

“By reason of past history”: Poland Through Irish Eyes

by **Brian Earls**

There’s an Egg in my Soup and Other Adventures of an Irishman in Poland, by Tom Galvin, The O’Brien Press, 271pp, € 9.95, ISBN: 978-1847170484

Dublin Moja Polska Karma, by Magdalena Orzeł, Wydawnictwo Skrzat, PLN 17.90 , ISBN: 978-8374372596

Sean Lester, Poland and the Nazi Takeover of Danzig, by Paul McNamara, € 25.00, ISBN: 978- 0716529699

In the first half of the 1990s, following the end of one party communist rule, Poland embarked the painful transition from a command to a market economy. The Irish government wished to be helpful to the new democracy but, as tight controls on public expenditure were in place and the Celtic Tiger still an unsuspected presence lurking in the undergrowth, little by way of substantial assistance could be given. It was in these circumstances that, with funding from Ireland’s development aid budget, the Association for Professional Service Overseas (APSO) dispatched a group of recent graduates to teach English in schools throughout provincial Poland. One of these enthusiasts was Tom Galvin who, in the summer 1994, found himself in Minsk Mazowiecki, a comfortless town in eastern Poland where, as he discovered on the first morning, not only was it unclear where breakfast was to come from but, although the town had a population of 20,000, it had no entry in *The Lonely Planet Guide*. Tom Galvin stayed the course, discovering a new society, while ignoring advice not to bother learning Polish (“too difficult”). The book’s final pages finds him, after five years, still in Minsk Mazowiecki, by now tired of teaching but richer in experience, as he undergoes instruction, together with his fiancé Asha, from the local Catholic priest in preparation for marriage. *There’s an Egg in my Soup* is a cheerful, slangy account of the author’s experiences over those year, culminating in a Polish-Irish wedding with 150 guests, 150 bottles of vodka, fifty bottles of wine, a few kegs of beer, and endless food including herrings, pork and boiled sausages at four in the morning.

An 'Afterword' finds Tom Galvin back in Ireland, where on a Sunday morning in May 2005 he observes the crowds of young Poles gathered before mass outside Saint Michan's Church near Smithfield. The huge growth in numbers of Poles working in Ireland, following EU accession in May 2004 and Ireland's opening of its labour market to citizens of new member states, has taken place. Outside the church he falls into conversation with a fifty year old tiler from Bydgoszcz. "He asks", the author reports, "about me, my wife and whether I have children. When I tell him I've no children because they're too expensive and I needed a house first, he's shocked. Rent a house he says. Family is more important than houses. Maybe, but he doesn't know modern Ireland." Afterwards the Polish chaplain, Father Andrew Pyka, talks of the constant demands placed on his ministry, with requests from Belfast to Cork for someone to hear confession in the Polish language. The priest complains that facilities in the Polish-Irish Society in Fitzwilliam Square were inadequate. "People were standing all over the place and even to have a cup of tea was impossible. I was hearing confessions in the toilets because there was no room." When Tom Galvin enquires whether there could possibly be such a demand for confession, Father Andrew explains that Poles will not go to communion without going to confession first. Later he muses, "Faith was what helped us to survive for so long. And if you take the faith from the Polish people they haven't got much."

For anyone who grew up in the Ireland of the 1960s aspects of contemporary Poland, from the succession of seasonal fruits and vegetables on the market sellers' stalls to the devout crowds of all age groups at Mass, recall Ireland as it was before the great transformation of the last quarter century. These parallels become even more striking when one turns to the history of the two countries. Ireland and Poland lost their independence to predatory neighbours, who had better organised and more centralised state machines. Following the late eighteenth century partitions Poland, whose history had previously been quite different to that of Ireland, found itself bereft of state institutions and committed to a struggle to reassert the existence of the nation in the face of the powerful counter will of its new Russian and Prussian masters. In these circumstances Irish analogies inevitably came to the fore, as the Polish nineteenth

century, like that of Ireland, was punctuated by insurrectionary outbursts set against a background in which the alternatively pursued strategies of constitutionalism and revolutionary violence waxed and waned. For both countries the long nineteenth century, a period dominated by the rhetoric of denunciation, when nationalism pushed other impulses to the margin, culminated with the First World War and the emergence of a strategy for ending the link with their respective imperial powers. Polish leaders exploited the need of the rival partitioning powers to obtain the support of their Polish subjects, while in Ireland radical nationalists attempted to secure independence by forming an alliance with the Central Powers (“our gallant allies in Europe” in the 1916 proclamation). Both re-gained sovereignty only with considerable difficulty, in the confused period that followed the ending of the war. As a result, for an Irish person the experience of reading a history of Poland can be unsettling, as one encounters a history that is at once exotic and yet strangely familiar, so that at times it almost seems that if only dates and names were changed the history of one could be that of the other.

The historical analogies we have sketched, however rough and inexact, have their parallels in popular attitudes towards the past. The modest bunches of flowers which appear regularly at Warsaw’s monuments to the rising of 1944, speak of a society that, like Ireland until comparatively recently, is given to memorialising and seems determined that meanings derived from the national narrative will not be forgotten. Sitting through the mesmerised and prolonged silence following a showing of Andrzej Wajda’s *Katyn* in a central Warsaw cinema, or listening in another to the jeers of derision which greeted Stalin’s appearance in Vladimir Pietrov’s vainglorious *Stalingradskaya Bitva* (*The Battle of Stalingrad*) of 1949, was to receive instructive lessons in the closeness of past and the present. The palpable sense of the dead and living coming together, that is the undeclared but unmistakable meaning of the hundreds of candles flickering in the reassuring darkness of Polish graveyards on All Souls Night, recalls accounts of Samhain given by earlier generations of Irish country people. To which, those unimpressed by such a past-centred vision might add that the faults which accompany such perspectives also repeat, and that elements of post-communist Polish discourse recall the introspective Ireland of earlier decades.

Against this background, for Irish people of a certain age, Tom Galvin's conversations at Saint Michan's are likely to possess a certain piquancy. The Poles described by him, with their unproblematic patriotism and religious faith woven into the texture of daily life are (very approximately) at a place where Irish people stood three to four decades ago but from where, for good or ill, they have in large numbers since moved away. Given a relationship of such closeness and divergence, implicit in the situation described in *There's an Egg in my Soup* is the question of what these newcomers make of contemporary Irish society and of what aspects of Irish life they find attractive or disquieting. The book ends with author worrying about how well the visitors may be integrating. The Irish, he reports one Polish blogger as complaining, are good to go out to the pub with, but are not likely to invite you to their homes. Having chewed the matter over Tom Galvin concludes that this is as it should be. Like immigrants everywhere, the majority of Poles are in Ireland to fulfil a purpose, have no interest in integration, and are happy to hang out with their own kind. "Nobody," he adds, "really wants that many new friends. New friends can be a pain in the arse."

To judge by Magdalena Orzeł's *Dublin Moja Polska Karma*, it may be as well that this is so. The book consists of a series of reflections on aspects of life in contemporary Dublin, seen through the eyes of a Polish immigrant. The author, a graduate in Polish studies and philosophy from Warsaw University, is presumably identical with the unnamed observer whose perceptions constitute the text. What results might be seen as an attempt to undermine, or at least correct, a prevailing benign Polish stereotype regarding Ireland, by replacing it with a more realistic account of matters. *Dublin Moja Polska Karma* begins with a dose of strong medicine, as the author walks, on her first weekend in Dublin, through the drunkenness and debris that characterises parts of the city centre on Saturday night. Other correctives are somewhat milder; it is reported that not all Irish houses have central heating and that Polish public transport is better than Irish. Somewhat disquietingly, from the point of view of Irish readers, is the division of the world into *My Polacy* (we Poles) and *Oni* (them – the Irish). A certain solipsism results from this rhetorical device, which lies at the centre of the book and constitutes its organising principle. In a characteristic moment, having noted that unlike previous emigrations,

satellite television has created a virtual Poland, so that the immigrant can remain caught up in Poland's domestic debates and scandals, the author offers the reflection, "We leave Poland, but we take with us all our fears and wounds. We constantly scratch old wounds and torment ourselves with reflections, because we, Poles in Dublin, nurse our masochistic patriotism." Well perhaps, but to judge by some Poles I have spoken to, leaving their homeland may have provided a relief from such burdensome stuff.

Tom Galvin and his fellow APSO volunteers were not the first young Irish to travel eastwards on educational business. In 1910, when passing through Warsaw, Yeats's future biographer Joseph Hone noted that the city was "one of the few European capitals that the tourist has not yet wooed. A few governesses in high Polish families are practically the only resident British subjects, and these ladies are mostly Irish, because they must be Catholics."¹ Among those who found work in early twentieth century Poland was Bessie O'Brien, the convent educated daughter of a prosperous Limerick farmer. The chapter in *The Farm by Lough Gur* entitled "Bessie Goes to Poland" tells of the astonishment of the O'Brien family when, shortly after the end of her school days, a letter arrives from "reverend Mother in France" to announce that "Bessie has the chance of a good position as a governess with a Madame Swinarski in Poland". Although Bessie is only a marginal actor in *The Farm by Lough Gur*, her first letter home, which was included as an appendix, provides a high-spirited, amusing and informative description of her new family. Her account, which takes up eight pages of text, is insightful and nuanced in its depiction of the family members, their relatives and retainers, and amounts to a miniature portrait of the culture, prejudices and idiosyncrasies of an early twentieth century szlachta (gentry) family. (The szlachta were central actors in Polish history and the shaping of society. An English language translation of the Polish constitution of 1791 rendered the term as 'the noble equestrian order' and assigned to the class the duty of defending Poland's liberty.²)

In Bessie's letter pride of place is given to the real head of the household ('Number two who is really number one'), Madame Swinarski. She writes, "I seldom felt so attracted towards anyone; she is intelligent, well-informed and noble-hearted, above all so

patriotic; you cannot imagine the extent to which she carries the love of her country, and so we are well met. She cries sometimes in speaking of the wrongs they all suffer: we compare our stories and what a resemblance we find between the two nations!” A few “homely examples” of similarities between Poland and Ireland concludes, “I could go on for hours proving to you that oppression is the cause of their and our faults, otherwise how could there be such a striking resemblance between the two nations, so far apart, having no communication and of different race?”³

One topic, which is at once fascinating and little explored, is the role of mothers, aunts and other female relatives in the transmission of religious values, including the religion of patriotism, in nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland. Where Poland was concerned, Bessie’s letter suggests that women played an important role as guardians of the national flame. In a particularly striking passage she wrote of Madame Swinarski:

You should see her when she talks of her country! She always finishes in tears. Her mother died saying, “My God, I never did anything wrong; I always gave to the poor; I practiced faithfully my duties as a Christian and a good Catholic. I never so much as harmed a fly, but I cannot forgive the enemies of my country! No, never! And I pray in this solemn moment when I go to appear before the great Judge, that the most terrible misfortune may fall on the head of whoever of my children forgets the misfortunes of Poland! To you, my sons, I leave it to avenge her! You, my daughters, never dare to rejoice in your family or in solitude; never be happy – I forbid it to you – till Poland is free!” Her sons, both before and after her death, were in every insurrection of the country. Once, after a battle in the depths of winter, she went over the battlefield with a lantern in her hand looking for the corpses of her husband and two sons; she was accompanied by Madame Swinarski (then only 15 years old). Every body lying there she lifted, peering into the dead face. “Is it Casimir? Is it Stanislaus? Is that Thaddeus?” What courage, and what a scene for a young girl, especially when she found her brother, 16 years old, dead not from wounds so much as from the cold which penetrated and congealed them. They carried him home between them, and had a rejoicing for the neighbourhood in his honour. “This is the dearest of my children’, cried his mother, ‘he has given me more happiness to-day than all the rest of you put together. I can only say that I hope to see each of you share the same glorious fate! For what is a Polish noble born if not to die when the enemies conquer?’ Madame Swinarski is the counterpart of her admirable mother, yet her brothers and sisters say, ‘Our Valerie has not a grain of patriotism!’ when I heard this I cried out, ‘Oh, then, if that is the way, may God defend us from the others!’ She assures me that with them it is shame and disgrace to a family that has not lost

some member fighting against the Germans or the Russians. The contempt they have for a young man who has never been imprisoned, or lost an eye or an arm, or cannot show that he has taken an active part in the rebellions, is unbearably cutting.⁴

Bessie O'Brien's letter reveals her to have been an amusing and clear sighted observer. It seems clear that if she had not married a young Serb, who was serving as an officer in a Russian cavalry regiment, and departed with him for Serbia, she had the makings of a gifted journalist or novelist of manners. She might thus be seen as a precursor of better known writers such as Kate O'Brien or Maura Laverty, who found in the experience of working in continental Europe (both as governesses in Spain) an imaginative enlargement and, at a personal level, an opportunity for self-definition and a release from the constraints of a provincial society. With its succession of character sketches, which amount to a group portrait of a Polish household, and brief outline of the essential social background, Bessie's letter might be seen as a first chapter in a generic Irish novel of exile.

