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John Mitchel and his biographers

If, as Thomas Flanagan has asserted, 'the importance of John Mitchel's *Jail journal* to the tradition of Irish separatism has been underestimated', the appearance of James Quinn's recent short biography of Mitchel is to be welcomed. Indeed, the remarkable thing is that Quinn's was the first book-length biography of Mitchel to be published since 1938. The biographical literature on Mitchel has veered between the hagiographic and the critical before settling, ultimately, into an apparent historiographical indifference. This essay examines Mitchel's biographies, his commemoration in periodical and ephemeral sources, and the development of the historiography of this most ardent republican, concluding that a renewed interest in Mitchel is timely.[1]

Historians have long been interested in how the past was deployed by nationalists in pursuit of contemporary political ends. This interest has been reflected in the interest of biographers in the means by which national heroes, prophets and martyrs were created, for example in Lucy Riall's recent biography of Garibaldi or Marianne Elliott's study of Emmet, which devotes fully half its length to discussing 'the making of a legend'. This departure in the modern historiography of nationalism has been particularly stimulated by ideas of the 'imagined community', the 'invention of tradition', of 'social memory' and other conceptual tools for the characterisation of the discursive construction of nineteenth-century nations. While Professor Elliott expresses some impatience at the 'unhelpfully jargonistic' nature of some of the contributions, her biography of Emmet is a significant addition to this body of work, particularly by tracing the development of the Emmet legend in popular culture.[2]

However, among the cast of characters in the story of nineteenth-century Irish nationalism, relatively little attention has been paid to the ways in which Mitchel was deployed to legitimise late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Irish republicanism. Further, while many early assessments of Mitchel's political career and thought were hagiographic, there was some nineteenth-century criticism of Mitchel. The distinction between criticism and hagiography reflected the divisions in nationalist Ireland between the parliamentary gradualists of Home Rule and the republicans in the tradition of Fenianism and Sinn Féin. Yet

[1] Thomas Flanagan, 'Literature in English' in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland v: Ireland under the Union, 1801–70* (Oxford, 1989), pp 482–522 at p. 509; James Quinn, *John Mitchel* (Dublin, 2008).

[2] Lucy Riall, *Garibaldi: invention of a hero* (New Haven & London, 2007); Marianne Elliott, *Robert Emmet: the making of a legend* (London, 2003). See also Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities* (London, 1991 ed.); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The invention of tradition* (Cambridge, 1992); Ian McBride, 'Memory and national identity in modern Ireland' in idem (ed.) *History and memory in modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001) pp 1–42.

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it is also notable that the memory of Mitchel was contested and, at times, deployed in ways that might not be expected. Indeed, some who supported Home Rule nevertheless adopted Mitchel for their purposes when his story proved useful, or to gain the authority among nationalists that appropriation of his memory would confer. It appears that the narrative of Mitchel as a martyr for Ireland was effectively established in 1848, during the years following his arrest and transportation and in the pages of moderate nationalist newspapers as well as the militant *Irish Felon*, which was published briefly in the summer of 1848 by Mitchel's friend John Martin. This narrative was so well-established that even if constitutionalists would have liked to abandon him, it would not be possible to do so.

There is, nevertheless, one early appraisal of Mitchel that stands out in setting the tone of later criticism, written by Emile Montégut and published in the French *Revue des deux mondes* in 1855, after the publication of Mitchel's *Jail journal*. Montégut's essay was not translated into English until 1915 when it appears to have been published as a cautionary epistle about the consequences of Mitchel's revolutionary position. This in itself betrays the influence Mitchel had on militant Irish nationalism in the early twentieth century, the translator, J. M. Hone, observing that Mitchel was 'still a favourite theme with our young literary patriots'. Montégut's essay is characterised by a mid-century French admiration for England, its constitutional and political stability and its economic dynamism, noting that it was 'the most accomplished type of the modern nation'. Montégut observed that Mitchel consistently found Englishmen to be very civil towards him and suggested that, if the Irishman had been arrested in Austria or Russia, the consequences for him would have been much worse. The essay is most notable, however, for being an early expression (and from a comparatively neutral source, notwithstanding its moderate anglophilia) of the historiographical tradition that discerns Mitchel's primary motivation as hatred: 'A bitter and implacable sentiment connects all these pages together and make the unity of the book: this sentiment is hatred of England'. In his conclusion, Montégut returns to the same theme: 'Wit, eloquence, imagination, a nervous and hysterical gaiety, courage, not a practical idea, not a single considered opinion on the future of Ireland – that is all Mitchel's book. The author does not reason, does not discuss. He hates, he puts all his powers into his hatred.' This position was to become, and broadly remains, the standard critical assessment of Mitchel, shared both by academics and non-republican nationalists.[3]

The public remembrance of Mitchel's role in the events of 1848 required careful handling on the part of home rulers while he was still alive, as the 'exiles' of 1848 remained a potential living reproach to their critics. It is perhaps for this reason that the question of how Mitchel should be commemorated caused increasingly conflicting evaluations only after his death in 1875. The most significant exceptions to this delicate approach were the critical appraisals of the disinterested foreigner, Montégut, and that of Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, Mitchel's erstwhile colleague. Nevertheless, the task of commemorating Mitchel in particular ways became more urgent following the renewal of militant nationalist

[3] Emile Montégut, *John Mitchel: a study of Irish nationalism*, ed. J. M. Hone (Dublin, 1915), pp 5, 12, 30, 19, 59–60; William Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel* (2 vols, London, 1888), ii, 63.

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agitation in the 1860s. Following his death, major nationalist newspapers like *The Nation* and the *Freeman's Journal* wrote glowing obituaries, notwithstanding their political disagreements with the deceased – and it ought to be borne in mind that almost all nationalists had at least some disagreements with Mitchel. Unsurprisingly, *The Nation* took a more politically sympathetic approach than the *Freeman's Journal*. However, what is most striking is the ways in which both newspapers deployed familiar narratives to construct their Mitchels, reflecting Ian McBride's observation that the potency of collective memory is acquired from its ability to create narratives that provide 'basic images and narrative types that answer specific ideological needs'.[4]

Most of the front page of the issue of *The Nation* published following Mitchel's death was occupied by a portrait of Mitchel, surrounded by four further drawings that illustrated scenes from his life. These four scenes – one in Newgate Prison following his conviction on 27 May 1848, another of him boarding the ship that would carry him away from Ireland, a third that showed him resigning his parole before he escaped from Van Diemen's Land in 1853 and the fourth a depiction of him making a speech following his election as M.P. for County Tipperary, days before he died – themselves convey a narrative of confinement, exile, escape and final triumph. Among the hagiographic sentiments that might be expected on such an occasion, the most remarkable feature of the obituary that follows inside *The Nation* is the way the newspaper simply made up narratives that suited its purpose, and clumsily at that. For example, in writing of Mitchel's mother, the writer asked 'may we not fondly guess that she trained to vigorous growth the heroic disposition of her child?' The guesswork did not end there. As a boy, the obituary noted, 'we may guess that his eyes were open to what was going on around him'. The writer also invoked the idea of a devoted husband that was to become so common in the hagiographic literature, claiming that he 'wed his first and only love'. A family-endorsed biographer was to reveal some years later that Mitchel had been devoted to another young woman before he met his future wife. *The Nation* writer could perhaps not be blamed for not knowing this, yet the desire to create a heroic narrative of Mitchel led to statements that appear to be, in no insignificant measure, invented. In this way a journalist could fill in the gaps with a Mitchel imagined in ways that suited the writer. This point is significant, and will re-emerge when considering the hagiographic portraits of Mitchel written in the late nineteenth century.[5]

The *Freeman's Journal* obituary created a tragic tale in which death snatched away the recent County Tipperary by-election victory and a romantic story in which 'he married the woman who was to him in shade and sunshine the truest and tenderest of wives'. Further, there were narratives of Mitchel's personal accomplishment and integrity, demonstrated in 'the mingled force of genius and earnestness' that was apparent in his writings and his principled adherence to his beliefs.[6] The obituaries in both newspapers made something of Mitchel's 1848 speech from the dock in which Mitchel attempted to adopt the mantle of Emmet. Both newspapers were content to bestow it upon him posthumously, *The Nation* quoting some passages from the speech, and the *Freeman's Journal* describing it

[4] McBride, 'Memory and national identity', p. 36.
[5] *The Nation*, 27 Mar. 1875; Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel* i, 20, 22.
[6] *Freeman's Journal*, 22 Mar. 1875.

