stressed clarity and ease of style, an alternative model of rhetoric that valued figurative language was developing in Ireland, centred on Trinity College, Dublin. John Lawson, along with his fellow Trinity colleague Thomas Leland, has increasingly been seen as an important rhetorician who prefigured some aspects of the New Rhetoric prior to their Scottish formulation, although with an Irish inflection based on local conditions.[55] Lawson's lectures celebrated clearness, propriety, and harmony, but warned that these qualities are 'not sufficient to answer the Ends of Oratory'.[56] In order to make discourse 'lively and animated', the use of figures was necessary, as people by nature and inclination find pleasure in novelty and comparison of imagery. Lawson defended figurative speech against charges that it was 'artificial' by arguing that in moments of great passion individuals find themselves overcome with the struggle to express themselves, and so 'heapeth Images upon Images, and painteth its own Disorder in the Irregularity and Confusion of its Language': 'From these Considerations it appears, that Figurative Speech is so far from being, as it hath been oftentimes represented, merely artificial, and a Departure from Nature, that it is a faithful Image of Nature. Inward Emotion displayeth itself as readily in the Language as in the Features.'[57] Lawson's defence of figurative speech was not unconditional. He did acknowledge that it should be 'conducted with much care and discretion' and that 'excess taketh away

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Credibility from the Speaker'.[58] Interestingly, though, he also insisted that the speaker ought not to partake of the passionate feelings he would excite, making the orator open to accusations of insincerity:

> A good Speaker must seem to feel the Passion he would excite, he must have its Air, its Language, the Figures most expressive of its actual Influence; but I now add, that he must not be under that actual Influence: However outwardly in Transport, he must retain a Fund of Coolness within, Reason must rule there.[59]

Lawson's successor, Thomas Leland, also argued that tropes and figures derived neither from 'artifice and refinement' but were 'the *real*, *natural*, and *necessary* result of *real* passion and emotion'.[60]

An interesting extension of Lawson and Leland's account of figuration occurred in the lectures on figurative language delivered in Maynooth in 1800 by James Bernard Clinch. Clinch asked his students to imagine a class of beings that resembled humans in reasoning power 'but [were] yet either so perfect or incomplete as to be free from, or deficient in those emotions by which men are universally acted upon'. Granting this imaginary race a language 'as might befit intelligent agents', he imagined what a language shorn of abstract terms and figurative language might seem like:

> '[The] fury of the storm' would in that language be nonsense, for anger would be an idea unknown, and though it were understood, the crashing of waters, whether as a destroying or a powerful thing, would have its own significant term. Of tropes the most justifiable to cold reason is the metaphor; this being excluded, the others, in which affinity is more remote, and sometimes arbitrary, of which the advantage is often ambiguous, and the application often obscure, would evidently be absurd.[61]

Clinch then asked 'could eloquence subsist in such a creation of rational animals?' In answer to his hypothetical scenario, Clinch argued, it would 'be as possible to find eloquence . . . as in a case of geometry or a sum of arithmetic'.[62] For Clinch, 'eloquence is persuasion',[63] and the compensation for inhabiting an existence in which language is marked by both abstraction and arbitrariness is a greater level of communication due to the necessity of sympathy. Language is circumscribed by the need to communicate emotional states, with people eventually developing a narrower range of words and idioms to express emotional states:

> We have taken away infinity of words, to substitute infinity of feelings. For an idle power of ranging without end through ideas, and chattering to all eternity upon essence, without profit, delight, or amelioration of their nature, we have given to men higher powers, that of instructing, of

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> convincing, of moving, of delighting, of doing wonderful things by the charm of a few words . . . Which is the more excellent nature, the man who can repeat all dictionaries by heart, or the orator who makes the tyrant tremble, before whom others fall prostrate?[64]

In grounding eloquence to a language of the passions, Clinch was working within a longer tradition of rhetoric from the eighteenth century which placed rhetoric and eloquence into both theories of sentiment and sympathy and associationist models of psychology. Indeed, Clinch calls sympathy 'the first limitation of an indefinite language'[65] and throughout his lectures he aligns eloquence with emotion and passion. His equation of eloquence with persuasion is telling, as it places Clinch within what was a crucial debate about the relationship between persuasion (moving an audience through emotions to a particular end) and conviction (appealing to the rational understanding of an audience) that would be central to the reception and reputation of Irish oratory.