In *The Farm by Lough Gur*, when news arrives that Bessie has received an appointment with the Swinarski household this immediately provokes the question, "Where exactly is Poland?" The narrator recalls, "We all spoke at once. Michael went for the Atlas and mother found the place with trembling hands. In the hubbub no one heard me say that Poland is on the way to the isles of Greece!"⁵ The uncertainty of the O'Brien family as to the location of Bessie's new home serves as a reminder of how far, before the age of mass travel, Ireland and Poland were from each other. Pre-nineteenth century contacts seem to have been occasional and miscellaneous. John Minihan's recent edition of the poems of Geoffrey O'Donoghue (Séafra Ó Donnchadha) provides a glimpse of one such contact, as registered in Pádraigín Haicéad's elegy for the Munster soldier Richard Butler, after his death in 1649. Following the lead of earlier Butlers who had fought in the army of the Polish king, Richard had served in the Smolensk War of 1633-4 and had received a written testimonial to his prowess "from the powerful king of armoured Poland":

Gurbh fhiadhain súl ar shiubhal an aird-fhir

é féin dá fhéachain do láthair
ag Smoilionnsco i bhfionn-Ruis fhásaigh,
mar thréan-laoch ag léidéireacht lá teith,

lá inar briseadh, inar milleadh, inar bhearnadh,
le Risdeard an mbuadh, fá ruathar rábach,
don tsluagh Bhiorrbach ioghantach ádhbhal
ón Mosco mór, ón treón-Tartáire.

That he was witness to the travels
of that noble lord, whom he saw present
at Smolensk in beautiful wild Russia,
a hero leading on a hot-fought day,

a day when victorious Richard routed,
smashed and forced with a gallant onslaught,
the amazing and dreadful step-land army
from great Moscow, from strong Tartary ⁶

In spite of professional wanderers such as Richard Butler, or later Bernard Connor (who served as physician to the Polish King, Jan Sobieski, and wrote the first English language history of that country), such was the distance between the two countries that Irish and Poles almost certainly met in significant numbers for the first time not in Europe but as immigrants in the great cities of North America. Such encounters as took place closer to home, although infrequent, seem to have been enthusiastic. One of the best known of these, which occurred in spring 1851, could be seen as emblematic of the form assumed by the Irish-Polish relationship in the nineteenth century, in its combination of broad sympathy with an inevitable lack of nuance, as the parties spoke different languages. The meeting took place when, as a result of a storm, a ship carrying 261 Poles was forced to put in for repairs at a small port on the west coast of Ireland. Following the crushing of the Kossuth insurrection, the Poles, who had taken part in the fighting on the Hungarian side, had sought refuge in the Ottoman Empire. It was while being transported from a port in the Ottoman lands to Liverpool, that they made their unscheduled Irish visit. Once the visitors had been identified they were feted, with much drinking of toasts, as heroes of liberty by the whole local community.⁷ It is striking that at this unrehearsed meeting, in spite of linguistic difficulties, the Irish soon established who the Poles were or, more

accurately, what they stood for. Having done so they were in no doubt as to the meaning they perceived in their heroic, but defeated, guests.

Bessie O'Brien gives the impression of having discovered for herself, somewhat to her own surprise, the "striking resemblance between the two nations." In fact, unknown to her, it was a familiar commonplace in nineteenth century Irish discourse, in both its rhetorical and more reflective moments. While sympathy for Poland, as the recurring victim of Czarist repression, was widespread in nineteenth century Europe, in Ireland this assumed an intensity and duration which seems to have been unparalleled elsewhere. At the heart of such feelings lay the recognition by Irish observers, with occasional Polish echoes, of affinities between the political situation of both countries. On the Irish side, a wide range of figures, extending from the free-thinking Thomas Moore in the 1830s to the deeply orthodox John Tobin writing in *The Catholic Bulletin* a century later, were struck by the analogy. Commentators on the Polish side, if somewhat fewer in number, were equally impressive in the quality of their engagement. What resulted might be seen as an Irish-Polish dialogue, or more accurately two parallel monologues which occasionally intersected, based on a shared perception of history and a continuity of feeling over several generations. While the exchange between the two countries had its superficial moments, at its most impressive it touched on matters of deep consequence, including the fate of the nation, the impact of romanticism, and the history of ideas in both countries. If, at its most routine, the Irish-Polish comparison was a little more than a familiar commonplace, a well rehearsed motif within a patriotic discourse, at its most probing it amounted to a reading of one culture in terms of the concerns of another.

Prior to the nineteenth century Poland had not figured, to any significant extent, on the Irish map of Europe. Improved access to information regarding current affairs, resulting from the rise of literacy and the habit of newspaper reading, probably goes much of the way to explaining the greater knowledge of developments in east-central Europe, which made the emergence of the Irish-Polish comparison possible. Its appearance as a trope in the first half of the nineteenth century provides evidence of the speed and effectiveness with which, in the age of steam, ideas, information and sentiments circulated from one

end of the continent to the other. This meeting of Irish and Polish concerns which resulted is a now a half-forgotten chapter in Irish intellectual history and is, for this reason alone, surely worth recovering.

When commentators in Dublin, or occasionally Warsaw, turned to the other nation, they must have encountered some corpus of shared experience for the comparison to make sense to themselves and their readers. Those who explored the comparison, while coming from a wide range of backgrounds and diverging sympathies, were in agreement on the nature of the phenomenon described. As these nineteenth and early twentieth century voices are insistent in telling us, the fundamental affinity perceived was the loss of independence and the experience of oppression. On the Irish side the Polish example could be seen as an informal, but consistently applied, external control on the native historical self-understanding. This was found to provide a valid analogy from the rising of 1831 to the aftermath of the First World War. While the Irish-Polish elective affinity is probably too loose to prove anything conclusively, it is certainly highly suggestive. One effect is to render the popularly received version of Irish history less singular. Viewed from a Polish perspective, that version, as articulated by figures ranging from Geoffrey Keating to A. M. Sullivan, yields itself less easily to presentation as an ideological construct serving the interest of dispossessed Gaelic elites, or as a false memory and a made-up story to be glossed by reference to *The Morphology of the Folktale*. Seen in comparative terms, the Irish attempt to come to terms with the rule of one people by another emerges as analogous to the self-understanding of at least one other European people.

The origins of Irish sympathy for Poland can be traced to the partitions of the late eighteenth century, when those on the radical end of the political spectrum perceived analogies between what was happening in that country and their own situation. This sentiment found expression in November 1798, in the address of Wolfe Tone to officers of his court martial. As is clear from the address, Tone accepted it was useless to dispute the case against him and that a sentence of death was inevitable. In these circumstance he reflected, “In a cause like this, success is every thing. Success, in the eyes of the

vulgar, fixes its merit. Washington succeeded and Kosciusko failed.”⁸ Tone’s invocation of Poland, made in a context of defeated revolution, found multiple echoes extending from his own time to Bessie O’Brien’s perception of the Irish-Polish relationship as a matter of shared patriotism and insurrectionary defiance. Given the situation of both countries, this recourse to the language of radicalism was perhaps inevitable, even on the part of the daughter of an economically comfortable and socially conservative Munster farmer. It is therefore striking that the earliest, and one of the most eloquent, Irish sympathisers with the Polish cause should have been a figure who is conventionally seen as a leading ideologist of European counter-revolution and who was denounced by Marx as a “sycophant ...in the pay of the English oligarchy” and “an out-and-out vulgar bourgeois.”⁹

Although comparisons between Edmund Burke and Bessie O’Brien may seem far fetched, both were children of Munster Catholic land holders, whose lot it was to make their way in the world amid strangers and in settings which were far from home. Burke, an Irish outsider, did so by winding his way into the heart of the British political establishment, becoming one of its leading figures over several decades in the second half of the eighteenth century. As a political thinker Burke operated within, and accepted, the constitutional order which derived from the Revolution of 1688, which he regarded as providing a broadly benign framework for human affairs. He did so, however, while remaining in touch with his Irish Catholic roots. As the Catholic Irish were the major losers under the Williamite settlement, Burke was unusual in eighteenth century establishment politics in his feeling for those who found themselves on the edge of the constitution. This sympathy extended not only to his fellow countrymen, removal of whose disabilities was a lifelong endeavour, but also to Britain’s misgoverned subjects in India and its unjustly taxed colonists in North America. It also extended to Poland, indeed such was his concern for that country that he has been described by a recent historian as “the staunchest ally of Poland at Westminster.”¹⁰

Burke was in Paris in 1773 at the time the first assault on Poland and noted the French reaction to “the shocking and uncoloured violence of that partition.” He went on to argue

in the *Annual Register* that the partition was “the first great breach in the modern political system in Europe ... It is not sapping by degrees the constitution of our great western republic, it is laying the axe at once to the root, and in a manner as threatens the total overthrow of the whole.”¹¹ In January 1774 he remarked of the Poland’s predatory neighbours, “These powers will continue armed. Their arms must have employment. Poland was but a breakfast; and there are not many Polands to be found – where will they dine?”¹²

Burke’s most sustained engagement with Poland came more than a decade and a half later, during the final years of the royal republic, and had as its background his polemic against the political course and intellectual underpinnings of the French revolution. The publication of *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in 1790 brought Burke a European reputation. Among his correspondents were Stanisław Augustus, the last King of Poland and the Empress Catherine II, who was Poland’s most dangerous enemy. Stanisław regarded developments in Paris with distaste and had read and admired the *Reflections* shortly after their appearance. As Poland was at that time engaged in the task of constitution drafting, one effect of Burke’s work had been to steer the King away from Rousseau derived concepts of a social contract towards a more pragmatic constitutional model.¹³ Catherine’s reaction to the *Reflections* was of a more conventional kind. In her youth “the lady who so mildly conducted the affairs of Russia,”¹⁴ had patronised Voltaire and the *philosophes* until, horrified by the forces unleashed by the enlightenment, she had reason to rethink her attitude and express her gratitude to Burke for his defence of legitimate authority.

Domestically Burke’s critique of developments in France, and what he saw as the flawed assumptions regarding human nature and society underlying the revolutionary experiment, led to a break with Charles James Fox and the Whig leadership. Unlike Burke, whose reading of the future course of the revolution, several years before the execution of the King and the unleashing of the terror, proved to be remarkably prescient, Fox and his associates tended to a benign view of its potential. Burke’s falling out with the Whigs, who had provided his parliamentary home since the beginning of his political

career, led to the publication in August 1791 of *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*.

In this glittering polemic, which was W.B Yeats' favourite of all Burke's works, his primary concern was to defend himself against charges of inconsistency between his current attitude and positions adopted during earlier stages of his career. Poland finds a place within this argument, in a passage of notably high rhetoric. *An Appeal* was written in the period immediately following Burke's parliamentary quarrel of April- May 1791 with Fox and the Whigs. As this coincided with the adoption of the French constitution on 15 April and the Polish constitution on 3 May of the same year, Poland presented an example of wide ranging but peaceful changes which, for the purpose of the argument, could be set against the destructive innovations of the French. *An Appeal* shows Burke to have been well-informed regarding developments in Warsaw and in sympathy with the Polish effort to avert catastrophe by enacting deep reform.