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as 'one of the finest "speeches from the dock" ever uttered' (the quotation marks acknowledging the existence of a 'speeches from the dock' genre).[7]

However, the most intriguing aspect of the *Freeman's Journal* obituary is the concluding paragraph, which intones a series of binary contrasts. The writer was constrained to tread carefully in view of Mitchel's heroic status in nationalist Ireland but this technique enabled the identification of political disagreements with Mitchel and those who currently appropriated his mantle, while at the same time achieving a suitably reverential tone. Mitchel required careful treatment from a newspaper which was quite aware of its major political disagreements with him, expressed with characteristic candour by Mitchel on many occasions.

> Finally, although we cannot admire the character of Mitchel's political views, we must respect the integrity with which they were maintained. We may lament his persistence in certain lines of action which his intelligence must have suggested to him would have but futile issue. But it is impossible not to acknowledge the constancy with which he adhered through all vicissitude, and despite all that might oppose, to the dominant idea of his career. There is something altogether noble and reputable in this conscientious maintenance of an opinion even though experience and observation have shown the impossibility of advancing it. John Mitchel may have been too rigidly pledged to principles unsuited to the sentiment of our day. But he held his pledge in purity of motive and entire unselfishness of heart. If it is to be regretted that he made no compromise, we can also feel that he bore himself in extremes with honour. He was a rare example of fidelity to a cause, and this fidelity marked his comportment in private life. His love for Ireland may have been imprudent. But he loved her with a devotion unexcelled, and in that fact alone lies his title to the respect, the regret, and the remembrance of his country.[8]

This sense of balance would vitiate any criticism from contemporaries based upon political disagreement with the recently deceased.

Once the necessary obsequies were performed, however, the task of reconstructing the memory of Mitchel for contemporary purposes became more pressing. If the literary commemorations of Mitchel, whether in hagiographic pamphlets and books or in nationalist newspapers and periodicals, can be considered as textual *lieux de mémoire*, then they were produced in concrete circumstances that required them to serve specific ideological duties. Among the first major posthumous critical assessments of Mitchel was that written by Justin McCarthy, a Home Rule M.P. and constitutionalist, one which would draw the ire of radical nationalists. Yet McCarthy's assessment paid some back-handed compliments. The provocative 'scheme' adopted by Mitchel in the spring of 1848 was reckoned 'wild and hopeless', a case also made by Duffy, but McCarthy added that it did not appear so to many at the time. This additional comment is consistent not only with Mitchel's own *post hoc* analysis (which also, it is worth noting, suggested that victory would be gained, even in defeat) but also with that of the Lord Lieutenant, Clarendon, whose panic-stricken missives to London in the spring of 1848 contrast sharply with Gavan Duffy's *sangfroid* thirty years later.[9] McCarthy also considered that the moment when the movement of 1848 was defeated in Ireland was not the rout at Ballingarry of a tiny force led by William Smith O'Brien in late July, but Mitchel's trial two months earlier.

[7] *Freeman's Journal*, 22 Mar. 1875; *The Nation*, 27 Mar. 1875.

[8] *Freeman's Journal*, 22 Mar. 1875.

[9] For example, Clarendon to Sir George Grey, 25 Mar. 1848 (Bodl., MS Clar. Dep. Irish vol. 2, f. 177).

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Indeed, McCarthy wrote, the Irish imitation of the French revolution of 1848 might have done 'memorable mischief if the policy of the one only man in the business who was in earnest … had been carried out'. Of the leaders of the Irish Confederation, McCarthy added,

> Some were jealous of Mitchel's sudden popularity, and in their secret hearts were disposed to curse him for the trouble he had brought on them. But they could not attempt to give open utterance to such a sentiment. Mitchel's boldness and resolve had placed them at a sad disadvantage. He had that superiority of influence over them that downright determination always gives a man over colleagues who do not quite know what they would have.

Thus, when the Confederate leadership succeeded in ensuring there was no rescue attempt after Mitchel's trial, 'far-seeing persons smiled to themselves and said the danger was all over'.[10]

McCarthy also complimented Mitchel's literary abilities in a manner not too dissimilar to the republican hagiographers. Mitchel was a man of great literary talent, 'indeed a man of something like genius', he wrote. Mitchel's prose was clear, bold, incisive and still worth reading, and his newspaper, the *United Irishman*, had quickly supplanted *The Nation* in both popularity and circulation. McCarthy was writing at a time of some tension between parliamentary and out-of-doors nationalisms, and this may have prompted his attack on Mitchel's personal honour, concerning the escape from Van Diemen's Land, to which Mitchel had been transported. The suggestion that Mitchel had not acted in accordance with his word as a gentleman in withdrawing his parole and effecting his escape in July 1853 had first been aired by Duffy in a supplement to *The Nation* in April 1854. This followed Mitchel's attack on Duffy in the serialised *Jail journal*, which appeared in Mitchel's New York newspaper, *The Citizen*, early that year. The allegations were repeated in private to Smith O'Brien and were widely discussed in nationalist circles both in Ireland and the United States, prompting a flurry of letters from veterans of 1848 as diverse as John Blake Dillon and John O'Mahony in Mitchel's defence.[11]

McCarthy suggested that the manner of Mitchel's escape had not been approved of by O'Brien, his fellow prisoner and someone whose reputation among nationalists as a man of integrity gave the assertion some weight. O'Brien had in fact written to Duffy in 1854 stating that 'I especially regret that you should have imputed to him [Mitchel] the violation of his parole', and Duffy had replied that 'nothing in my life surprized me so much as your justifying the course he took'. In a later, abridged version of his *History of our times*, McCarthy corrected some errors concerning Mitchel, but not this one. Duffy's version of the affair of Mitchel's alleged parole-breaking had become part of the critical master-narrative.[12]

Duffy's assessment of Mitchel was to prove more influential, and would provide ample resources for those nationalists who were opposed to republican

[10] Justin McCarthy, *A history of our own times* (4 vols, London, 1879), ii, 24, 28, 29, 37.

[11] *The Nation*, 15 Apr. 1854; *The Citizen*, 6 May 1854.

[12] William Smith O'Brien to Charles Gavan Duffy, 28 Nov. 1854 (N.L.I., William Smith O'Brien Papers, MS 2642/3489); Duffy to O'Brien, 2 Dec. 1854 (N.L.I., William Smith O'Brien Papers, MS 445/2877); McCarthy, *History of our own times*, ii, 25, 24, 33, 34; Justin McCarthy, *A history of our own times* (London, 1890 ed.), p. 94.