Clinch's lectures were not published until 1835, but he can be read as a hitherto neglected bridge between eighteenth-century New Rhetoric and the later work of Richard Whately, whose *Elements of Rhetoric* (1828) would become the standard rhetorical treatise of the nineteenth century. Whately's book on rhetoric opened by acknowledging the low opinion of rhetoric, which was 'generally regarded by the Vulgar as the Art . . . of deluding the multitude by specious falsehood' and 'apt to suggest to many minds an associated idea of empty declamation, or of dishonest artifice'.[66] For Whately, instruction in rhetoric was a means of inoculating oneself from the dangers of being misled by skilled sophistical orators, as well as a way of deepening one's own eloquence and reasoning faculty. Whately gave the traditional definition of persuasion as 'the art of influencing the *Will*', but warned against the 'limited' manner of regarding rhetoric as focused solely on this: '*Conviction* of the understanding is an essential *part* of Persuasion.'[67] For Thomas De Quincey, Whately's insistence on the importance of conviction seemed to contradict earlier rhetoricians who had insisted on the centrality of the passions. In a review of Whately in 1828 he argued 'where conviction begins, the field of rhetoric ends . . . as to the passions, we contend that they are not within the province of rhetoric, but of eloquence'.[68] De Quincey semi-seriously wrote in a pastiche of Edmund Burke that 'the age of Rhetoric, like that of Chivalry, is gone', while describing eloquence as 'the overflow of powerful feeling', echoing a famous dictum about poetry by William Wordsworth.[69]

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Irish Literature and Excess

In the same year as his article on Whately, De Quincey was sounding alarms about the election of Daniel O'Connell in the Clare by-election. Writing for the *Edinburgh Evening Post*, De Quincey speculated about the prospect of the popular advocate for Catholic Emancipation taking his seat in Westminster. For De Quincey, O'Connell's great success was based on demagoguery, a mix of 'scorn, indignation, and intemperate invective' that would flounder when confronted with the decorum of the Houses of Parliament: 'To him the forms of the House of Commons would be a complete extinguisher. These forms, the gentlemanly self-restraint, the necessity of courting the ear of the House, would be a curb-chain to him.'[70] De Quincey was not alone in thinking about how Irish oratory might find a different reception when placed in a British context. Irish writers addressing a British audience often had to strategically think about how they incorporated florid rhetorical tropes into their writing. Later in life Daniel O'Connell recalled the poet Thomas Moore saying to the barrister, playwright, and Emancipationist Richard Lalor Sheil 'I know the English flower market better than you do and too much ornament won't suit their taste': 'Sheil unluckily took the advice; repressed his natural bent; and tried to be cold, unadorned, and Anglican. His speech was a failure. Warned by experience, he gave full scope to his genius on the next occasion – was in the highest degree impassioned and eloquent, and was received with perfect rapture by his audience.'[71]

It was difficult to predict the response of an English audience to heightened rhetoric. The fear of flowery ornament in Moore's comment to Sheil spoke to some Irish writers' paranoia that their work trod a fine line between impassioned argument and lachrymose camp. When William Hazlitt compiled an anthology of British oratory he introduced Henry Grattan's speeches by comparing them to 'a piece of Gothic architecture, full of quaintness and formality'. While Grattan might be 'what many people call eloquent', Hazlitt found his speeches 'over-run with affectation . . . at the same time mechanical, uncouth, and extravagant'.[72] The link between ornate Irish prose and an exaggerated Gothic style was also made by a reviewer of Charles Maturin's play *Bertram* (1816), who spoke of its 'language copious to verbosity . . . a style resembling the celebrated productions of the Minerva Press . . . and strewed over with the profusion of the "daisies and dandelions" of Irish eloquence'. According to this reviewer, the closest analogues to Maturin's lurid tragedy