The relevant passage begins with an outline of the circumstances which had made change imperative:

The state of Poland was such, that there could scarcely exist two opinions, but that a reformation of its constitution, even at some expense of blood, might be seen without much disapprobation. No confusion could be feared in such an enterprise, because the establishment to be reformed was itself in a state of confusion .A King without authority, nobles without union or subordination, a people without arts, industry, commerce, or liberty; no order within, no defence without; no effective police force, but a foreign force, which entered a naked country at will, and disposed of everything at its pleasure. Here was a state of things that seemed to invite, and might, perhaps, justify bold enterprise and desperate experiment.

Burke was evidently familiar with the new Polish constitution, which had been translated into English following its enactment and published in London in the same year. The changes ushered in as a result of Poland's new order receive the highest praise:

In contemplating that change, humanity has everything to rejoice and to glory in, nothing to be ashamed of, nothing to suffer. So far as it has gone, it probably is the most pure and defecated public good which has ever been conferred on mankind. We have seen anarchy and servitude at once removed, a throne strengthened for the protection of the people, without trenching on their liberties, all foreign cabal banished, by changing the crown from elective to hereditary; and

what was a matter of pleasing wonder, we have seen a reigning King, from an heroic love to his country, exerting himself with all the toil, the dexterity, the management, the intrigue, in favour of a family of strangers, with which ambitious men labour for the aggrandizement of their own ... Ten million men in a way of being freed gradually, and therefore safely to themselves and the State ... Inhabitant of cities, before without privileges, placed in the situation which belongs to that improved and connecting situation of social life. One of the most proud, numerous, and fierce bodies of nobility and gentry ever known in the world, arranged only in the foremost rank of free and generous citizens. Not one man incurred loss or suffered degradation. All, from the King to the day labourer, were improved in their condition. Everything was kept in its place and order, but in that place and order everything was bettered. To add to this happy wonder (this unheard of conjunction of wisdom and fortune) not one drop of blood was spilled; no treachery; no outrage; no system of slander more cruel than the sword; no studied insults on religion, morals, or manners; no spoil; no confiscation; no citizen beggared; none imprisoned; none exiled ... ¹⁵

Although no reference is made to France in the Poland section of *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, it is strongly present by implication, most notably with the cascade of negatives with which the passage concludes, so that Poland figures as a kind of anti-France. Those qualities which are found most attractive in the new Polish constitutional order – the absence of violence, its gradualism, its explicit Christianity, the acceptance of the existing orders of society as a starting point for reform – contrast with the abstract and speculative doctrines which, in Burke’s view, marred the French attempts at constitution making.

Burke reverted to Poland in his *Thoughts on French Affairs* of December 1791. Unlike *An Appeal*, which was a published work intended for wide readership, this was a memorandum for the eyes of Pitt and his ministers only. As part of his argument for breaking off relations with France, Burke undertook a survey of the European scene, assessing the vulnerability of each of the major states to revolutionary infection. The account of Poland is notably brisker and less optimistic than he had offered several months earlier. The difference in tone is perhaps a matter of setting; *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* was a public performance, while *Thoughts on French Affairs* was a narrowly focussed argument intended for fellow politicians who had no need for flights of rhetoric. In August Burke had assessed the Polish constitution as a set of aspirations, whereas in December his concern is how it was functioning in the real world. The

assessment was not encouraging. “Poland”, he wrote, “from one cause or another is always unquiet. The new constitution only serves to supply that restless people with new means, or at least new modes of cherishing their turbulent disposition. The bottom of the character is the same.” Although Burke regarded the outcome as uncertain, he evidently continued to wish Poland well, adding, “It is a great question, whether the joining of that crown with the electorate of Saxony will contribute most to strengthening the royal authority of Poland, or to shake the ducal in Saxony.”¹⁶

Burke’s Polish reflections follow on directly from a brief, but trenchant, assessment of Russia’s revolutionary potential. As is clear from the passage, which borders on the contemptuous, Catherine’s admiration for the author of the *Reflections* was not reciprocated. Although an opponent of revolutionary France, Burke was far from being a blind reactionary and seems to have regarded Czarist despotism as resulting in a state that was inherently unstable.

The Russian government is of all others the most liable to be subverted by military seditions, by court conspiracies, and sometimes by headlong rebellions of the people, such as the turbinating movement of Pugatchef. It is not quite so probable that in any of these changes the spirit of system may mingle in the manner it has done in France. The Muscovites are no great speculators – but I should not much rely on their uninquisitive disposition, if any of the ordinary motives to sedition should arise. The little catechism of the rights of men is soon learned; and the inferences are in the passions.¹⁷

This was an assessment which was to be echoed by many Polish commentators on their great, but disquieting, neighbour.

The years that followed, in which the Polish republic finally foundered, provide a melancholy footnote to Burke’s long engagement with that country. On 25 April 1793, as the second partition loomed, his fellow countryman and former political ally, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, launched an extended assault in the House of Commons on Burke’s “pompous language” and policies. For this purpose Sheridan quoted in its entirety the Polish section of *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, which had been published a year and a half previously. At this stage Burke advocated war with France, with the object of overthrowing the revolutionary government. This allowed Sheridan to attempt

to embarrass his opponent by arguing that there was no difference between an intervention of the kind envisaged and the despoiling of Poland by its neighbours in 1772. Was it the intention, Sheridan asked, of the counter-revolutionary powers “to make a partition of France, as they did of Poland? ... Were we to forget the recent conduct with respect to Poland? Were we to forget the taking of Dantzic and Thorn?” Somewhat later in the speech the terms of the analogy changed as Sheridan enquired, once more with the first partition in mind: “whether any robbery that had been committed by the most desperate of the French, or whether any of their acts, were more infamous than this? Of what consequence was it to any man, whether he was plundered by a man with a white feather on his hat, or by one with a nightcap on his head?”¹⁸ Sheridan was prominent among political and civic leaders in London who were outraged by Russia’s treatment of Poland. Although the indignation in his speech was not feigned, his analogies are stretched and lacking in internal consistency, while his arguments, although vigorously advanced, have about them the air of debating points; one doubts if Burke felt seriously challenged.

In attempting to convict Burke of inconsistency, Sheridan anticipated subsequent critics who have argued that the author of *Reflections on the Revolution in France* is not compatible with his earlier Whig persona. Seamus Deane has summarised this view, which he does not share, as being that Burke’s late counter-revolutionary writings were a betrayal of “those principals that had been the ground of his support for the American Revolution, for the cause of the Irish Catholics, of the Indian princes against Warren Hastings and the East India company, and the Polish and Corsican rebellions.”¹⁹ The fact that his most extended reflections on Polish affairs coincided with his polemics against revolutionary France, and that he was simultaneously a supporter of a liberal constitutional monarchy in one country while rejecting a more radical agenda in the other, constitutes a powerful counter argument to the case against Burke. Following Poland’s final defeat, he defended the reputation of its ruined King, who had been “reduced to see the destruction of his dearest hopes in the downfall of his country’s liberty.”²⁰ It also fell to him to pronounce the epitaph of the vanished *rzeczpospolita* with

the comment, at once sad and undeniable, that “Poland must be regarded as being situated on the Moon.”²¹

Throughout his lifetime the Irish Catholic community, in which Burke had his roots and with whose members he retained affectionate ties, was subject to the ensemble of legal disabilities known as the Penal Laws. Conor Cruise O’Brien has argued that a major, if undeclared, commitment, which sustained Burke’s political career, was to provide legal redress for his fellow countrymen from the worst effects of the code. So intense was this commitment that, in O’Brien’s view, it animated causes, notably Burke’s defence of the North American colonists against arbitrary taxation and the inhabitants of India against the system of organised robbery operated by the East India Company, which to all appearances had no connection with Ireland. Dr. O’Brien argues that Burke’s “concern with the suffering people of India clearly has something to do with his concern for his own suffering people: the Catholics of Ireland under the Penal Laws.”²²

Like the eighteenth century Irish, the Poles were a predominantly Catholic people who had been overtaken by grievous misfortune. Against this background it seems possible that a continuity of feeling, similar to that which linked Ireland and India in his mind, underlay Burke’s attitude towards Poland. He was well versed in Irish history and, as a lawyer coming from a largely agrarian society, was particularly attentive to the means by which “the estates of the old Irish nobility and gentry”, including those of his own mother’s family, were confiscated in the seventeenth century. Burke’s long-standing attitude towards these transactions found expression in a passionate outburst of early 1792. It was, he told his son, as a result of the acts of “arbitrary monarchs ... inquisitions of corrupt tribunals, and tortured jurors ... [and] fictitious tenures, invented to dispossess whole unoffending tribes and their chieftains” that “the lands of their country were put up in a mean and scandalous auction in every goldsmith’s shop in London.”²³

There is no formal connection between these sentiments, articulated on the eve of the final partitions, and what was happening in Poland. It requires, however, no excessive stretching of the evidence to believe that one who had such attitudes towards the history

of his own country, would not have been offended by the transparent legal fictions with which Catherine and her Prussian allies attempted to cloth their aggressions in Poland, or would not have seen in such devices an echo of the misuse of the law for comparable purposes in seventeenth century Ireland. Like other Western Europeans, Burke objected to the partitions of Poland out of a mixture of concern for fair play and anxiety over the disruption of the balance of power in Europe. He was, however, unusual in the intensity with which he held these positions. It was not for nothing that in 1792, in what must have been one of the last undertakings of this kind by the Polish republic, Burke was awarded the *Merentibus* medal by Stanisław Augustus.

Burke's sympathy for the defeated Polish order was echoed at other levels in Irish society. It is to be found in the popular culture, in a south Wexford mummers' play whose text was put down in writing sometime between the end of the Napoleonic wars and the 1830s. Like other products of oral tradition, Irish folk drama was the outcome of processes of improvisation and variation, with the result that the Kilmore mummers' play contains material extending from the eighteenth century to the 1830s or perhaps a little later. Among its characters, along with Saint Patrick, the Grand Signor, Dan O'Connell and Napoleon, is the Czar. Some of the pleasingly bombastic lines assigned to the latter suggest that the text post-dates the Greek struggle for independence of the 1820s and the crushing of the Polish rising of 1831 ("When my Polish subjects did rebel, how dare you interfere?")

The Polish King, when he makes his appearance, would seem to belong to an older layer, being presented in his traditional role as defender of Christendom against the Turks. The figure who speaks could be seen as combining aspects of Jan Sobieski, who raised the Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683, and, in the complaint of the concluding lines, of the last king, Stanisław Augustus:

Here I am, the Polish King, that stood in time of need,
My sword I drew against the Turks, all Europe I have freed ...
One day in blood, alone I stood, on me did all depend,
Till Mahomet's standard it must fall, or Vienna have an end.
From morning till the sun went down, the slaughter did remain,
Full thirty thousand of our sons lay scattered on the plain

'Twas with a slow and steady pace we advanced along the plain –
 We halted every fifty yards to prime and load again.
 With imperial drums and thundering drums we raised the hue and cry,
 You'd really think Vienna's fate would surely rend the sky.
 So Christian Europe, now rejoice, give thanks to God and me;
 For in that war, if you had to fall, all heathens you would be.
 Now gratitude is dead and gone, the world may plainly see
 Amongst them all, I'd no friend at all, in my extremity.²⁴

While there are countless Irish broadside ballads which register the impact of the *Rights of Man*, there are none in praise of *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Although Burke's Irish record was an honourable one, to the degree that the memory of 1798 was incorporated as a key milestone in the national narrative, it was perhaps inevitable that he should have been remembered as an opponent of revolutionary France and that his Irish significance should have slipped from view. It was among moderate nationalists in the early twentieth century that Burke, who presented difficulties for both separatists and defenders of the existing order, found his most insightful Irish admirers. Among these were the old land agitator William O'Brien, who had unsuccessfully pursued the eminently Burkean policy of reconciliation between nationalist and unionist Ireland. To O'Brien's name should be added that of the clerical intellectual William Barry, who hailed Burke as a "devoted son of Eirinn" and argued that the major nineteenth century Irish advances, from Catholic Emancipation to land reform, were a carrying through of Burke's programme.²⁵

There is indeed an obvious continuity between the Catholic Relief Acts of 1778 and 1793 and final securing of Emancipation in 1829. There are also, though the position is more arguable, continuities between Burke, under whose influence the earlier Relief Acts were carried, and the architect of emancipation, Daniel O'Connell. Although differing in temperament and circumstances, both were scions of gentry families from old Catholic Munster, who were repelled by the French revolution, convinced that the redress of Irish grievance should be by non-violent means and, in spite of diverging intellectual histories, believed in versions of the enlightenment that were compatible with Christianity. Both were also supporters of the Polish cause.