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principles, strategy and tactics. His retrospective view of Mitchel, which also appeared in his published memoirs of the period as well as in *The Nation*, found its way rather uncritically into later assessments of Mitchel's politics. Although Duffy's relationship with Mitchel had deteriorated some months before Mitchel's trial, the two men had once been good friends, taking a holiday together in August 1845. Following Thomas Davis's death in September 1845 Duffy, as proprietor of *The Nation*, invited Mitchel to work full-time as a journalist in Dublin, clearly believing that both men could work together in the national cause.[13] His later assessment, however, was that Mitchel was wildly impractical as a politician and had no strategy in the spring of 1848, that he hated England considerably more than he loved Ireland, and that his political thought was an unoriginal rendering of whichever writer happened to be influencing him at any particular time.[14] Many years after the events, Duffy recalled Mitchel as the man who 'more than anyone' was responsible for the failure of the Irish Confederation's campaign against the Act of Union in 1848. His assessment was countered by a developing radical commemoration of Mitchel by men such as P. A. Sillard, who identified Mitchel as a prophet pointing out the road to deliverance from national bondage, whose personal bravery was not matched by his Confederate accomplices. For Sillard, a rescue attempt of the imprisoned Mitchel would have galvanised the Dublin masses, leading to the revolutionary confrontation with British rule that had been developing (and developed by Mitchel in the pages of the *United Irishman*) through the spring of 1848.[15]

Duffy did acknowledge that circumstances in the spring of 1848 were 'creating the decisive public opinion to which it is the duty of rulers to submit' and that Mitchel's fervour had contributed to the development of the political atmosphere that spring. Yet, despite acknowledging the impact of revolutionary events in France and of Mitchel's *United Irishman*, Duffy claimed that Mitchel 'rendered success at first difficult and finally impossible'.[16] Yet there is fair evidence – in Duffy's own brief radicalisation, in the mobilisation of volunteers and confederate clubs, in Clarendon's profound anxiety, in the enthusiasm for Mitchel's newspaper in Dublin – that a considerably more serious crisis existed than that which was to end at Ballingarry or that which would be recalled in Duffy's memoirs.[17] As noted above, McCarthy later wrote of the revolutionary atmosphere in Dublin. Certainly neither Duffy nor O'Brien, nor even Thomas Francis Meagher and Mitchel, were practitioners of revolution, and the moment passed. Clarendon's action against Mitchel swiftly disposed of his most potent enemy and the inertia of the Confederate leadership dissipated any insurrectionary energy (although Clarendon continued to fear an uprising by the

[13] William Dillon wrote that at the beginning of their professional association Mitchel probably never thought he would have serious political differences with Duffy: Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, i, 74–5, 84.

[14] Charles Gavan Duffy, *Four years of Irish history* (Dublin, 1887 ed.), p. 209. First published in 1883.

[15] Duffy, *Four years*, p. 208; P. A. Sillard, *Life of John Mitchel with an historical sketch of the '48 movement in Ireland* (second ed., Dublin, 1901), p. 219.

[16] Duffy, *Four years*, p. 208.

[17] See, for example, the minutes of the Council of the Irish Confederation (R.I.A., MS 23 H 62, pp 282–305) for the extensive efforts it made to dispel the insurrectionary mood among the Dublin Confederates.

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Confederate Clubs for a few weeks after Mitchel's removal) that could have been unleashed by a rescue attempt.[18]

The view that Mitchel hated England more than he loved Ireland gained ground among home rulers in the late nineteenth century. Though suggested by Montégut in his review of the *Jail journal* in the 1850s, as previously noted this did not become available in English until the second decade of the twentieth century and Duffy was thus more influential in propagating this view of Mitchel. Duffy offered this critique in a passage reflecting on the comparisons made between Mitchel and Davis: 'Their animating motive was far from being identical, Davis loved Ireland, Mitchel hated England'. This motif recurs time and again in the home rulers' criticisms of Mitchel. In what appears to have been a direct response to Duffy, Pearse would later reconstitute Mitchel's hatred as a virtue, asserting 'that love and hate are not mutually antagonistic but mutually complementary; that love connotes hate, hate of the thing that denies or destroys or threatens the thing beloved: that love of good connotes hate of evil, love of truth hate of falsehood, love of freedom hate of oppression'. The characterisation of Mitchel as primarily a hater of England reflected the ideological fault lines that separated constitutionalists from republicans.[19]

The militants were, unsurprisingly, especially willing to give Mitchel the full hagiographic treatment and, about the time that McCarthy and Duffy were writing, a different commemorative tradition became widespread. While a cheap, popular biographic sketch of Mitchel as 'the first victim' of the treason-felony act had appeared in 1849, the year after he was imprisoned, Mitchel's earliest hagiographer was a priest named John Bannon who, like Mitchel, supported the south during the American Civil War. Bannon's *Life of John Mitchel* (1882) was published in Liverpool by the tireless activist John Denvir as one of *Denvir's Illustrated Penny Library Series*. The 24-page pamphlet uses classic literary tropes to depict a prophetic national martyr, complete with the personal qualities required of any literary hero of the age, including a happy marriage to a steadfast wife 'who brightened his path, who cheered him on in every vicissitude through his chequered and eventful life'. Similarly, Mitchel was 'filled with the holy spirit of freedom' by the liberal Presbyterian doctrines learned in childhood from his father.[20]

Bannon's pamphlet was evidently intended to reach a popular audience and perform a didactic function: the inside covers of Denvir's pamphlets were filled by advertisements for others in the series, including a *Catechism of Irish History* that was endorsed by Parnell as 'useful in directing the minds of the young', while Michael Davitt approved the *Penny Library Series* as 'excellent text-books for the youth of Ireland'.[21]

Bannon took much of the material for his pamphlet from Mitchel's *Jail journal*, his intention being not so much to write a biography that would withstand academic scrutiny as to add Mitchel to the pantheon of republican

[18] Clarendon to Lord John Russell, 31 May 1848 (Bodl., MS. Clar. Dep., Irish vol. 2, f. 274).

[19] Duffy, *Four years*, p. 209; P. H. Pearse, 'The sovereign people' in idem, *Political writings and speeches* (Dublin, 1952), pp 366–7.

[20] *Memoir of John Mitchel, the first victim* (N.L.I. ephemera collection, P 350 (1)); Quinn, *John Mitchel*, p. 72; John Bannon, *Life of John Mitchel* (Liverpool, 1882), pp 2, 3.

[21] Bannon, *Life*, inside covers.

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heroes. Mitchel's quarrel with Duffy was played down and the question of Mitchel's alleged parole-breaking dismissed with the assertion that 'he did all that was becoming an honourable man'. The most striking emphases within the pamphlet were on Mitchel's supposed endorsement of Fenianism, as proved by his short period as a fund-raiser in Paris, and his rejection of Home Rule. For Bannon, Mitchel's election as an M.P. in 1875 'was looked upon, both by himself and the people of Tipperary, simply as a protest against British rule' and Mitchel 'would never have consented to sit in the British House of Commons, for he scorned their laws, and held in contempt their every action'.[22] Thus Bannon's pamphlet was a radical commemoration of Mitchel, in which Mitchel passed on the tradition of uncompromising and militant opposition to British rule. It was also an approval of Fenianism, in ways which Mitchel himself would have been more than a little uneasy about (despite acting briefly as an agent for the Fenians in Paris, Mitchel wrote that he did not want his name associated with the brotherhood, that he had no part in the development of Fenianism and no great hopes for its future.)[23] Further, private and public virtue were blended in this portrait of a man who 'dared all and suffered ... without having yielded one jot the patriotic ardour which consumed him'.[24]

Bannon's popular pamphlet was followed by further hagiographic surveys of Mitchel's career that included William Dillon's *Life of John Mitchel* (1888), P. A. Sillard's *Life of John Mitchel* (1889), P. S. O'Hegarty's *John Mitchel: an appreciation, with some account of Young Ireland* (1917), Louis J. Walsh's *John Mitchel* (1934) and Seamus MacCall's *Irish Mitchel* (1938). In addition, a number of the leaders of early twentieth-century republicanism wrote favourably of Mitchel, including Arthur Griffith in a preface to a 1913 edition of Mitchel's *Jail journal*, Pearse in various political writings, and Eoin MacNeill in a preface to a 1917 edition of extracts from Mitchel's *United Irishman* newspaper. It is in these writings that Mitchel's significance for later nationalism becomes most apparent.[25]

Dillon's biography was a substantial work in two volumes, written by the lesser-known brother of the home rule M.P., John Dillon, and it remains the single most significant secondary source for the life of Mitchel. Though James Quinn considers Dillon's work not uncritical of Mitchel, such minor criticisms as do appear are of the token variety, inserted (in part) self-consciously to demonstrate the author's fairness and balance. Nevertheless, Dillon's biography does not sit comfortably in either the republican or the Home Rule camp. The Dillon brothers had befriended Mitchel during his last visits to Ireland in 1874 and 1875. The biography, written in the context of land unrest and Parnellism (like his brother, William Dillon was a member of the Land League's national organising committee), allows Mitchel posthumously to serve a strategy in which

[22] Bannon, *Life*, p. 18.