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weren't to be found on stage but in 'the poetico-prosaic raptures of Mr [Charles] Phillips':

> Indeed, if we were to compare this tragedy to any thing which *we* ever read, it would be to the performances of the orator to whom we have alluded. The two authors resemble one another in many qualities, both good and evil, and their productions may be paralleled, we think, without any injury either to the one or the other.[73]

The notorious cheap productions of the Minerva Press, the forensic oratory of an Irish lawyer, and a theatrical production at Drury Lane were all linked by the reviewer, creating an arena of disreputable and illegitimate literature that Irish oratory fit into. Verbose and impassioned, *Bertram*, along with Sheil's tragedy *The Apostate* (1817), was the subject of a series of lectures by the British orator John Thelwall on his tour of Ireland in 1817, advertised in the *Freeman's Journal* as a series of lectures on 'Elocution, Oratory, and the Drama'.[74]

Charles Phillips was an associate of Sheil and would have a career that would be marked by debates about what 'legitimate eloquence' might sound and look like. It's certainly not difficult to find in his speeches examples of Gothic imagery that justify comparison with the lurid imagery of a dramatist. A year after Maturin's play, his *Speeches of Charles Phillips* contained an address he had made to Catholics in Cork directed against Protestant bigotry that utilised imagery that would not be out of place in one of Maturin's works:

> But to what end do I argue with the BIGOT? – a wretch, whom no philosophy can humanize, no charity soften, no religion reclaim, no miracle convert: a monster, who, red with the fires of hell, and bending under the crimes of earth, erects his murderous divinity upon a throne of sculls [*sic*], and would gladly feed, even with a brother's blood, the cannibal appetite of his rejected altar![75]

The speech of Phillips that would have been to the front of the *Augustan Review*'s mind in 1816 would have been his speech in an adultery case in Dublin in 1815. Phillips's speech in the case of *Guthrie* vs *Sterne*, examined in greater detail in Chapter 4, was loaded with implicit and explicit allusions to sentimental literature. For many reviewers, such passages were 'in the worst style of florid and mawkish novel-writing',[76] and similarly to the reception of *Bertram* we can see reviewers drawing what would seem to modern readers to be cross-generic comparisons between forensic oratory and popular literature.

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When Hazlitt came to review Maturin's Gothic masterpiece, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), he attacked the excessive nature of the writing by comparing Irish literature to wider shifts in taste away from eighteenth-century decorous language:

> In our last Number, we noticed the revolution in our poetry; the transition from the lucid terseness of Pope and Goldsmith, to the rambling, diffuse, irregular, and imaginative style of composition by which the present era is characterised; and we might have added, that a change equally complete, though diametrically opposite in its tendency, has been silently introduced in our prose. In this we have oscillated from freedom to restraint; – from the easy, natural, and colloquial style of Swift, Addison and Steele, to the perpetually strained, ambitious, and overwrought stiffness, of which the author we are now considering affords a striking exemplification.[77]

Hazlitt went on to link 'a peculiar tendency to this gaudy and ornate style, [that] exists among the writers of Ireland'.[78] Fred Botting has described the Gothic genre as marked by a 'writing of excess',[79] and a similar excess marked Irish literature in the period. Debates about the existence or otherwise of an Irish tradition of Gothic writing have mostly sought to identify a continuity of themes or imagery, but perhaps a more useful marker of a tradition is style. The Romantic period saw Irish writing characterised from both within and without as marked by excessive language; emotions and language pitched to a point of tension that wearied the reader and threatened to collapse at any moment into either bathos or camp. For Hazlitt and for many other British critics, the rhetorical density of Irish writing gave it an archaic feel, as if it were a survival from a prior historical stage of society:

> Their genius runs riot in the wantoness of its own uncontrolled exuberance; – their imagination, disdaining the restraint of judgement, imparts to their literature the characteristics of a nation in one of the earlier stages of civilization and refinement. The florid imagery, gorgeous diction, and Oriental hyperboles, which possess a sort of wild propriety in the vehement sallies of Antar the Bedoween chieftain of the twelfth century, become cold extravagance and floundering fustian in the mouth of a barrister of the present age.[80]

Tellingly, Hazlitt finishes with 'the mouth of the barrister': Irish 'literature' was notoriously disrespectful of modern generic or stylistic registers.