O’Connell’s achievement in mobilising the Irish masses to bring pressure to bear on the British state to secure Catholic Emancipation had astonished Europe and won him a continent-wide reputation. His standing can be gauged from Montalembert’s tribute, “you are not only the *Man of one Nation*, you are the Man of all *Christendom*.”²⁶ Such indeed was his fame that he was approached on behalf of Czar Nicolas I with a request for his autograph. O’Connell is said to have refused on the grounds of Nicolas’ mistreatment of the Poles.²⁷ Gestures and words coincided. Speaking in the House of Commons on 22 June 1831 regarding the King’s speech, at a time when fighting was under way between Polish and Russian forces, O’Connell “was sorry, that he could find in it no expression of sympathy with the struggling Poles, whom he looked upon as at this moment the most interesting people in the world to every friend of mankind.” To this were joined some reflections on the struggle for Belgian independence, seen as illustrating “this lesson, that one nation cannot continue with impunity to wrong and oppress another.” Turning to his own country, where Connaught was stricken by one of the periodic minor famines, which were the fate of the poor throughout much of the nineteenth century, O’Connell demanded relief. He was trenchant in his view of the cause of the distress, attributing this, “not the mismanagement of Irishmen certainly, but that of the English Government, whose rule for seven centuries had brought them to a state unparalleled in the history of nations, that of a people starving in the midst of plenty.”²⁸

At the time of his speech on the Polish and Belgian revolts and the Connaught famine, O’Connell was shifting towards a policy of agitating for Repeal of the Union. This objective did not, in fact, move centre stage until over a decade later, when in 1842-43 he organised a series of huge open-air gatherings throughout Ireland in favour of Repeal. These meetings, which mobilised large sections of the population, with many hundreds of thousands participating, could be seen as a series of informal referenda on the link between Britain and Ireland. Their import was that Irish consent to the Union was not forthcoming. In the face of this campaign the British political class, both government and opposition, were united in their view that Union was essential for Britain’s safety and must be maintained, in spite of the absence of consent. The logic of this view of relations between the two countries was made explicit on 7 October 1843 when the monster

meeting scheduled to take place on the following day at Clontarf outside Dublin was banned by the Peel government. A week later O'Connell and a number of his chief lieutenants were arrested on charges of conspiracy.

It was against this background that the Whig member of parliament, who was also one of Victorian England's most popular historians, Thomas Babington Macaulay, rose on the evening of 19 February 1844 to address the House of Commons on the state of Ireland. The speech he delivered was unusual in that it recognized the failure of the link between Britain and Ireland, while insisting that it must be maintained, as "Repeal of the Union would be fatal to the empire."²⁹ Macaulay, whose party was then in opposition, found a means of occluding this impasse at the heart of his argument, through the familiar device of attacking the government. It was the Tories, he asserted, who were responsible over several decades for poisoning relations between the two peoples, by obstructing all efforts to enact Catholic Emancipation. As a result that what might once have been easily granted was reluctantly conceded under immense pressure from Ireland. In Macaulay's account, the original sin which doomed the Union was failure to keep the terms by which it had been negotiated in 1800 and which included the immediate granting of Emancipation. This he saw he saw essentially as a rejection of Burke's strategy of whose wisdom, following the crushing of the insurrection of 1798, the Prime Minister, William Pitt, had been persuaded. Macaulay recalled:

Of Mr. Pitt's plan the Union was a part, an excellent and essential part indeed, but still only a part ... He wished to blend, not only the parliaments, but the nations, and to make the two islands one in interest and affection. With that view the Roman Catholic disabilities were to be removed: the Roman Catholic priests were to be placed in a comfortable and honourable position; and measures were to be taken for the purpose of giving to Roman Catholics the benefits of a liberal education. In truth Mr. Pitt's opinions on these subjects had, to a great extent been derived, been derived from a mind even more powerful and capacious than his own, from the mind of Mr. Burke. If the authority of these two great men had prevailed, I believe that the Union with Ireland would now be as secure, and as much beyond the reach of agitation, as the Union with Scotland. The parliament in College Green would have been remembered as what it was, the most tyrannical, the most venal, the most unprincipled assembly that ever sate on the face of the earth. I do not think that, by saying this, I can give offence to any gentleman from Ireland, however zealous for Repeal he may be: for I only repeat the language of Wolfe Tone.³⁰

Macaulay's speech provides evidence that knowledge of Burke's views on Ireland was current within the Whig-Liberal elite several decades before the publication of Mathew Arnold's edition of Burke's Irish writings. The speech is certainly impressive for the candour with which Macaulay acknowledges Irish realities. He speaks in circumstances in which, the Tories having rejected Burke's advice and "scourged away and spurned away the Roman Catholics", government policy has been reduced to "more barracks and more soldiers."³¹ Macaulay's willingness to take account of unwelcome realities is evident in his acknowledgement of the position O'Connell, then in jail, as the leader of the Irish people. It is when trying to bring home this politically disagreeable point to his fellow parliamentarians that the Polish analogy comes into view. This occurs in a passage in which, having made clear his "deep disapprobation" of O'Connell's policies, Macaulay goes on to admit:

it is impossible for me not to see the place which he holds in the estimation of his countrymen is such as no popular leader in our history, I might say perhaps the history of the world, has ever attained. Nor is the interest which he inspires confined to Ireland or the United Kingdom. Go where you will on the Continent: visit any coffee house; dine at any public table; embark on board of any steamboat: enter any diligence, any railway carriage: from the moment that your action shows you to be an Englishman, the very first question asked by your companions, be they what they may, physicians, advocates, "What will be done with Mr. O'Connell?" Look over any file of French journals; and you will see what a space he occupies in the eyes of the French people. It is most unfortunate, but it is truth, and a truth which we ought always to bear in mind, that there is among our neighbours a feeling about the connection between England and Ireland not very much unlike the feeling which exists here about the connection between Russia and Poland.³²

So widespread was the comparison between Poland and Ireland, advanced by Macaulay as a first hand observation, that it almost seems as if discussion of English misgovernment in Ireland automatically triggered an association with Czarist misrule in Poland. In the early summer of 1844, several months after Macaulay's speech, when Czar Nicolas I was received by Queen Victoria at Windsor, *Punch* commemorated the event with a cartoon. This showed the still youthful Victoria sitting under a map of Ireland, while the Czar sits under a map of Poland. Victoria turns to her fellow monarch and tells him, "Brother, brother, we're both in the wrong."

As for Macaulay, although rarely less than emphatic, the contradiction between Irish antipathy to the Union and British determination that it should be maintained brought an uncharacteristic lameness to the conclusion of his speech of February 1844. Things would be better for the Irish, he implied, if there was a change of government in London. This proved not to be the case. In late summer of 1845, less than a year and a half after Macaulay's speech, in what proved to be first of a series of failures, the potato crop was blighted throughout Ireland. As the potato was the staple food of the lower classes, what followed was an unparalleled disaster for the Irish poor, in comparison with which the regional famine O'Connell had drawn to the attention of the House of Commons in 1831 must have seemed the most minor of visitations. From June 1846, following a change of government, Macaulay's fellow Whig, Lord John Russell, became Prime Minister. It was Russell's failure to provide relief adequate to the disaster that laid a bedrock of hatred and resentment among extensive sections of the Irish population which, in the view of many observers, sealed the doom of the Union.

The nature of the Irish interest in Poland can be inferred from the differing receptions given to early Polish visitors to Ireland. In May 1821 the bibliophile Karol Sienkiewicz, while visiting Britain on business connected with the Czartoryski Library in Puławy, came to Dublin, principally to visit Trinity College Library. This turned out to be something of a disappointment, as the staff of the library made clear that they had no intention of helping him and he was refused permission to view either the catalogue or the books on the "barbarous" grounds that "reading the books is permitted only to those who are authorised to do so."³³ Twelve years later the elderly man of letters Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz undertook an equally disappointing journey to Dublin. As a writer and publicist Niemcewicz was a figure whose personal history echoed that of his country. He had been a member of the four year sejm (parliament), and was to the fore among those had struggled to introduce reforms in the final years of the royal republic. Following the second partition, Niemcewicz became an aide-de-camp to Kościuszko and took part in the campaign against the Russian forces until the final Polish defeat when, together with his leader, he was taken prisoner. During the two years of solitary confinement that

followed, in the Petropavlovsk fortress in Petersburg, he amused himself by translating *The Rape of the Lock* into Polish. A lifetime later, following the crushing of the 1831 insurrection, he was compelled to abandon his books and manuscripts and go into exile.

In was in these circumstances that Niemcewicz, by now in his mid-seventies and intent on salvaging whatever possible from the disaster that had overtaken his country, came to Dublin to raise funds for the education of young Polish immigrants. His attempts to arouse interest in this cause among leaders of Dublin society proved fruitless, as he was met at every turn by indifference and distrust. His treatment at the hands of Archbishop Murray seems to have particularly rankled. The Archbishop avoided meeting him and gave an evasive answer to a request that training be provided for Polish clergy in Irish seminaries. Niemcewicz wrote to a correspondent of Murray's response, "What a cold, what a cautious letter, no answer to my question ... no sympathy for the persecuted and oppressed Catholics of Poland – a letter written as if Lieven and Czar Nicolas were going to read it."³⁴

Although he lived into the age of romanticism, Niemcewicz was a child of the Polish enlightenment, who was characterised by Czeslaw Milosz as possessing an "open mind" and "a rare gift of moderation."³⁵ A year before his unsuccessful visit to Dublin, a younger man, who possessed neither of these attributes, was afforded a very different reception. The visitor was Józef Kazimierz Sulpicjusz Napoleon Czapski, a startling figure who embodied in his own person, in a manner which had been speeded to an almost parodic degree, the revolutionary impulse which gripped sections of European society between the defeat of Napoleon and 1848. When he first appears on stage, as a ardent young man set against the background of a restored ancien régime of the post Waterloo era, Czapski seems almost like a figure out of an unwritten novel by Stendhal. Following the death of his father, a major-general in the Polish army, he quarrelled with his uncle regarding inheritance rights and, having been refused permission to use his father's aristocratic title by the Prussian authorities, ostentatiously titled himself *peasant* and used the name Napoleon from then on. While still in his twenties, as a student of philosophy in the University of Breslau – from which he was ultimately expelled – he

had already drawn the attention of the authorities. In reports submitted to the Grand Duke Constantine by General Nicolai Novosiltsov, the Czar's representative in the Congress Kingdom of Poland, Czapski was described as a dangerous leader of international revolutionary youth and “une des plus mauvaises têtes de l'Université de Breslau”. This judgment was echoed within the Prussian administration, where he was characterised by a former neighbour, in a report to Minister Count Lottum, as an extremist dreamer.

Following a period of wandering in the 1820s, Czapski returned to Poland in January 1831, where he fought in a number of the major battles of the rising of that year. As a soldier – he was a field-adjutant to the Polish commander-in-chief Skrzynecki – he distinguished himself by his valour and, faced with the indecisiveness of his commander, insubordination. After the defeat of the insurgent forces he fled Poland, making his way with difficulty via the Prussian partition, where he was sought by authorities who regarded him as the Robespierre of the rising. Following an adventure filled journey, he arrived at the Irish coast at the end of January 1832.