[23] *The Nation*, 14 July 1866, a reprint of Mitchel's 'usual Paris letter to the New York Daily News, dated 10th July'.

[24] Bannon, *Life*, p. 24.

[25] P. A. Sillard, *Life of John Mitchel* (Dublin, 1889); P. S. O'Hegarty, *John Mitchel: an appreciation, with some account of Young Ireland* (Dublin, 1917); L. J. Walsh, *John Mitchel* (Dublin, 1934); Seamus MacCall, *Irish Mitchel* (London, 1938); Arthur Griffith, 'Introduction' in John Mitchel, *Jail journal* (London, 1913 ed.); Eoin MacNeill, 'Foreword' in John Mitchel, *Letters to the Protestant farmers of Ulster* (Dublin, 1917).

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parliamentary campaigning could be backed by out-of-doors pressure. It is evident that, whatever Duffy or McCarthy might say, Mitchel had to be remembered reverentially by such as Dillon. Thus Dillon's criticisms mainly concerned Mitchel's tactical abilities and his ineptitude as a 'practical politician', rather than his fundamental principles. When Dillon wrote about the period when Mitchel was at his most influential and strident, during the spring of 1848, he said that some of the passages in Mitchel's *United Irishman* 'could not be defended from a practical point of view'. Nevertheless, it was important for all nationalists to honour the patriot dead, partly, it appears, in a battle for the control of how their memory was deployed to legitimise contemporary strategies.[26]

Dillon's preface suggested that while there might be things to disagree with in Mitchel's work and writings, there was nothing to be ashamed of (another example of a binary contrast in the manner of the *Freeman's Journal* commemoration). Dillon also conceded that Mitchel 'often indulged in a certain exaggerative style of writing' (an expression Mitchel had prefigured when confessing to an 'exaggerative habit') that caused him to be regarded as 'wildly impractical'. Similarly, Dillon asserted that adulation, notoriety and 'the habit of strong excitement' had a bad effect which made the tone of Mitchel's later work immoderate. These few criticisms in a substantial book (running to more than 650 pages) reinforced Dillon's credentials as a biographer and also allowed Mitchel's political principles to be subsumed into a radical Home Rule strategy. So, importantly, Mitchel could be uncoupled from Fenianism and secret conspiracy. In Dillon's book, Mitchel remained aloof from the murky world of Fenianism in the United States and quickly withdrew from their employment in Paris when he realised 'the hopes he had formed regarding the Fenians were illusory'. The book's introduction by John Dillon proclaimed that Mitchel's writings 'read now like those prophecies which it is given to the genius alone to utter'. The book thus takes what was to become a familiar posture in relation to Mitchel, hailing him as a prophet. This was perhaps the tone Mitchel's family was looking for. Mitchel's younger brother, William, having authorised the work and co-operated with its author, professed himself pleased with what he described as an 'authentic memoir ... well done' when he was sent the proofs in early 1888. The following year, despite complaining that the book was overpriced for the Irish market, he praised it as 'the fundamental document' about his brother.[27]

Dillon's biography also upheld Mitchel's personal integrity, perhaps unsurprisingly, given Duffy's criticism of Mitchel on this basis. Discussing the circumstances of the successful escape from Van Diemen's Land, Dillon noted the allegation that it 'did not amount to such a surrender of the parole as to make Mitchel's escape honourable' but suggested that Duffy's accusation was merely an outcome of his 'personal quarrel' with Mitchel as a consequence of Mitchel's treatment of him in the *Jail journal*. As noted earlier, Dillon's father, John Blake Dillon, had written to Mitchel's *Citizen* newspaper in New York back in 1854,

[26] Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, i, vii, 197, 198.

[27] Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, i, ix, xiv–xv, 196, 249; ii, 228; John Mitchel to Marie Thomson, 1 Nov. 1855 (P.R.O.N.I., T/413/1); William Mitchel to James Mitchel, 31 May 1888 (Columbia University Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection, New York, MS Coll. Meloney-Mitchel, Box 2); William Mitchel to James Mitchel, 11 Mar. 1889 (ibid.).

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dismissing Duffy's claims. The quarrel is important in the context of the radical historiography of Mitchel, in that it was essential to fashion a Mitchel who was honest, brave, sincere and righteous; not only a prophet but also a moral beacon.[28]

To conform to the literary requirements of popular nationalist discourse, Dillon took some pains to draw an appealing picture of Mitchel the man. 'His sincerity was above question', asserted Dillon in the preface. He went on to note Mitchel's personal qualities. As a boy Mitchel liked school and excelled at the classics, he loved natural beauty, especially the mountains and streams of County Down, he enjoyed close friendships with his siblings, and he was very close to his mother. As a man he was a loyal, dutiful and loving husband, a kind father who adored his children, a man who knew only to 'try the virtue of plain, outspoken, desperate truth', who 'had the faculty of making zealous and faithful friends', who lacked personal vanity, who loved literature and could recite poetry from memory (including Mangan's translations of the German romantics), and who was so tolerant in matters of religion as to endorse the desire of two of his daughters to convert to Catholicism. One acquaintance in Richmond, Virginia, was reported as observing that 'a kinder husband, a tenderer father, a warmer, truer friend I have never known'. Mitchel's harsher characteristics were all effaced in the company of family and friends and his most notable attribute was unselfishness, particularly in relation to the weak and the suffering. Dillon added to this judgement that 'one test of goodness and greatness has been a readiness to oppose the powers that be at the risk of life or liberty', a test that Mitchel evidently passed, as his 'greatest quality, perhaps, was his absolute and unswerving sacrifice of self and self-interest to principle'. The idea of noble self-sacrifice had already been well-established in the hagiography of Emmet that had developed earlier in the nineteenth century and Dillon gave Mitchel a similar treatment. Dillon concluded that Mitchel 'was the greatest Irishman of his generation'. Thus the composite picture that emerges from Dillon's biography was of a man fit to stand among the heroes and transmit the spirit of nationhood to the current generation, but who, despite his occasional excesses, was opposed to conspiratorial methods.[29]

What is perhaps most remarkable about the hagiographic portraits of Mitchel is the ways in which they conformed closely to popular literary forms, in which the romantic hero adhered to his principles in spite of the personal danger and discomfort to which this exposed him. Christopher Morash has noted the ways in which such mechanisms ease the path of particular discourses into popular memory through matrices of inter-textual references that rapidly establish themselves as 'truth'.[30] This was also apparent in the obituaries discussed earlier. It has also been suggested that a print revolution – combining a critical mass of literacy with a widespread availability of popular texts – was a necessary precondition for such a process in the mid-nineteenth century, which was subsequently utilised more or less self-consciously in the creation of a

[28] Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, ii, 12, 13, 18.

[29] Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, i, x, 8–9, 11, 14, 16, 261; ii, 24, 27, 39, 120, 122, 146–8, 192, 218, 196, 302–3. Cf. Elliott, *Emmet*, pp 65, 132–3.

[30] Christopher Morash, 'Making memories: the literature of the Irish famine' in Patrick O'Sullivan (ed.) *The meaning of the famine* (London, 1997), pp 40–55 at p. 50.