As Ina Ferris notes, O'Connell himself 'was widely seen as importing into the British political scene a suspect pre-modern oral model of public speaking'.[81] In the same year as he was pondering O'Connell's reception in

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Westminster, De Quincey was '[tracing] the impoverished condition of civil eloquence to the complexity of public business'.[82] This had been a point De Quincey would make again when writing about Greek oratory some years later:

> [In] England, the vast intricacy and complex interweaving of property, of commerce, of commercial interests, of details infinite in number, and infinite in littleness, break down and fritter away into fractions and petty minutiae, the whole huge labyrinth of our public affairs . . . In Athens, the question before the public assembly was, peace or war – before our House of Commons, perhaps the Exchequer Bills' Bill; at Athens, a league or no league – in England, the Tithe of Agistment Commutation-Bills' Renewal Bill; in Athens – shall we forgive a ruined enemy? In England – shall we cancel the tax on farthing rushlights?[83]

De Quincey was not alone in seeing the increased complexity of modern life and politics acting as a check on parliamentary eloquence. Henry Brougham also argued that 'the assemblies of modern times are eminently places of business': 'Ornament of every kind, all manner of embellishment, must be kept within its subordinate bounds, and made subservient to the main business.'[84] In his biography of the playwright and politician Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Thomas Moore gave a similar diagnosis for a decline in parliamentary eloquence since the end of the eighteenth century:

> In politics, too, he had the advantage of entering upon his career, at a time when habits of business and a knowledge of details were less looked for in public men than they are at present, and when the House of Commons was, for various reasons, a more open play-ground for eloquence and wit. The great increase of public business, since then, has necessarily made a considerable change in this respect. Not only has the time of the Legislature become too precious to be wasted upon the mere gymnastics of rhetoric, but even those graces, with which true Oratory surrounds her statements, are but impatiently borne, where the statement itself is the primary and pressing object of the hearer.[85]

An article on 'Irish Eloquence' in *The Dublin Penny Journal* in 1835 opened with an acknowledgement that 'the sons of the Green Isle have ever been noted for their faculty of speaking "*ore rotunda*"', before asking whether the Act of Union had 'produced effects prejudicial or otherwise on this national talent'.[86] Whether there was a causal link between the Union and a decline in the standards of public speaking was often posed by writers in the period, and the old House of Parliament on College Green in its post-Union guise as the Bank of Ireland seemed to provide a concrete image of the move from eloquence to commerce.[87]

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Figures of Speech and the Figure of Speech: Orality and Literature

John Philpot Curran would often joke to Thomas Moore that 'When I can't talk sense, I talk metaphor',[88] pithily acknowledging the widespread suspicion that figurative speech could be used to hide a lack of convincing argument. Irish speech, from the lowest class to the highest, was characterised by the indulgence of figuration. The author of *Letters from an Irish Student in England* observes that 'in the streets of London I have heard nothing of that wit, drollery, naieveté, and emphatic use of figurative speech, which it is impossible to walk in Dublin for half an hour without hearing'.[89] Maria Edgeworth, in *An Essay on Irish Bulls*, asserted that '[the] Irish nation, from the highest to the lowest, in daily conversation about the ordinary affairs of life, employ a superfluity of wit and metaphor which would be astonishing and unintelligible to a majority of the respectable body of English yeomen'.[90] She jokes that 'even the cutters of turf and drawers of whiskey are orators'.[91]