Interest in Czapski's activities was not limited to the gendarmerie of the partitioning powers. At about the time the fugitive was making his way westward, a Wielkopolska correspondent wrote to Adam Mickiewicz, “Czapski is the only one in the world capable of being your Wallenrod, in the best sense. Try to get to know him in your travels. He understood your heart a long time ago. Perhaps he is the only one to rise up to the level of your glorious dreams.” The recipient of this letter, himself an exile, had been deeply stirred by the rising of 1831, which he had belatedly and ineffectually attempted to join. It may be for this reason that Mickiewicz's correspondent presented Czapski as an implementing figure, capable of carrying into practice that of which the poet dreamed. This embodiment of insurrectionary romanticism certainly seems to have had an explosive impact on arrival in Ireland. He was received enthusiastically in Dublin, where he was showered with invitations and honours. Czapski proved to be a riveting public speaker, to whom it was impossible to remain indifferent. “Enthusiasm for the Polish

cause”, he wrote, “opened a thousand hearts to me”, as a pro-Polish petition which he had initiated received five thousand signatures in one day.

The Dublin Castle authorities were evidently uncertain how to respond to this unexpected presence on the Irish scene. While there was a significant current of opinion in Britain sympathetic to the Poland it seems likely that, almost certainly as a result of informal police co-operation, they were well informed regarding the background of their guest. When a pretext was found to charge him with failure to observe passport formalities, and a fine of fifty pounds imposed, a public collection was organised to raise this and “save Ireland from disgrace.” In a piece of political theatre, of the kind to which O’Connellite Ireland was well practiced, the sum was assembled in the smallest denominations possible, as lawyers and merchants went around Dublin collecting contributions in wheelbarrows. These events, which were reported in the newspapers of the day, served only to increase Czapski’s fame. Together with O’Connell he visited a number of provincial towns, where he spoke at public meetings, before departing Ireland for Liverpool in April 1832. There followed a further decade of revolutionary intrigue, conducted in half a dozen European countries, with all of the paraphernalia of assumed names, false passports and secret societies, before his returned to Wielkopolska in the mid-1840s, having evidently made his peace with the Prussian authorities. He did not take part in the Poznan rising of 1848 and died of cholera in 1852, two years after his marriage.³⁶

The apprehensions felt regarding Czapski’s presence in Ireland may have been soundly based, to judge by the poem addressed “To Count Joseph Napoleon Czapski”, which appeared in the O’Connellite *Irish Monthly Magazine* of May 1832. This summarised the circumstances which led to his exile in the following terms:

’Twas thus, when fate, fell Russia’s ruffian hordes,
 O’recame Sarmatia’s sons, whose well-tried swords
 Fell shivering from their hands, and every hope
 That they could longer with their tyrants cope
 Was gone – O! then, a few who’d rather stray
 O’re dreariest wilds, so Freedom led the way,
 Forsook their native soil – their once proud sphere,

To seek the boon denied by tyrants there.
 Of these was Czapski, and each realm he tried,
 To where Ierne bounds the western tide;
 And there he paused – for there he found alone
 A land – a race congenial to his own.

In the perspective of the poem, the welcome extended to Czapski in Ireland is underwritten by a sense of similarity between Poland's fate and that of his host country. This is explicitly asserted when Czapski speaks:

He spoke of Erin's wrong'd, afflicted land,
 Like Poland blighted by the stranger's hand!³⁷

A year before the Czapski poem, in arguing for Irish legislative independence, the pamphleteer George Ensor was struck by the similarity between the subterfuges and hypocrisies employed in the partitioning of Poland and the passage of the Act of Union. These, in his view, included the stirring up by the authorities of the appearance of Jacobinism as an excuse for repression in Ireland and military intervention in Poland. This tactic involved the use of agent provocateurs “by the partitioning powers to colour their subdivision of Poland, as, by the English ministers, to swallow Ireland by an incorporate Union.”³⁸ Even more striking was the nature of the promises extended to both peoples by their interfering neighbours. Ensor wrote:

First it was stated, preparatory to the Union, in various pamphlets, speeches, and addresses, that the English ministry sought the union of England and Ireland principally to serve the Irish nation; yet up to that hour the little good received from England was wrung from her often at considerable loss, while the evil was great and gratuitous. Whether such professions of kindness to Ireland were adopted literally, or in spirit, from Catherine's loving professions to the Poles, when she prepared to dismember their country, I do not know; but anyone who wishes to see the state lie of that profligate old woman, may turn to the royal communication on that subject: their coincidence is remarkable.³⁹

In 1832 a variant of this analysis was proposed in an article entitled “Poland - Russia – Ireland”, which accompanied the Czapski poem in *The Irish Monthly Magazine*. The anonymous author, who was more passionate if less lucid than Ensor, demanded rhetorically:

Is there any resemblance between the political and sectarian discord encouraged and taken advantage of by Russia to enslave Poland, and the factious animosity

and religious broils which England excited in Ireland, to produce rebellion, military occupation, and the destruction of our existence as a nation, by the insidious scheme of an incorporating Union, carried during a reign of terror, and almost while the swords of England’s mercenaries, and the lashes of her executioners, were as red with the blood of Irishmen, as the lances of Suwarow’s Cossacks were red with the blood of the Poles? ⁴⁰

Underlying such passages is a sense of affinity between the liberties of pre-partition Poland and the rights secured by the Volunteers for the old Irish parliament in 1782. The parallel is, of course, imperfect; the College Green parliament did not represent the nation in the way that the eighteenth century sejm, based on a remarkably wide suffrage judged by pre-democratic standards, could claim to represent Poland. Neither Ensor nor the writer in *The Irish Monthly Magazine* would have allowed themselves to be deceived where the old Irish parliament was concerned; both detested the eighteenth century landowning ascendancy and were well aware of the religious exclusivity of the assembly in which that class held its deliberations. One concludes that they asserted otherwise because, intent on constructing a new sovereignty, it suited them to pretend they wished to restore something that had previously existed. Thus when Ensor advocated “the restoration of a native resident, radically reformed, independent parliament”, ⁴¹ far from being a restoration, what was proposed amounted to a wide-ranging innovation.

The revolutionary years of 1831, 1848, and 1863 constitute key dates in the Irish-Polish configuration. The connection is delightfully, if obliquely, suggested in James Clarence Mangan’s “The Domiciliary Visit (A Scene in Faubourg St Antoine, Paris).” This brings together Mangan’s taste for puns, Poland’s revolutionary reputation, the Paris of Louis-Philippe and, in the place of publication (*The Nation* of April 4, 1846), the leading organ of political and cultural nationalism of the 1840s. The squib takes the form of a dialogue between a suspicious and deeply obtuse Officer of the Gendarmerie and a youthful Citizen. During the exchange the policeman notices a book in the young man’s possession. The conversation takes the following turn:

Officer:	Ha – Treatise on the <i>Poles</i> .
Citizen:	The South
	And North Poles only.
Officer:	Rebel!

How dare you ope your *gamin* mouth?
Your explanations treble
Your guilt. South Pole and North! To what
Owes Earth its *revolutions*,
If not to these, you leveller-flat
Of thrones and institutions?⁴²

As substantial bodies of opinion in Ireland and Poland were committed to dismantling the existing order, nationalists in the two countries found themselves in antagonistic relationships with the major imperial powers, with the significant exception of France. Although the nineteenth century history of neither country can be reduced to a mere chronicle of rebellion, it was the fate of both peoples to occupy a prominent place on the revolutionary map of Europe. It was one of the clichés of the age that Poles were to be found at every barricade in Europe, in the hope that revolution elsewhere might be to their country’s advantage, while perpetually “disturbed” Ireland extended its passionate sympathy to a range of causes from Orthodox Greeks and Kossuth’s Hungarians, via the French in almost all of their insurrectionary moments, to Indian mutineers and Boer farmers.

Marx and Engels were keenly aware of the insurrectionary potential of Ireland and Poland and the place of both countries in the century’s revolutionary drama was reflected in their writings. Where Ireland was concerned they saw the situation as unique in Europe and believed there was nothing comparable to England’s treatment of the Irish, even under the Russian tyranny in the east. In assessing this judgment, it should be recalled that it had as its background the famine decade and the depopulation of Ireland in the third quarter of the century. Engels saw first hand what was taking place, having visited Ireland in 1856. In a letter to Marx of May of that year he wrote, “The whole of the west, especially in the neighbourhood of Galway, is covered with ruined peasant houses. I never thought famine could have such tangible reality ... Famine, emigration and clearances together have accomplished this.”⁴³ Marx and Engels regarded what was taking place in Ireland as consistent with English colonial strategy from the sixteenth century onwards. They viewed England, the “metropolis of capital”, as the world’s most advanced capitalist society where working class power was likely to emerge first. In what

may have been an adaptation of the analysis of George Ensor, with whose writings Marx was familiar, they held that political development was being held back by the colonisation of Ireland and the resulting blunting of Britain's progressive potential. In this perspective they urged support for the independence of Ireland as being of international importance.

Marx and Engels' attitude towards Poland had its basis in a shared detestation of Czarism. They saw its role in resisting Muscovite despotism as being of European significance, referring to the Poles as "twenty million heroes between Europe and Asia."⁴⁴ Marx's earliest linkage of Poland with Ireland occurred in a speech of February 22, 1848, to mark the second anniversary of the Cracow uprising. This reached its climax in a passage in which revolutionary excitement finds its focus in what must appear (retrospectively) as an unjustified confidence regarding developments in Ireland:

The Cracow revolution has set all of Europe a glorious example, because it identified the question of nationalism with democracy and with the liberation of the oppressed class. Even though this revolution has been strangled with the bloody hands of paid murderers, it now nevertheless rises gloriously and triumphantly in Switzerland and in Italy. It finds its principles confirmed in Ireland, where O'Connell's party with its narrowly restricted national aims has sunk into the grave, and the new national party is pledged above all to reform and democracy. Again it is Poland that has seized the initiative, and no longer feudal Poland but a democratic Poland; and from this point on its liberation has become a matter of honour for all the democrats of Europe.⁴⁵

An Irish-Polish link of a somewhat different sort made its appearance two decades later in a speech Marx delivered on January 22, 1867, to mark the fourth anniversary of the Polish uprising of 1863. Although Poland's role in resisting Czarist oppression is saluted ("Once again, it was the Polish nation, the immortal knight of Europe, that forced the Mongols to retreat!"), the mood is subdued in comparison with that of 1848. The crushing of the Poles is seen as opening the way for reaction, with a survey of Russian gains from the Caucasus to central Europe concluding with the gloomy reflection, "And if this were not enough, England's crime against Ireland created for Russia a powerful new ally on the other side of the Atlantic."⁴⁶ (The reference is presumably to the emergence in the post-famine years of an Irish community in North America, which was

deeply hostile to England. While Marx's logic is clear, it seems unlikely that there was much support for Russia among the Irish diaspora.)

As a separate Polish socialist movement began to emerge in the 1880, Engels developed a thesis on the relationship between revolutionary progress and the nation state. In a letter to Karl Kautsky of February 7, 1882, he argued that the national unit provided the necessary setting for socialism to develop. In his view "it is historically impossible for a great people to discuss this or that internal question in any way seriously so long as national independence is lacking." Accordingly "an international movement of the proletariat is possible only between independent nationsSo long as Poland remains partitioned and subjugated, therefore, there can be no development either of a powerful socialist party within the country itself or of genuine international intercourse *between Poles other than émigrés* and the rest of the proletarian parties in Germany, etc." In keeping with this logic, Engels argued that, of all the peoples in Europe, the Irish and the Poles had the duty to be nationalists before they could become socialists.

One of the real tasks of the revolution of 1848 (and the *real* as distinct from illusory tasks of a revolution are always carried out on the strength of that revolution) was the restoration of the oppressed and disunited nationalities of Central Europe in so far as these were at all viable and, in particular, ripe for independence. In the case of Italy, Hungary, and Germany, this task was carried out by the executors of the revolution, Bonaparte, Cavour and Bismarck, in accordance with the circumstances obtaining at the time. There remained Ireland and Poland. Ireland need not be considered here; it is only very indirectly concerned with conditions on the Continent. But Poland lies in the middle of the Continent and keeping it partitioned is precisely the bond that continually re-cements the Holy Alliance.....