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widespread nationalist culture.[31] This print culture was created in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ireland through the widespread publication of popular magazines. Periodicals like the *Irish Book Lover*, the *Irish Monthly* and the *Catholic Bulletin* made their own contributions to the making of John Mitchel as a national hero, offering some interesting perspectives in the process.

In the pages of the *Irish Monthly* Mitchel was dissociated from the cosmopolitan secular nationalism of Young Ireland and almost claimed for Catholicism. This is perhaps hardly surprising, given that the *Monthly* had been edited from its launch in 1873 by the Jesuit priest Matthew Russell. In an 1886 article the conversion of two of Mitchel's daughters to Catholicism was dwelled upon with some pleasure, as well as Mitchel's supposed empathy with Catholicism, which was considered evident because of his life-long friendship with Bernard Mooney, parish priest at Rostrevor, County Down. In the same year another example of Mitchel as the devoted family man was published, in an article which described the Mitchel family playing word games together. Two months later the magazine noted a letter had been published recently in the *Freeman's Journal*, commending a piece Mitchel had written for *The Nation* during the Famine that was still difficult to read 'without tears'. Armed with this justification, the magazine reprinted the article. It took an interest in Dillon's biography when it appeared, adding its own apocryphal and romantic tale about Mitchel's disguise when he was awaiting a boat for America in Sydney following his escape from Van Diemen's Land.[32]

In the early twentieth century the magazine was still taking an interest in Mitchel. It appeared to have access to correspondence between Mitchel and one of the friends of his youth. John O'Hagan had been a Newry lawyer while Mitchel was practising there, and later became a judge. The *Irish Monthly* reprinted a draft letter from O'Hagan in which he remonstrated with Mitchel about the dispute with Archbishop Hughes in New York during the late summer and autumn of 1854. Between 12 August and 16 September Mitchel had published a series of letters in his New York *Citizen* responding to Hughes's attack on him and the Young Irelanders in early August in a letter to the *Daily Times*. Hughes's letter had been occasioned above all by Mitchel's articles criticising the pope's temporal power in central Italy.[33] Yet this was forgotten when the magazine recalled (once more) the conversion of Mitchel's daughters, 'who joined the Church towards which their father showed much kindly feeling, as when he chivalrously defended Pius IX'. As a devoutly Catholic and constitutional publication, it is interesting to note the ways in which the *Irish Monthly* presented Mitchel. It took some pains to claim him for a more moderate nationalism than he is usually associated with, using the familiar devices of emphasising his personal integrity and goodness. The reasons for this are complex, particularly when Mitchel had been criticised strongly by Duffy, whose relative moderation – and Catholicism – could be expected to have

[31] Riall, *Garibaldi*, pp 128, 131.

[32] Declan O'Keeffe, 'A man for others and a beacon in the twilight: Matthew Russell, S.J. and the *Irish Monthly*' in *Studies*, xcix, no. 394 (Summer 2010), pp 1–8; *Irish Monthly*, xiv (Mar. 1886), pp 139, 145; xiv (Apr. 1886) pp 220–3; xiv (June 1886) pp 289–96; xvi (Aug. 1888), p. 463.

[33] *The Citizen*, 12, 19, 26 Aug., 2, 9, 16 Sept. 1854.

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rendered him a more suitable candidate for constitutionalist hagiography.[34]

It has been suggested that nationalist heroes became much 'safer', the longer they had been dead. However, it is also likely that, because Mitchel was a key figure for resurgent militant nationalism in the early twentieth century, the ways he was remembered were part of the contemporary political conflict between constitutionalists and republicans. Indeed, constitutional nationalists could, and did, appropriate the martyrology of the physical force tradition. It is also the case that, long after the decline of Young Ireland's cosmopolitanism, and Mitchel's feud with Archbishop Hughes, republicanism sought to avoid direct conflict with the Catholic Church in Ireland, particularly as the church's hegemony had become more firmly established since the Famine, the 'devotional revolution' and the days of Young Ireland. Mitchel himself, as the revolutionary tide of 1848 became an increasingly distant memory, sought means of accommodation with political Catholicism. During 1854, writing in his first American newspaper *The Citizen*, Mitchel described Pius IX as a 'weak and foolish Pope' who was 'the sovereign of a petty principality in central Italy' (prompting Hughes's riposte alluded to above). However, by 1864 Mitchel had expressed concern that Victor Emmanuel's transfer of the Italian capital from Turin to Florence was 'a perilous stride towards Rome'. Mitchel also noted a plan for the king to be a guarantor for the pope's peaceful possession of his dominions, 'the remnant of which the same King of Italy has not already robbed him'.[35]

The appropriation of such a potentially potent emblem of rebellion as Mitchel could help control the ways in which that memory was deployed in contemporary politics. By 1910 this project was well underway. The recent death of Mitchel's youngest child, Mary, prompted an article memorialising the 'heroic patriot ... his noble wife and children who shared, and supported him, in his exile, his trials and vicissitudes'. Indeed, little mention was made of Mary's death until the article sought to make explicit its purpose. She had visited her aunt, who was Mitchel's sister and the widow of John Martin, and was one of the last links connecting those who had met her in Ireland the previous year 'with the heroic figures of '48'. Her sojourn 'near the happy scenes and memories of her father's childhood awakened many thoughts of a brilliant period, and of men whose lives were a sacrifice, and an example and incentive to their people'. This link of the prosaic present to the heroic past was a classic discursive tactic, bidding the contemporary nation to live up to the example of its predecessors. The article attributed to Mary the same virtues as her illustrious father, including charm, devotion to duty and a willingness 'to do and to suffer' in a piece that was, to say the least, speculative in the same manner as the early newspaper obituaries. Thus the *Irish Monthly* promoted the ideal of self-sacrifice in favour of the wider national interest.[36]

At much the same time as the *Irish Monthly* was taking such a great interest in Mitchel's daughter, another periodical was also recalling Mitchel frequently. Discussions of Mitchel, and particularly the *Jail journal*, featured in the *Irish*

[34] *Irish Monthly*, xxxvi (July 1908) pp 361, 365.

[35] McBride, 'Memory and national identity', pp 32–3; *The Citizen*, 11 Mar. 1854; *Daily Richmond Examiner*, 13 Oct. 1864.

[36] *Irish Monthly*, xxxviii (July 1910) pp 361, 363.

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Book Lover, a mildly nationalist literary magazine, throughout the period of the Home Rule crisis. He was described as a brilliant journalist and, in the edition that coincided with the centenary of Mitchel's birth in November 1815, the first two pages were devoted to an assessment of his work. He was 'the greatest Irishman of letters since Swift', and his *United Irishman* was said to be 'written with a power and force that stir the reader's blood now, nearly seventy years after'. In the same edition a review appeared of the recent translation into English of Montégut's essay on Mitchel, originally published in France some sixty years earlier.[37]

The following month the *Irish Book Lover* reported on a lecture given by its editor to the Irish Literary Society in commemoration of Mitchel. The magazine also reported an anecdote told at the lecture by a Fr Eugene Sheehy, who had been at the Irish College in Paris when Mitchel visited it in 1866 with his friend, Fr John Kenyon. When Sheehy told the students who the visitor was, they 'cast all discipline aside and gave their distinguished countryman, on leaving, such hearty Irish cheers as that quiet quarter had never heard before'. Sheehy had also visited Mitchel in New York and told the audience that 'a truer, braver, better man never breathed'. The interesting thing about this anecdote is that it is possible to trace in this minor example the kind of process described by Morash about the accretion of popular wisdom regarding the national past. This incident had been reported in Dillon's biography twenty-seven years earlier, when Mitchel's reception by the students apparently prompted him to wonder how Cardinal Cullen would make the students 'good, faithful West Britons' on their return to Ireland as curates. The incident is not especially important, nor is there reason to doubt Sheehy's account. Yet the anecdote takes on greater significance, as it was selected (consciously or not) to assist in the creation of a national hero. It presents a popular Mitchel, beloved of Ireland's devout young Catholic men, in a story recounted by a man who, once again, was a living connection with the heroic past, thus transmitting the eternal flame of the nation and implicitly demanding its contemporary renewal. Mitchel's anti-clerical aside was ignored. The *Irish Book Lover* suggested that Mitchel was 'misguided' in certain respects but 'whatever may be thought of his politics or judgment, he was, as a journalist, unsurpassed in vigour and pungency'. Here, once more, is the curious appropriation of Mitchel's memory by a moderate, literary periodical. This was of particular significance during the resurgence of the physical force tradition in the early twentieth century. The point was to gain – or at least not lose – the moral leadership of nationalist Ireland by honouring national heroes, while drawing quite different conclusions from such commemoration to those drawn by the radicals.[38]