In his *Observations on the Character, Customs, and Superstitions of the Irish* (1812), Daniel Dewar, a Scottish missionary and professor of moral logic at the University of Aberdeen, argued that '[the Irish language] is extremely copious, especially on any subject connected to the passions': 'No tongue can better suit the purpose of the orator, whose subject is to make an impression on a popular assembly, and who, regardless of precision, seeks only to accomplish his end. Hence also, it is admirably adapted to poetry.'[92] As with many commentators on Irish oratory, Dewar characterises it as focused almost exclusively on the passions rather than on reason ('it can scarcely be considered a good vehicle for philosophy'),[93] and on ends rather than means. Give the comparative lack of institutional arenas for the deployment of forensic and deliberative oratory in Irish, and the comparative lack of a publishing industry, it is hard to include Irish-language material in a survey of printed literature and its reception in Britain. Nevertheless, as Nicholas Wolf has shown, there were political and legal accounts of Irish-language speech-making in the early nineteenth century. There were numerous accounts of Irish-language speeches having a profound effect on popular meetings throughout the period of agitation for Catholic Emancipation and then into the Tithe War and movement for Repeal.[94]

As Wolf also points out, the expansion of access to the legal system for Irish speakers from the mid eighteenth century and into the nineteenth brought the issue of language to the fore in everyday legal oratory. Contrary to Dewar's belief that Irish was particularly suited to oratory,

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the experience of translation and interpretation in the courtroom caused difficulties for Irish-speaking plaintiffs and defendants.[95] In her work on the infamous Maamtrasna murder case of 1882, Margaret Kelleher quotes the Irish-language scholar Pádraig Ó Néill (1765–1832) on the difficulty of translating from the figurative Irish into formal English language: 'The Irish converse much in idioms which should not, and oft times could not be literally translated . . ..their stile [*sic*] abounds in figurative expressions which amid the bustle of a court of justice and a crowded audience were difficult indeed to render into another language in their own proper colours.'[96] While written accounts of the Irish language deployed directly in courtrooms remain rare, there was some conjecture on the part of both Irish and British writers about the influence of the language on what came to be recognised as Irish eloquence. For Thomas Davis, for instance, the forensic speeches of Curran were a case in point of how Irish eloquence went beyond slavish imitation of Greek and Roman authors: 'But except the likeness between the exordium of his defence of Rowan and Cicero's of Milo, there is little of classic influence observable in his speeches. Surely, he owes more to the wakes and his mother's stories about ghosts and heroes, and to the Bible and Sterne, than to all the classics.'[97] In this account, religion, eighteenth-century sensibility, and a rich seam of oral culture are all united in Curran's speeches. William O'Regan, one of Curran's earliest biographers, went further and said that Sarah Curran was held by her son to be a formative influence: '[Whatever] were his intellectual pretensions, he was indebted to her for them' and that his mother spoke Irish 'with such purity, with such fluency, with such a smack . . . that the West Country people used to flock round her from distant parts, and listen to her with admiration and delight'.[98] O'Regan located the tradition of waking the dead as foundational for Curran's oratorical career:

> [The wake] is a theatre on which tragedy, comedy, broad farce, matchmaking, speech-making, etc. all that is *bizarre* and comical in the genuine Irish character, develop themselves with a freedom truly fantastic . . . The transitions from the deepest and most impassioned tones of sorrow, to mirth and humour, are quick as thought . . . At one of those national carnivals . . . Mr Curran felt the first dawn, the new-born light, and favourable transport which almost instantly seized upon his imagination, and determined his mind to the cultivation and pursuit of oratory.[99]

The ability to move quickly from one impassioned state to a contrary one was also held up by Curran's son as a one of the chief factors in his father's reputation: 'the wonder that he excited was owning to the rapidity of his