Hence I am of the opinion that *two* nations in Europe are not only entitled but duty-bound to be national before they are international – Ireland and Poland. For the best way they can be international is by being well and truly national. That's what the Poles have understood in every crisis and proved on every revolutionary battleground. Deprive them of the prospect of restoring Poland, or persuade them that before long a new Poland will automatically fall into their laps, and their interest in the European revolution will be at an end.⁴⁷

The Fenian Brotherhood was one of a number of revolutionary groups to which Marx extended his less than disinterested sympathy. His feelings regarding Poland were shared, in less theoretically elaborate form, by the Skibereen Fenians. As O'Donovan

Rossa recounted, in Spring 1863 “the Poles were struggling against their tyranny, and we conceived of the idea of having a meeting of sympathy for them in Skibereen.” This did not pass off uneventfully, as police and magistrates were summoned, the riot act read and local women terrified, in an attempt to ensure that the meeting did not go ahead. As with Czapski’s visit three decades earlier, those in authority had little difficulty in reading the subtext and, as Rossa recalled, “recognized in our meeting of sympathy for the Poles a meeting of organized hostility against England.”⁴⁸

Fellow feeling for Poland was not confined to the radical wing of Irish politics. On the first of July 1863, that most conservative of rebels, William Smith O’Brien, addressed a public meeting in Dublin in support of the Polish cause. This honourable, but less than effective, leader of the Young Ireland rising of 1848 had recently returned from Poland, where he had witnessed the rising then under way. O’Brien’s Polish journey began in Cracow, where he passed five days before travelling by train to Warsaw, where his books and papers were confiscated by the Czarist customs. Having stayed long enough in Warsaw to meet “some of the most distinguished of the local nobility”, he travelled to Grodno to visit the estate of his namesake O’Brien de Lacy, a local grandee of Irish origin, who had acquired land in the Russian service. From Grodno he made his way to Wilno, where he spent two nights “in that beautiful town.” Having been in Lithuania long enough to form the judgment that “the insurrection has been espoused by the inhabitants ... with as much zeal” as in the Polish heartland, he travelled to Koningsberg via Kowno. Once outside the oppressive Czarist realm, “touched to the heart” by what he had seen, “and impressed with the deepest solicitude for the fate of Poland,”⁴⁹ O’Brien wrote an appeal on behalf of the Poles which was carried in a number of Irish papers and, translated into French, was published as a pamphlet in Paris.

O’Brien was a careful observer, anxious to see and learn as much as possible, who managed to become “acquainted with a considerable number of influential and intelligent Poles.” These included participants in the fighting and civilians caught up in the turmoil. Both groups seem to have spoken to him with considerable openness, with the result that his portrait of Poland in 1863 is a remarkably full one. He claims it was his informants’

knowledge “that they could repose entire confidence in the sympathy and honour of an Irish gentleman” that led them to speak to him without reserve. One suspects that this may not have been the whole story, and that as a veteran of 1848 O’Brien had an entrée to circles that would have been closed to other travellers. While otherwise wide-ranging in his account, it is striking that most of his informants appear to have belonged to the *szlachta*. He was impressed by this group commenting: “in all my intercourse with society I have never met with gentlemen more courteous, more refined, more intelligent, and more humane than these members of the aristocracy of Poland.”⁵⁰ By virtue of their social position both he and they were reluctant revolutionaries, whose justification was that they took up arms as a last resort. It may be that as, a scion of an old Irish family whose involvement in 1848 was driven by a sense of *noblesse oblige*, O’Brien was better placed than most to sympathise with the doomed attempt of the Warsaw and Lithuanian *szlachta* to reconcile patriotism with the need to conciliate the Czar. Although his lecture is otherwise bereft of class sentiment, there is an unmistakable throb of fellow feeling when he touches on the threat of confiscation of property which hung over his Polish interlocutors.

During his travels O’Brien saw and heard enough to provide a vivid portrait of a country in the throes of insurrection. Cracow, in his description, is a city whose “streets and promenades” are “crowded with young men”, waiting for an opportunity to cross the frontier and “take part in the struggle.” The city’s hospitals are full of wounded insurgents, “most impatient to be healed, not that they might return to their homes, but that they might again repair to the forests for the purpose of fighting against the Russians”. In the Russian partition the “young and vigorous” have departed for the forests to carry out a “system of guerrilla warfare”. (He notes that, in warfare of this kind, in summer the advantage lies with the irregular forces, but they cannot remain in the field in winter.) Meanwhile the “fathers of families” are compelled to stay at home, where they “await the fate which the caprice of Russian cruelty may inflict.” Everywhere O’Brien encounters reports of Russian atrocities. Since the Warsaw massacres of 1861 “the men and women of Poland have not only worn the sable dress which indicates a general mourning, but they have abstained from all social pleasures. During more than two years

the theatres have been closed – No one dances, no one sings ...” All this takes place against the background of a surprisingly effective “Secret Government”, whose mechanisms must have provided O’Brien with an instructive contrast with the failure of his own efforts seventeen years previously.⁵¹ He was clearly intrigued by this authority which was successful in the basic task of government, collecting taxes, whose administration of justice was accepted by public opinion and whose orders, conveyed by clandestine newspapers which baffled the Russian police, were obeyed by all.

O’Brien’s account of what he heard and saw in Poland is intermittently interrupted by passages of purple prose, as the rhetoric soars to do justice to the sanctity of the Polish cause. In this spirit, commenting on the insurrection, he wrote, “ That which seemed at first to be but the last convulsive agony of despair, which was destined to terminate in the destruction or expatriation of a few humble artisans, has become a grand national movement, and it is to be hoped now that the destruction of the Assyrians under Sennacherib will not have been a more signal instance of Divine vengeance than the expulsion and extermination from the soil of Poland which awaits the legions of the Muscovite Czar”.

Given this frame of mind, O’Brien was nothing if not responsive to the drama of Polish history. Viewing the tombs of the Polish king in the Wawel, this descendent of the kings of Thomond “could not refrain from exclaiming – Where are the successors of these heroic sovereigns? ...a Sovereignty has been extinguished by a lawless combination of crowned bandits, who have united to rob the Polish nation of its indefeasible rights. Let others go in search of arguments which may justify the Poles in rebelling against the Muscovite robber – For my part I require no argument beyond that which thus spoke to my heart when I visited the Cathedral of Cracow, and told me it is never too late to redress a wrong or to punish a crime.”

The Kosciusko memorial outside the city was found to be equally moving, being described as a “still nobler monument, erected by the spontaneous efforts of the population of Cracow”. This is “a mound or tumulus, similar to those which were erected

more than two thousand years ago over the bodies of the kings of Ireland in the sepulchral fields which adjoin our river Boyne.” The passage concludes, “Standing on this summit – surrounded by objects calculated to excite and intensify emotion – could I do otherwise than vow that I would bring to the aid of the Kosciuskos of modern Poland all that is generous, all that is noble, all that is brave in the hearts and arms of my fellow-countrymen?” O’Brien’s account of Warsaw, although stylistically more sober, is not without pathos. Warsaw, he wrote, “is one of the finest capitals of Europe, and, as the manners of the inhabitants are social and genial, it ought to be one of the most agreeable of residences: but, alas! the enjoyments of social life have been blighted by the accursed tyranny to which its inhabitants are subject.”⁵²

William Smith O’Brien’s efforts on the part of the Poles seem to have been noted by the Czarist authorities, to judge by the appearance, one year after his intervention, of *Petersburg and Warsaw: Scenes Witnessed during a Residence in Poland and Russia 1863-4*. The author, Augustine P. O’Brien, presents himself as a fair minded observer, endowed with “a hereditary English indignation against oppression”,⁵³ who has been led to reconsider his views during a visit to Lithuania and Poland during the course of the insurrection. In spite of his disposition towards liberty, he appears to have changed his outlook with little difficulty, and emerges in the work as a robust opponent of the Polish cause. He certainly had an impressive knack for turning up at the right place and time; the characteristic narrative movement of *Petersburg and Warsaw* involves the author arriving on the scene shortly after some spectacular disturbance or act of Polish outrage. The senior Czarist figure present, almost invariably a military officer, explains his government’s point of view with grave firmness, following which the author pleads (invariably successfully) that mercy be granted to some young and misled rebel in the custody of the Russian authorities.

In spite of the extraordinary scenes its author witnesses, *Petersburg and Warsaw* is a curiously impersonal work, which contains little by way of particularity or surprise, and no sense of an observing personality responding to the strangeness and novelty of that which it encounters. The society through which O’Brien travels is one which offers no

linguistic resistance as, in what might seem a challenging situation for a Victorian gentleman, he conducts conversations on subjects of some complexity, without difficulty or the aid of an interpreter, with wounded rebels, Catholic clergy, Polish landowners and Russian generals. O'Brien for his part is an individual without a biography; he does not feature in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and is the author of no other known work. For such an obscure figure he certainly enjoyed extraordinary access and, at a time when other travellers reported the endless obstacles put in their way by Czarist officialdom, is taken into the confidence of the Russian side and admitted to the heart of their administration in their prisons and courts. Even more strikingly, for a traveller in a country convulsed by rebellion, he is received by senior officials of the Russian administration such as General Mouravieff and Count de Berg, who not only make themselves freely available, but explain their thoughts on matters of deep policy, with every appearance of frankness, to a person they are meeting for the first time. The suspicion would surely arise that these grandees had remarkably little to do with their time, were it not that the views communicated invariably reflect the concerns of Russia's rulers.

Petersburg and Warsaw is a work which deconstructs itself in the course of reading. Although its author had access to huge amounts of local information, it seems plain that most of the scenes of which the work is made up never took place. While it purports to be a travel book, its attempts at self-verification are transparently contrived, and it can be thought of as a series of episodes crafted to put across the official Russian point of view and rebut some of the main accusations made by Russia's critics. Its author is aware that, in adopting this standpoint, he is writing against the weight of Western opinion, as shaped by a multitude of commentators. The latter include "English gentlemen travelling through Poland, who, touched by tales of oppression related to them, take up their pens and, filled with virtuous indignation, make the English people acquainted with tales of horror, which the narrators firmly believe, but whose origin may be traced to the interested framers of such reports."⁵⁴ *Petersburg and Warsaw* is a sustained attempt to disinfect such reports; its unavowed, but discernable, point of view is not that of a traveller on the roads of

Lithuania and Poland, but a press officer in the Czarist embassy in London, who is intensely aware of the negative reports on his country which fill the Western press.

As a propagandist O'Brien employs scatter gun tactics, with the aim of disabling, or at least spreading doubt, among a variety of critical groups. "For Catholic Rome, Liberal France and Protestant England," he writes, "the story was painted to suit the occasion. At Rome it was believed; and through Rome the inhabitants of Faubourg St. Germain, and the Catholics of England and Ireland, believed that the Poles were being persecuted on account of their religion ... To the free-thinking public of France and the Protestant people of England, the insurrection was described as the heroic struggle of a people galled by a hateful yoke."⁵⁵

There are a number of points in the book at which this broad brush approach is abandoned and the specific targets can be identified. One of these would seem to have been William Smith O'Brien. When the latter went to Poland he had been concerned that the insurrection might be a revolutionary outburst "occasionné par la turbulence des éléments révolutionnaires de la société actuelle." As he makes clear in his pamphlet of 1863, if this proved to be the case he would not have wished to help. O'Brien had, however, been reassured by numerous meetings with members of the szlachta, or, as he put it, individuals who belonged to that section of society which naturally loved order as well as liberty, and was led to the firm conviction that the insurrection was national rather than class based. A year later Augustine P. O'Brien poured scorn on this viewpoint, arguing that Polish patriotism has been misused and that the Poles had allowed themselves to become the tools of blood soaked revolutionaries. The intentions of the latter were not, he argued, confined to that country; it was intended by those who controlled this vast conspiracy that the convulsion in Poland would spark a wider European revolution and that "the indignant 'peoples' of Europe would rise at the call of their natural leaders and that the war of democracy against kings, priests and statesmen would rage from the Nile to the Neva, and from the remote east to the shores of Ireland, for the Emerald Isle had an important part allotted to her in the projected drama."⁵⁶

It is possible that there was an individual called Augustine P. O'Brien who, in return for payment, lent his name to the enterprise represented by *Petersburg and Warsaw*. Whatever the role of its putative author, it is certain that this attempt to frighten the major Western powers with the spectre of revolutionary democracy was the product of a mind in the service of the Czarist state. Even if someone who bore the name Augustine O'Brien existed, in the sense that the various encounters he described never happened but were contrivances on which to hang the views of the Russian authorities, he was a fiction. Given that his journey was fabricated, all in all it seems likely that this was also the case with the author. It is not clear why, having been given the persona of an English gentleman, he was assigned such a conspicuously Milesian name. It may have been a piece of mischievous disinformation, intended to create confusion and undermine William Smith O'Brien's pamphlet of the previous year. It is, however, just possible that buried in the pseudonym there was a grim joke on the part of the Czarist secret police, the Okhrana. Some years after his Dublin sojourn Józef Czapksi, by then a figure of interest to police forces throughout Europe, travelled to Marianbad and Vienna under an assumed Irish identity as John O'Brien. If in 1864 anyone was likely to have recalled this detail, it was those who concocted *Petersburg and Warsaw*.⁵⁷

The dialectic of insurrection and organic work, which marked nineteenth century Polish history, could be seen as having an Irish equivalent in the alternate strategies of armed separatism and pursuit of the national agenda by parliamentary means. In his speech of 1863 although wishing well to the Poles, William Smith O'Brien was not sanguine about their prospects without the military intervention of an outside power. Where Irish affairs were concerned, as an unsuccessful rebel in 1848, he discouraged the revolutionary Fenian movement of the 1860s. Both prognostications proved well founded, with the Polish rising of 1863-64 and Fenian rising of 1867 ending in defeat. The experience of failure had had a comparable impact within both body politics, with the Polish retreat from revolutionary romanticism to a chastened and more pragmatic approach to the national question, following the crushing of the January rising, echoed in Ireland during the same period, as domination of the political scene by the Fenian Brotherhood mutated into the activity of the Land League.