In a related project the politically and doctrinally militant *Catholic Bulletin* attempted to appropriate Young Ireland for a Gaelic, Catholic nationalism, reflecting its own editorial predilections. In August 1911 it claimed that 'to Irishise Young Ireland is the necessity of the hour' and reported with pleasure that

[37] *The Oxford companion to Irish literature*, ed. Robert Welch and Bruce Stewart (Oxford, 1996), p. 263; *Irish Book Lover*, ii, no. 5 (Jan. 1911) p 89; vii, no. 4 (Nov. 1915) pp 57, 58, 74.

[38] *Irish Book Lover* viii, no. 5 (Dec. 1915) pp 95–6; xiii, no. 3 (Oct. 1921), p. 43; Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, ii, 246–7.

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the *Jail journal* had been translated into Irish by Eoghan Ó Neachtain. A children's competition to write the best essay on the life of Mitchel was run in 1914. The winner, Brigid Ni Searcaigh, sent her submission from remote Cruit Island, off County Donegal, and was rewarded with a book of Mitchel's writings.[39] Another article in the *Catholic Bulletin* reminded readers of Mitchel's devotion to Ireland, and that he 'suffered for her sake'. Yet again, the subject's individual qualities were praised and a fiction about Mitchel's conversational abilities inserted in the tale:

> The expression of his countenance indicated the gentleness, the sincerity and the firmness of his character. His manners were those of a refined gentleman, simple, unaffected and dignified. He spoke almost as well as he wrote, and his conversation was, as may be supposed, deeply interesting ... He was one of those men who have made history.[40]

While the life, personality and deeds of Emmet were a recurrent theme in popular literature in the nineteenth century to an extent that they were not in the case of Mitchel, the latter did appear in occasional broadside sheets, in illustrations in popular magazines, in poems and in other commemorative ephemera. On the occasion of his centenary a 'celebration' was held, chaired by Arthur Griffith. Patriotic tunes were played on the *uillean* pipes, ballads were sung and Pearse made a speech. The programme for the event urged the audience to buy a copy of *Jail journal* 'and possess one of the greatest classics in history'.[41] The language of personal suffering and sacrifice appears to have been a recurring motif. Professor Elliott has noted the ubiquity of notions of personal sacrifice in the creation of the Emmet legend. Indeed, she considers the idea of blood sacrifice to be the 'origin legend' of independent Ireland.[42] Similar themes recur in periodical commemorations of Mitchel. However, these themes reached a crescendo in the work of early twentieth-century republican writers, especially Griffith and Pearse. Thus Mitchel's significance goes beyond the ways in which commemoration helped make self-evident the truths of nationalist history, and into the ways his ideas directly inspired the republicans of the early twentieth century. This is apparent in the commemorative event alluded to above, but also strikingly in some important writings by Griffith, MacNeill and, above all, by Pearse.

Arthur Griffith's appraisal of Mitchel seems more honest than that of many other nationalist writers, in part because he appears to have agreed with some of Mitchel's more shocking views. Griffith wrote a preface to a new edition of the *Jail journal* in 1913. While continuing in the same vein as many earlier hagiographers, he was one of a few writers not to ignore Mitchel's approval of

[39] For a flavour of the *Catholic Bulletin* see Brian Murphy, 'J. J. O'Kelly, the *Catholic Bulletin* and contemporary Irish cultural historians' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, xliv (1989), pp 71–88; *Catholic Bulletin*, i (Aug. 1911), p. 401: iv (Nov. 1914), pp 769–71.

[40] *Catholic Bulletin*, iii (May 1913), p. 340.

[41] *An extract from the "Jail journal" of John Mitchel, prisoner in the hands of the British* (Paris, undated) (N.L.I. ephemera collection); colour supplement to *The Shamrock*, Christmas 1885; supplement to the *Irish Fireside*, 9 Sept. 1885; C. J. Kickham, 'The first felon' in *Catholic Bulletin*, iii (Aug. 1913), p. 694 [first published 1849]; Commemorative programme, 'Celebration in honour of the centenary of the birth of John Mitchel', 4 Nov. 1915 (N.L.I. ephemera collection).

[42] Elliott, *Emmet*, p. 224.

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slavery. Instead, he complained that Mitchel's views had been 'deprecatingly excused, as if excuse were needed for an Irish Nationalist declining to hold the negro his peer in right'. Nor did Griffith ignore Mitchel's views on crime and criminality, asserting that Mitchel 'laughed at theories of human perfectability and equality, and despised the altruism which sees in the criminal a brother to be coaxed, not a rogue to be lashed'. Griffith approved of Mitchel having dissevered 'the case for Irish independence from theories of humanitarianism and universalism'. These comments form an important link between the militant nationalism of early twentieth-century Ireland and that of Young Ireland, and Mitchel as its most significant thinker. In the dismissal of Enlightenment ideas of human affairs written as narratives of progress, Griffith was connecting with Mitchel's 'rejection of the nineteenth century', choosing what were, to him, among the congenial aspects of Mitchel's thought.[43]

In one attempt by republicans to address the problem of unionism in the north of Ireland, Mitchel's 'Letters to the Protestant farmers of Ulster', originally published in the *United Irishman* in 1848, were published in pamphlet form in 1917, with a foreword by Eoin MacNeill. MacNeill took a side-swipe at the recent publication in English of Montégut's 1855 essay, which had imputed 'unreasoning rancour' against England as Mitchel's prime motivation. MacNeill's contribution made more or less explicit the reason for the publication of the letters in pamphlet form, commenting that 'seventy years ago, this Ulster Protestant poured scorn on the No-Popery campaign of the Ulster landlords ... The No-Popery campaign is still the main reliance of the British Oligarchy in Ireland'. He concluded, in a profession of faith that did not explain how the event might come about, that 'Mitchel, the Ulster Protestant, spoke nothing but the truth, and suffered for it. The day will come, in spite of all the machinery for controlling the truth, when Mitchel's truth will prevail among the Protestants of Ulster'.[44]

Pearse's debt to Mitchel is greater still than Griffith's or MacNeill's, and it is in him that Mitchel's influence on republicans is most evident. In writing of Mitchel's sacrifice and martyrdom, Pearse had a subject whose story lent itself to his purpose. Pearse wrote that he sought an Irish-speaking John the Baptist who would speak of Tone and Mitchel. This is interesting in its appropriation of the Anglophone Protestants for the Gaelic nation, and also because it made prophets of Tone and Mitchel. He presented the *Jail journal* as one of the 'holy books of Ireland', the 'last gospel of the New Testament of Irish Nationality'. In the graveside oration for O'Donovan Rossa, he spoke of the Volunteers knowing only one definition of freedom, 'it is Tone's definition, it is Mitchel's definition, it is Rossa's definition'. In the last example it is evident that Mitchel had been elevated to the pantheon of national heroes, and that Pearse was preparing O'Donovan Rossa for similar treatment by associating him with Mitchel and Tone.[45] Pearse even managed to turn Mitchel's lack of pragmatism in the spring of 1848 into a virtue, in which the people did not deserve to be free because they

[43] Griffith, 'Preface', pp x, ix; James Quinn, 'John Mitchel and the rejection of the nineteenth century' in *Eire–Ireland*, xxxviii (Fall–Winter 2003), pp 90–108.