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transitions from passion to passion, from the deepest emotions that agitate the soul up to the liveliest combinations of a playful imagination'.[100] However, William Curran was more circumspect in aligning the Irish school of eloquence with Irish Gaelic oral culture, despite the two sharing figurative and emotional similarities: 'The idiom of the native Irish language is highly figurative, and has a sensible influence upon the minds of the lower orders; but it would be difficult to show that this influence has ever extended much beyond them.'[101] While William Curran's account of Irish eloquence sought to distance political and forensic oratory from the rich oral culture of the peasantry, other writers celebrated the figurative and emotional strength of the Gaelic tradition. Irish writing in English was fascinated by Gaelic and Hiberno-English speech. Sydney Owenson saw in the figurative and emotional intensity of Gaelic a language that could align with eighteenth-century fashionable sensibility:

> So energetic, so expressive is the Irish language, that those of the lower order, who borrow the idiom of their English from that of their native tongue, frequently say more in a single sentence than volumes could express. 'Your absence is ever present to me'; 'the light of heaven has taken shelter in your eye'; 'pulse of my beating heart'; and many other equally tender expressions of endearment, I have heard them frequently use to each other; and, indeed, were Love to draw up a nomenclature of his own technical phrases, the Irish language would perhaps contribute more largely to the undertaking than any other whatever.[102]

It's notable that a number of women writers in the post-Union period were at the forefront of attempts to incorporate some of the energies and idioms of Irish into English-language literature.[103]

This study opens with chapters on two of the most important writers in Ireland in the post-Union period. Sydney Owenson and Maria Edgeworth have long been held up as contrasting authors, one representing a wild Romantic nationalism and the other a rational, improving practicality. In Chapter 1 I look at how Owenson situated female patriotism in relation to traditions of rhetoric and civic republicanism that excluded the possibility of female agency. Owenson in her fiction revelled in figurative and emotional excess, and her early fiction had a profound influence on how Irish literature in the period would be read. Her novels attempted to create a model of patriotism that had a central role for female eloquence. In Chapter 2 I look at Maria Edgeworth's views on rhetoric in both her educational writings and in the series of novels and tales, culminating on her 1814 novel *Patronage*. In particular I look at how Edgeworth was preoccupied in the years prior to the publication of that novel with the

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legacy of Edmund Burke. Her thoughts about Burke's rhetoric percolated into a number of her books, and deeply informed her own developing thoughts on the nature of realism in literature. As such, Edgeworth's rhetorical theories were foundational to the development of the troubled relationship between realism and reality in nineteenth-century Ireland. Chapter 3 looks at the work of Charles Phillips and a number of other barristers who became increasingly prominent in the latter half of the 1810s. Phillips's speeches in particular prompted vigorous debates about the nature of 'Irish eloquence' and culminated in his 1819 anthology *Specimens of Irish Eloquence*, the first anthology of Irish oratory and an important and hitherto overlooked contribution to cultural nationalism in the period. Phillips was part of a generation of barristers and writers who rose to prominence during the difficult post-Napoleonic years, during which the increased agitation for Catholic Emancipation made tentative, complicated links with radical voices in Britain. In the heated political arguments leading to the infamous Peterloo Massacre of 1819, the question of what counted as 'legitimate eloquence' became linked to the rise of mass democracy. Chapter 4 looks at perhaps the most famous Irish author of the period, Thomas Moore. Moore had been one of the most successful poets in the post-Union period, but he increasingly moved to prose in the 1820s. I look at his biography of Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1825) as an important turning point in his career, as it was composed over a number of years that saw Moore consider his own politics in the light of Emancipation and Radicalism and ponder what constituted an appropriate 'tone' in literary work. Tone was central to the work of Charles Robert Maturin, whose Gothic masterpiece *Melmoth the Wanderer* is a novel full of histrionic speech. Chapter 5 examines his sermons and a little-known oratorio he arranged the text for. The performance of *Revelations* in 1823 sparked a controversy in a city awash with the inflated religious rhetoric of the Second Reformation. Chapter 6 finishes the study by looking at the work of John and Michael Banim, who emerged in the late 1820s as the most significant writers of a new generation of Catholic authors. Their work deeply engaged with ideas of Irish eloquence and began a process of historicising the post-Union moment of Irish rhetoric.

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