These alternations should not be over stated, as the choice of strategy was a function of what was possible at any given time. In Ireland's case many of those who had been Fenians in the 1860s were active Land Leaguers a little more than a decade later. Nonetheless the shift towards a more realistic assessment of what was achievable did not take place without strain, as the more sober-minded among the Polish and Irish elite grew increasingly exasperated with the verbal maximalism of their revolutionary brethren. It was in this spirit that, following the failure of the uprising of 1863, Julian Lukaszewski admonished his countrymen, "The latest uprising has taught us a great lesson; we have had a difficult education. The noose, conflagration, Siberia, the general repression at home and exile abroad ought to sober us completely and bring it home to us that it is not in poetry and clairvoyance or in higher missions that political calculation lies, but in the awareness of the actual conditions of our country, in its wealth and resources, which await future great deeds."⁵⁸ Lukaszewski's comments could be compared to the advice of caution, and a prudent awareness of the sheer weight of British power, which A.M. Sullivan of *The Nation* tendered to the young Fenians in the 1850s, or the even more astringent verbal medicine administered some years later by Thomas D'Arcy McGee to his (as he believed) deluded fellow countrymen.⁵⁹

Similarities at the level of political history can be paralleled in the religious experience of the two peoples. The nineteenth century Irish, like the Poles, gathered around their church and, in the absence of alternative institutions, made it an instrument of national self-assertion. As a result, the bishops in both countries had to manoeuvre between the demands of their flocks and the need to deal with the occupying power. The Vatican's well documented inclination to side with Vienna and St. Petersburg, rather than with the oppressed Polish faithful, had its echo in Papal willingness to exert a calming influence in Ireland in the hope of securing diplomatic relations between Great Britain and the Holy See in return. (Both initiatives came to nothing, as neither St Petersburg nor London was willing to deal.) An early twentieth century Italian observer, looking back on the reign of Pius IX, described the Pope, mindful of the needs of the Papal States, as having "abandoned the unfortunate Catholics of Poland to Russian tyranny, and refrained from

raising his voice in defence of the Irish Catholics.”⁶⁰ Rome’s indifference to the suffering of Catholics in both countries inevitably aroused resentment. Although it is difficult to think of an Irish writer who might have expressed himself in such extravagantly subversive terms, many Irish readers would have seen the point of Slowacki’s satire involving the Polish patriot Kordian, the Pope and a demented Latin speaking parrot.⁶¹

In a striking formulation, Eamon de Valera once expressed the view that “analogies are disgusting.” One does not have to share this view to realize the limitations of comparison; one thing is not another and, similarities notwithstanding, the history of Ireland is not that of Poland. Nowhere are differences more striking than in relation to the core elements of identity, particularly language. In his essay of 1982 “Conversations in the Citadel” Adam Michnik commented on the challenge faced by his nineteenth century fellow-countrymen, “National resistance meant defence of the faith, the language and customs of fathers and grandfathers; it meant blocking through passive resistance, the persistent attacks on the national identity.”⁶²

It is at this point that Ireland and Poland part company, as the nineteenth century Irish decoupled defence of the faith from that of the language and customs of fathers and grandfathers. Ireland entered its fatal union with Great Britain in 1801, six years after the final partition of Poland. Throughout the long nineteenth century, in spite of their many disputes regarding political tactics, there was a consensus among Polish intellectuals that language and traditions must be maintained. This remained the case even in the most depressing of circumstances when, faced with the overwhelming power of the Russia and Prussia, re-establishment of statehood appeared remote or illusory. There was no equivalent to this obstinate Polish point of honour on the Irish side. It was thus that Ireland, which entered the union as an Irish-speaking nation with an English-speaking minority, recovered its independence one hundred and twenty years later as an English-speaking nation with an Irish-speaking minority. Although at the time of the Act of Union a majority of Ireland’s inhabitants spoke Irish, it was a language under threat, with English having made extensive inroads in the east of the country. In terms of public administration and power structures it was of no consequence. The intensified pressure

made possible by the Union, the Great Famine of the 1840s in which the Irish-speaking poor were overwhelmingly the victims, and the accompanying changes in Irish mentalities, sealed the fate of the language.

In the view of later cultural nationalists, the nineteenth century, which witnessed the great retreat of the Irish language, constituted an unparalleled disaster. In contrast with the high-spirited Polish defence of the national substance, there was on the Irish side, throughout most of the nineteenth century, effectively nothing. Instead, as politics displaced culture, those intent on protecting what they saw as the essence of the nation, such as Matthew Graham in Louth or Philip Barron in Waterford, were isolated figures who never acquired sufficient weight to matter. The difference between Polish and Irish attitudes was noted by the perceptive Betty O'Brien who commented, "Polish is the language of the people and all speak it, but French is used in good society. It is a good thing that the Poles keep alive their old tongue.... After all what were they to do? – speak the conqueror's tongue as we unfortunate Irish have done? Perish the thought! Neither German nor Russian will ever be the tongue of Poland".⁶³ It was only towards the end of the century, with the emergence of Gaelic revivalism, that voices equivalent to those which were so widespread in Poland began to make themselves heard. By this point, as is clear in retrospect, it was too late.

Both Poland and Ireland shared the common situation of what Adam Michnik has described as "a menaced national existence".⁶⁴ Each reacted differently. In reflecting on why matters which were so diligently attended to in one country were so neglected in another, a number of reflections come to mind. The most obvious of these is that, in comparison with Ireland, Poland had much greater resources. In addition to the peasant majority, it possessed a land-owning gentry, an emerging middle-class, an intelligentsia, an elite diaspora and a national church. Ireland had nothing equivalent to the social density of nineteenth century Poland, merely poor peasants, farmers, a small middle-class and a scattered and poorly resourced intelligentsia. Although the Anglo-Irish land-owning class were urged, by figures ranging from Samuel Ferguson to Standish O'Grady, to place themselves at the head of their country's affairs, such calls remained largely

ineffectual as, translated into Irish terms, the intense patriotism of the Polish szlachta could only have been subversive of the Union.

Ireland's democratic political elite, which in other circumstances might have been in the forefront of cultural nationalism, found itself from the 1830s onwards caught up in the endless business of Westminster. Although Ireland had a church, its leadership tended towards pragmatism and had its own agenda (most notably relating to control of education). Moreover, in the second half of the century, the Irish church increasingly emerged as the mother church of the Irish diaspora throughout the English-speaking world. In these circumstances it was, to say the least, unlikely to share the linguistic concerns of the Poles, and indeed the practice of preaching in English to Irish-speaking congregations features among the reasons advanced by contemporary observers for the decline of Irish.

As Oliver Mc Donagh has argued, as a result of the union with Great Britain, Ireland found itself linked in an unequal partnership with what was then the most advanced state in the world. One result was that Britain had the means to penetrate Ireland, through public administration, law and education, with a thoroughness, indeed intimacy, that in the Polish case was quite beyond the powers of the ramshackle Czarist state. Even in the most difficult of times Poland always had at its disposal an institute of higher education, either in Vilno, Lwow or Cracow. Once again, Ireland had nothing equivalent. Lacking thus Poland's resources, and under pressure of a state intent on language change through the means of mass education in English, for many of the Irish rural poor English represented the only available bridge to modernity and economic advancement. One result was that the advice tendered by Rousseau to the Poles, that they should defy their oppressors by clinging to everything that particularised them, was in Irish circumstances untenable.

In *Dublin Moja Polska Karma* Magdalena Orzeł notices that, although Irish is afforded considerable symbolic importance in contemporary Ireland, as a spoken language it is seldom heard. Reflecting on this she comments with bleak finality, "my mamy swój

język, a oni wyspę. Każdy ma coś” (we have our language and they have [their] island. Everybody has something.) One result of the retreat of the language was that nineteenth and early twentieth century Irish separatism could not be articulated in terms of classic, language-based cultural nationalism. The paradox that one of the most nationalist peoples in Europe were in the course of abandoning their native language was occasionally noted, with some surprise, by Polish observers. As a young man, caught up in the political excitement of the post-1916 period and enraptured by the poetry of Mickiewicz, Aodh de Blácam found himself embarrassed, in conversation with Polish friends, by the undeniable fact that Irish people, although on the point of electing their own parliament, did not speak Irish. His attempts to explain this anomaly, led to some confusion, as his interlocutor demanded, “Why, if we claimed to be a separate race and to be possessed of a distinctive language, had we sold our birth-right by adopting an alien language for our daily use?” Attempts to explain by reference to Irish history – that the famine and the national schools had driven the heart out of the people – were dismissed and “I was told to look to the case of Poland – a country for the past century under three masters who spoke each an alien tongue, and yet that country has ever heard its own native tongue beneath each village thatch and even in its own slums.” In response to the young Irishman’s special pleading, the Pole proposed a breathtakingly rigorous and unbending view of identity, as located in the continuum of language, self and community. This was summarised as, “In Poland, the man who lives in Germany and talks Polish is a Pole; the man who talks German and lives in Warsaw is German. Even if your father and your father’s father have lived within the political boundaries of a land, but you do not speak the native language of that land, you take your nationality from the alien language that you speak.”⁶⁵

Half a century before Aodh de Blácam encountered the “scorn” and “contempt” of his Polish acquaintance, another young Irishman found himself in an equally embarrassing situation. The individual in question was John Pope Hennessy who, as a Catholic Tory and as a member of parliament for King’s County (Offaly), was a prominent defender of the Polish cause during the 1860s. During the course of a visit to Poland, at a dinner given in his honour in Cracow, he was requested by one of the women in the company to

sing some well-known song in Irish. When he confessed himself unable to do so, explaining that Ireland had become an English speaking country, he was asked what he would think of the Poles if they were only able to speak “po moskiewsku” (in Moscovite)? To this the Irish visitor was unable to reply.