[44] MacNeill, 'Foreword'.

[45] P. H. Pearse, 'From a hermitage' in idem, *Political writings*, pp 141–211 at p. 168; idem, 'O'Donovan Rossa – graveside oration', ibid., pp 133–7 at p. 135.

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ignored the words of the prophet. Mitchel had miscalculated the enemy's vigour and zeal as well as the 'much-enduring patience and perseverance of the Irish'. In classic Pearse style, he added 'A man cannot save his people unless the people themselves have some manhood ... Christ cannot save you if you want to be damned: much less can any earthly hero'. Pearse placed Mitchel next to Tone, declaring that 'these two shall teach you and lead you, O Ireland, if you hearken unto them, and not otherwise than as they teach and lead shall you come unto the path of national salvation'.[46]

These themes reached a crescendo in Pearse's late pamphlets, *Ghosts* and *The sovereign people*. In these Pearse once more sought to integrate the Protestant republican into a Gaelic tradition, suggesting that in Mitchel's writings, Anglo-Irish literature had caught up with the vehement separatism of Gaelic literature. Mitchel was one of the 'four master minds' that developed the modern concept of the Irish nation in 'words of apocalyptic wrath and splendour', Pearse asserting that 'Mitchel was of the stuff of which the great prophets and ecstatics have been made. He did really hold converse with God; he did really deliver God's word to man, delivered it fiery-tongued'. Yet Mitchel was an evangelist as well as a prophet. Pearse suggested that while Davis's 'gospel' of love and concord between Irish people was one necessary gospel, another was Mitchel's 'denunciation of woe against the enemy of Irish freedom'. While Davis might be compared to St Luke, Mitchel was St John. His was the last of the four gospels, 'the last and the fiercest and the most sublime. It flames with apocalyptic wrath, such wrath as there is nowhere else in literature. And it is because the man loved so well that his wrath was so terrible'. It is easy to see how Yeats (deploying the narrative established by Montégut and Duffy) could have lamented that Pearse had elevated Mitchel's hatred of England above Davis's love of Ireland.[47]

In 1917 P. S. O'Hegarty, republican activist and writer, published a short biography of Mitchel that concentrated on the Young Ireland years. In the aftermath of the Easter events of 1916 O'Hegarty made explicit what he believed were Mitchel's lessons for contemporary Ireland, some years before O'Hegarty himself became disillusioned with republicanism.[48] It seems that, before independence, there was a tendency among biographers to emphasise Mitchel's compatibility with a particular, Gaelic, Catholic republicanism. In Pearse's narrative of Mitchel, the cosmopolitan, anglophone Presbyterian became, through that normative alchemy identified by Morash, a Catholic evangelist for Ireland, disconnected from the broader intellectual currents that had been Mitchel's true *milieu*. Classic narrative paradigms of sacrifice and triumph had become absorbed into Pearse's Mitchel.

Even after the creation of the Free State, Mitchel continued to appear with some regularity in periodicals, although the presence of his ghost could be an

[46] Pearse, 'From a hermitage', pp 169, 170.

[47] P. H. Pearse, 'Ghosts' in idem, *Political writings*, pp 219–55 at p. 235; Pearse, 'The sovereign people', pp 365, 370; Joost Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse: the making of a revolutionary* (Basingstoke, 2010), p. 292.

[48] For O'Hegarty's change of heart, see Frances Flanagan, 'The disappointed revolutionary: P. S. O'Hegarty and the ambiguous victory of Sinn Féin' in Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid and Colin Reid (eds), *From Parnell to Paisley: constitutional and revolutionary politics in Ireland* (Dublin, 2010), pp 97–115.

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uncomfortable reminder to the new dispensation of the unfinished business of the republic and also an aggressive assertion of Irish cultural distinctiveness. It seems that these considerations inspired some of the biographic material that appeared during the life of the Free State, particularly Walsh's *John Mitchel* (1934) and MacCall's *Irish Mitchel* (1938). Both these biographies articulated lessons for contemporary Ireland from the heroic life of John Mitchel, albeit in different ways. Walsh appears to have been particularly concerned to make Mitchel Irish in the manner of 'Irish Ireland'. Given the creation of Northern Ireland, there also appears to have been a polemical requirement to integrate Protestants like Mitchel into the Irish nation. This had been prefigured in the translation of *Jail journal* into Irish, and in the call to 'Irishise' the Young Ireland movement. In this way, overwhelmingly anglophone, bourgeois and frequently Protestant Young Irelanders like John Mitchel could serve the purpose of republicanism in the years after the creation of the Irish Free State. For Walsh, it 'would be a daring ethnologist who would dogmatise' about the distinctions between northern Protestants and the Gaelic ideal, so Mitchel could indeed be truly Irish. Walsh's biography, then, sought to make Mitchel a figure who could be accommodated within a Catholic Irish nation, rather than place him in a pluralist perspective. The evocation of the Irish landscape was an important narrative in this task, and so Mitchel enjoyed solitary rambles in the countryside. Mitchel's major disagreements with Daniel O'Connell were played down, Mitchel being 'too big a man not to recognise O'Connell's essential greatness'. Mitchel was also presented as essentially conservative. Walsh was one of the few people to acknowledge Mitchel's stance on slavery, and explained it in terms of Mitchel's antagonism to the modern industrial world and affection for the pastoral south. The contrast between the American north and south fitted with Irish-Ireland discourses on the distinctiveness of a non-materialistic, harmonious rural society like Ireland and the acquisitive, industrial capitalism of twentieth-century Britain. Walsh suggested that if Mitchel were still alive his argument would have been that, had the south won the Civil War, the United States would have escaped its modern industrial and financial collapse, while Britain's chronic contemporary unemployment revealed 'the folly of a nation abandoning the land in order to become a race of hucksters'.[49]

MacCall also dwelled on Mitchel's 'solitary rambles', his biography spending pages on Mitchel's affinity for the Irish countryside, suggesting further that, in terms of American politics, 'the north was "England", the south was "Ireland" '. However, MacCall's personal preference was for a negative version of O'Connell, so Mitchel's disagreements with the 'Liberator' received a full treatment, and Mitchel was also said to have known little about the slavery question. Nevertheless, 'Mitchel's writings became the Old and New Testaments of Irish nationality; they were an inspiration and a direct influence to Ireland's later leaders, and they shaped the main course of Ireland's later history'. Given this, MacCall found it all the more surprising that there was no 'material acknowledgement' in contemporary Ireland of its debt to Mitchel. MacCall's Mitchel has an inclusive conception of nationality, a man who was both cursed from Catholic altars and threatened with death by Protestant bigots. Thus Mitchel's religious pluralism became a negative commentary on the contemporary division of Ireland.[50]

[49] Walsh, *John Mitchel*, pp 12–13, 15, 54–5, 62, 67, 87.
[50] MacCall, *Irish Mitchel*, pp ix, 24, 57, 58–9, 74, 326, 331, 334, 388–9.

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So, for one hagiographer Mitchel could be a prophet, while for another he was an evangelist. For one writer he was an enthusiastic Fenian, for another he derided secret conspiracy. One assessment might portray him as a gentle, family man, while another presented Mitchel as an awe-inspiring orator and writer. These inconsistencies can often be explained by the writers' needs to fashion a Mitchel who served their contemporary political purposes. Yet while there is a certain inconsistency in most of the hagiographers' characterisations of Mitchel, a case could also be made that those assessments of Mitchel that were critical or hostile were similarly inconsistent.

Periodicals continued to commemorate Mitchel after independence, but in ways that anticipated the disengagement of academic studies from the nationalist master-narrative, adopting an increasingly critical tone towards the man who had so inspired the generation that fought to establish an independent Ireland. For example, one article in the *Dublin Magazine*, a major literary periodical of the Free State and early republic, described Mitchel's 'sincere humourless fanaticism', while accepting that he had compelled respect and inspired devotion. Mention of Mitchel was more likely to be along the lines of his journalistic ability, his intellect and his culture, rather than his political principles or judgement. Yet while post-independence biographies and magazine articles tended to emphasise the literary Mitchel, they were not quite confident enough to attack his heroic memory. O'Hegarty reviewed Walsh's biography for the *Dublin Magazine* and noted coolly that the book had 'not succeeded', an assessment that may reflect O'Hegarty's own disenchantment with independent Ireland. It appeared that it was no longer so urgent to appropriate or construct Mitchel as the fiery and implacable opponent of Britain. Assessments of Mitchel could increasingly escape from the exigencies of contemporary politics, although Ó Cathaoir's 1978 pamphlet compared Mitchel's experience of imprisonment with 'the treatment being meted out to our prisoners today'.[51]

While Duffy and McCarthy had criticised Mitchel from a nationalist perspective, among professional historians a critical approach to nationalist stories of Ireland would emerge, one which found Mitchel's strident tone distasteful. The appearance of this critical approach to the nationalist story has often been associated with the collection entitled *The Great Famine: studies in Irish history*, edited by R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams. The chapter in that volume of most significance to the story of John Mitchel is that by Kevin B. Nowlan, in which he decisively rejected the militant nationalist version of the Great Famine, and with it Mitchel's 'genocide' narrative: 'The history of the Great Famine does not sustain a charge of deliberate cruelty and malice against those governing'.[52] Professor Nowlan did, however, acknowledge that the idea of extensive government interference with the 'laws' of political economy was precluded, first by Peel in rejecting the idea of placing restrictions on exports from Ireland, and later by Russell and Trevelyan, who held that 'the

[51] Welch and Stewart, eds, *Irish literature*, p. 158; *Dublin Magazine*, xiv, no. I (Jan.–Mar. 1939), p 51; *Irish Book Lover*, xiii, no. 3 (Oct. 1921), pp 42–3; *Dublin Magazine*, x, no. 3 (July–Sept. 1935) pp 82–3; Brendan Ó Cathaoir, *John Mitchel* (Dublin, 1978), p. 26.

[52] Kevin B. Nowlan, 'The political background' in R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams (eds) *The great famine: studies in Irish history, 1845–52* (Dublin, 1994 ed.), pp 130–206 at p. 133.

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sovereign law of supply and demand should solve the Irish food problem'. The effect of this on Young Ireland and, in particular, on Mitchel and his young accomplice Thomas Devin Reilly (whom Nowlan credited with first formulating the genocide thesis), was to generate 'a new, harsh and implacable hostility towards the British government'. Russell and Trevelyan believed they were doing all that a government could do in response to the crisis and 'it is essential to realise that Lord John Russell and his colleagues were not animated by ill-will or hatred towards the Irish people'. It must be acknowledged that Nowlan, in one of the very few attempts – nationalist, revisionist or otherwise – to accord Mitchel a serious investigation, noted that Duffy's memoirs, while valuable, did less than justice to Mitchel's role in the shaping of nationalism, and that Mitchel was 'a man of remarkable political stature'.[53]

Nowlan's fundamental re-evaluation of Mitchel's most significant contribution to nationalist history was fixed by James Donnelly, in his contribution to the *New history of Ireland*, as the historiographical orthodoxy.[54] More than any other member of the pantheon of nationalist heroes Mitchel has been neglected, probably as a consequence of what Quinn describes as his 'repugnant' thinking but possibly also, as Donnelly suggests, because his militancy appeared to be of direct significance during the northern troubles of the late twentieth century, and because Irish historians were keen to distance themselves from the taint of republicanism.[55] Yet reassessments have emerged that have perhaps, in the cooler atmosphere of twenty-first century Ireland, begun to offer an opportunity to re-examine Mitchel and place his broad-ranging ideas more precisely than either nationalist hagiography or historiographic indifference have hitherto done. For example, Paul Bew's recent survey of modern Irish history noted that Mitchel had a 'profound influence on the Irish popular mind'. James Donnelly has written that 'it is now much easier to see why John Mitchel could plausibly accuse the British government of genocide … and why his indictment should have had such resonance at the popular level'. Donnelly has continued to reject the view of the Great Famine as genocide, but demanded that historians seek better to understand that resonance. Indeed, he 'deliberately' issued a challenge 'to the revisionist historiography of the Famine, in which Mitchel and other nationalist propagandists are dismissed as the creators of the baseless myth of genocide'.[56]

In an important essay that attributed Mitchel's thought to a 'rejection of the nineteenth century', of whiggish notions of progress and of imperialism, James Quinn suggested that 'Mitchel's hatred of progress was inextricably bound up with his hatred of Britain'. This is not the same as saying that he was motivated by hatred of England or Britain. Rather, Quinn's point was that Mitchel loathed industrial capitalism and its most successful contemporary exponent, Britain.

[53] Nowlan, 'The political background', pp 152, 154; idem, *The politics of repeal* (London, 1965), pp 10, 12.

[54] J. S. Donnelly jr, 'The administration of relief, 1847–51' in W. E. Vaughan (ed.) *A new history of Ireland v: Ireland under the union, 1801–70* (Oxford, 1989) pp 316–331.

[55] Quinn, *John Mitchel*, p. 90; James S. Donnelly jr, 'The Great Famine: its interpreters, old and new' in *History Ireland*, i, no. 3 (Autumn, 1993), pp 27–33.

[56] Paul Bew, *Ireland: the politics of enmity, 1789–2006* (Oxford, 2007), p. 213; Donnelly, 'The Great Famine: its interpreters', p. 33; idem, 'Mass eviction and the Great Famine: the clearances revisited' in Cathal Pórtéir (ed.), *The Great Irish Famine* (Cork, 1997), pp 155–173, at p. 173.

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This approach offers a fresh approach to Mitchel's ideas, one which locates him within the cosmopolitan sphere of mid-century social criticism associated with Thomas Carlyle.[57] Quinn has discussed Mitchel's intellectual debt to Carlyle, his racism, his illiberal views on crime and punishment, his romantic individualism, his transmission of ideas of blood sacrifice and of England's difficulty being Ireland's opportunity. Another recent work has begun the process of assessing Mitchel's American career, an aspect of his life so often ignored or excused in the earlier hagiography, although much remains to be done. It seems remarkable that, almost two hundred years since his birth, only now are Mitchel's ideas, for all their ability both to revolt and to inspire, being examined in such a way.[58]

John Mitchel has been neglected, as his strident, pugnacious style no longer fitted with the exigencies of state-building in Ireland. The ideas and the rhetoric that inspired the republicans of the twentieth century fell rapidly from favour among historians, too. One of the problems with this lack of focus on Mitchel has been an over-reliance on the sour recollections of an aged Charles Gavan Duffy by historians surveying the period. Yet Mitchel's significance, as this article has shown, and as Quinn's recent biography attests, remains enormous for an understanding of the roots of twentieth-century republicanism. Further, his ideas need a fuller treatment that places Mitchel in the context of nineteenth-century romanticism, of race-theory and of his intellectual debt to Carlyle and broader European intellectual currents. A closer examination of the primary evidence from his own time, considered outwith the sterile polarities of nationalism versus revisionism, will surely demonstrate that there is much still to be said about Mitchel.

MICHAEL HUGGINS
Department of History and Archaeology, University of Chester

[57] Quinn, 'John Mitchel and the rejection of the nineteenth century', p. 92; Quinn, *John Mitchel*, p. 89.

[58] Quinn, *John Mitchel*, pp 6, 57, 82, 88, 54; Bryan P. McGovern, *John Mitchel: Irish nationalist, southern secessionist* (Knoxville, 2009).

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