The story of Pope Hennessy’s humiliation was a detail within a larger argument, advanced in the Poznan journal *Głos Wolny* in 1865, on whether the Fenian movement was analogous to Polish resistance to Russian rule. As the author’s choice of the Hennessy episode suggests, he accepts the categories of nineteenth century nationalism, but argues that the Irish do not qualify for admission to the club. He is particularly incensed by the combination of self-deception and self-love, which allows the Irish to present their relationship with Britain as analogous with that of Poland with Russia. “No comparison,” *Głos Wolny* asserts, “could be more unfounded.” The analogy is rejected on the grounds that Ireland is defective in respect of nationality, language and the possession of a state prior to the English conquest. In a further accusation the author, who evidently belonged to the left-wing of European nationalism, argues that the Irish are to be excluded from the company of oppressed nations because of their general backwardness. They had, he notes, failed to extend solidarity to the Italians in their struggle for liberty and had supported the reactionary forces of Austria, the Pope and the King of Naples. Unlike the Catholic Church in Poland, which was progressive and enlightened in comparison to Orthodoxy, the Irish Church was an obstacle to progress and a patron of ignorance. Unlike Poland, which stands between Europe and the Asiatic barbarism of Russia, and whose triumph will be a victory of civilization, democracy and morality, the priest-ridden Irish lack an authentic nationality and their struggle against England is bereft of historical mission or European significance.⁶⁶ The freeing of Ireland from the civilizing influence of England would not therefore be a contribution to universal progress.

The *Głos Wolny* article is an explosion of contempt for Irish pretensions to be considered on the same plane as Poland. It provides evidence for the pervasiveness of the Irish-Polish analogy, which the writer had evidently heard once too often and which has got

badly on his nerves. Although its dominant impulse is one of rejection, the article nonetheless implies a certain reluctant admiration for the outrageousness of the Irish. Its rhetoric registers a palpable astonishment at the sheer improbability that, against all odds, a serious effort should have been made to free Ireland from British rule. This effort is regarded as absurd, in a piece that is pervaded by a heavy, pragmatic realism and an awareness of the power of the imperial state. In its sense of the futility of resistance, the *Głos Wolny* article speaks out of the post insurrectionary exhaustion that gripped Poland following the crushing of the rising of 1863. To the degree therefore that the piece is as much about Poland as its ostensible subject, Ireland, it confirms the analogy which its author is intent on negating. As with later progressive commentators, most notably Edmund Naganowski, the possibility that reactionary nations – as he would have perceived matters – have their rights, would seem to have been outside the writer’s conceptual frame.

Poland was deeply and consistently, and Ireland intermittently, moved by the impact of literary romanticism. The result in both cases was an exalted insurrectionary language, as romanticism provided a new, and at times startlingly original, vehicle for the articulation of local passions. Yeats’ self-interrogation in old age, as he reflected on the impact of his play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* on a generation of young nationalists,

Did that play of mine send out
 Certain men the English shot?

would have had a resonance in Poland as in few other parts of Europe. Literary commerce between the two countries began early. In 1971, in a paper of elegant and wide-ranging scholarship, the Irish Ambassador to the Netherlands, Eóin MacWhite, traced the impact of Ireland’s national bard, Thomas Moore, on Polish literature. As MacWhite demonstrates, in Poland as elsewhere in Europe, the first generation of romantics proved highly responsive to Moore’s combination of the national, the fashionably exotic and the saccharine. His impact is registered in a series of translations and imitations, undertaken by some of the most distinguished figures in early nineteenth century Polish literature. This network of influence and appropriation included

Mickiewicz, who translated “The Meeting of the Waters,” and Slowacki whose *Melodia Moora* were lost for many years and only published in 1952. One of the most fascinating aspects of Ambassador MacWhite’s paper is his demonstration that, in contrast to Western Europe, where Moore’s admirers included King Frederick William IV of Prussia, Goethe, Stendhal and Mme de Staël, “in Eastern Europe, whether under the heel of Tsarist autocracy, the Austro-Hungarian Emperors, or the Ottoman Turk, his admirers and translators were more likely to be in a garret or a prison cell than in a royal palace or the mansion of a lord”. Like the Russian Decembrists, Moore’s Polish admirers were explicit in acknowledging this political dimension. Thus when Krystyn Ostrowski, the son of the general of the Warsaw garrison who joined the Rising of 1831, forwarded a copy of his translation of “The Loves of the Angels”, he addressed the poet a title by a title with which he “not a little flattered ...the national poet of all oppressed countries.”⁶⁷

With the growth of literacy in nineteenth century Ireland, patriotic verse becomes one of the staples of local newspapers and magazines catering for a new readership. There was obviously an immense demand for verse of this kind, the sheer quantity of which cannot but impress. Over many decades patriotic verse provided an eloquent restatement of familiar themes, commented on issues of the day, and strove to keep up Irish spirits in difficult times. Such verse could range between nostalgia for past glories and rousing prophecies of better things to come and, in terms of quality, between the pedestrian and the superb. Local writers were quick to recognize the affinities between Ireland’s situation and that of Poland; comment on Polish affairs in nationalist newspapers throughout the century was almost invariably sympathetic, while the great insurrections of 1830 and 1863 were followed by pro-Polish verse.

“A Ballad of Freedom” by Thomas Davis, a key figure in the emergence of Irish cultural nationalism, provides a representative instance of this declamatory public poetry. The first three verses of the poem, which appeared in the immensely popular mid-century anthology, *The Spirit of the Nation*, denounce French oppression in Algeria, English oppression in India, and Russian oppression of the people in the Caucasus. The poem reaches its climax in the fourth verse, with an invocation of Poland, and a postulated

brotherhood of the oppressed, which will extend from Sind in British India to the River Shannon in Ireland.

But Russia preys on Poland's fields, where Sobieski reigned;
 And Austria on Italy – the Roman eagle chained –
 Bohemia, Servia, Hungary, within her clutches gasp;
 And Ireland struggles gallantly in England's loosening grasp.

Oh! Would all these their strength unite, or battle on alone,
 Like Moor, Pushtani, and Cherkess, they soon would have their own.
 Hurrah! Hurrah! It can't be far, when from the Scindh to Sionainn
 Shall gleam a line of freemen's flags begirt with freemen's cannon!
 The coming day of Freedom – the flashing flags of Freedom”⁶⁸

As Davis comes close to acknowledging in productions of this kind, Poland, like other victims of the nineteenth century empires, acts as a surrogate for Ireland, so that denunciation of Czarist oppression is, by extension, denunciation of Ireland's oppressors. His vision was not, however, a narrow one; in a variant on the theme of “for your freedom and ours”, in an essay of 1844 Davis argued that Poland, Italy and Hungary should be glad at the progress of the Irish cause. “We are battling for Ireland,” he wrote, “if we conquer it will be for mankind.”⁶⁹

The tactic of indirect expression attained a rare and chilling eloquence in James Clarence Mangan's “Siberia” which was published in *The Nation* of 18 April 1846. Mangan's editors comment that he had, no doubt, “been reading in *The Nation*, specifically the issue of April 11, about captured revolutionary leaders in Russian Poland. Several were executed, but some lives were spared and these men were ‘degraded from the ranks and condemned to hard labour in Siberia.’ ” In the poem, the desolate physical and human landscape of Siberia acts as an emblem both for Mangan's own hopelessness, and for the misery and despair of Ireland in the years of the Great Famine:

In Siberia's wastes
 Are sands and rocks
 Nothing blooms of green or soft,
 But the snow-peaks rise aloft
 And the gaunt ice-blocks.

And the exile there
 Is one with those;

They are part, and he is part,
For the sands are in his heart,
And the killing snows.

Therefore, in those wastes
None curse the Czar.
Each man's tongue is cloven by
The North Blast, that heweth nigh
With sharp scimitar.

And such doom each drees,
Till, hunger-gnawn,
And cold-slain, he at length sinks there,
Yet scarce more a corpse than ere
His last breath was drawn.⁷⁰

Mangan's engagement with Poland was not confined to the anguished register represented by "Siberia." Such was his delight in puns and word play, that he was irresistibly drawn to the verbal coincidence between the brave inhabitants of that central European country and the North and South Poles. Among a number of such jests from his pen, this gave rise to the following epigram in *A Polyglott Anthology* of 1839.

Quote Prince Pultrowski, while darning his clothing,
" 'Tish odd! I can't patch von single hole."
"Very odd," said a hearer, "for folks think nothing
As true to the needle as the Pole."⁷¹

Mangan, whose learning was wide-ranging and impressively non-pedantic, accompanied the poem with a line in what he evidently wished his readers to take for Polish; "Strzemlejno sztdrosztj Pujltrzouski ojpol dzcnek a gyeza." Although we may hope this means something, Polish friends profess themselves unable to make sense of it.

The sentiments articulate by Davis and Mangan in the 1840s continued to resonate over the decades that followed. All accounts agree that the Polish rising of 1863 was followed with intense interest in Ireland. The biographer of James Joyce's father, John Stanislaus Joyce, reports his reminiscence that when the aria "When the Fair Land of Poland" from Balfe's opera *The Bohemian Girl* was sung in his native Cork, "it was always received with great appreciation":

When the fair land of Poland
was ploughed by the hoof of the ruthless invader,
when the might of steel to the bosom,
and flame to the roof, completed her triumph o'er right;
in that moment of danger
when freedom invoked all the fetterless sons of her pride,
in a phalanx as dauntless as freedom e'er yoked,
I fought and I bled by her side.⁷²

The Irish-Polish interaction, whose outline we have followed from the time of Edmund Burke to that of the Fenians, continued to resonate in both literature and politics for several generations more. It can be traced from the shared defeats of the 1860s as far as the First World War and, with diminishing resonance, into the early history of the two new states. It was encountered in February 1934 by Sean Lester, when he attended an official reception in his honour at the Belvedere Palace in Warsaw. One of those who greeted him was the Polish Minister of Commerce, Ferdinand Zarzycky, who assured his guest that he was happy to welcome him on behalf of Piłsudski and “because I was an Irishman and there was an old and widespread feeling of liking and understanding between our two peoples who had to some extent trod the same path in their national history.”⁷³ The person thus addressed was a member of the recently established Irish diplomatic service. For several years Lester had had been on secondment, serving as a senior official with the Secretariat of the League of Nations in Geneva. It was in this capacity, as the recently appointed League High Commissioner in Danzig, that he paid his first visit to Warsaw and was reminded of the great Irish-Polish commonplace.

Before the partitions of the eighteenth century the Hanseatic port city of Danzig had been subject to the authority of the kings of Poland but, as part of the process by which of the Polish state was dismembered, had been incorporated into Prussia in 1793. At the end of the First World War, one of the most intractable problems with which the Versailles conference had been faced was whether this predominantly German speaking city should become part of Poland, as its economic role and geographic position at the mouth of the Vistula seemed to dictate, or remain part of Germany in keeping with the wishes of its inhabitants. The solution arrived at by the Versailles statesmen had been to

give Danzig the status of a free city, responsible for governing itself and with its own constitution and senate. While Poland was afforded certain commercial rights in the city, Danzig was not part of the Polish state, and was subject ultimately to the authority of the Council of the League of Nations. The League's representative in the city, and local bearer of its authority, was the High Commissioner.

This strange creation of the Versailles conference proved to be an irritant in international relations in the inter-war years and provided a theatre in which the rival claims of Polish and German nationalism were acted out. These tensions were becoming more acute at the time Sean Lester assumed the office of High Commissioner in late 1933. Reflecting developments in Germany, where Hitler had become chancellor in January of that year, the local Nazis had become the largest group in the Danzig Senate. This success led to pressure on other political parties, as it became increasingly clear that the victorious Nazis aspired to transform the city in line with developments in the Reich. Not much, as Paul McNamara makes clear in *Sean Lester, Poland, and the Nazi Takeover of Danzig*, was known about the new High Commissioner at the time he arrived and, as his predecessors in the office has been mostly undistinguished, little seems to have been expected. Lester was an Ulster Protestant who had taken part in the Irish struggle for independence and had, by his own account, been in his youth been “an ardent Sinn Féiner and a member of the IRB.”⁷⁴ He was also a committed democrat and a believer in the rule of law, with the result that he quickly became a major obstacle to the nazification of Danzig and, armed with the authority of the city's constitution, a protector of freedoms that had ceased to exist in Germany.

Sean Lester, Poland, and the Nazi Takeover of Danzig is the first book of a young Irish historian who has been teaching in Poland for a number of years. The story which it tells is of increasing friction between the High Commissioner and the Nazi leadership in Danzig, as Lester insisted, in one of his many complaints to the Senate, that “the ideal of a totalitarian state is incompatible with the present Constitution.”⁷⁵ Lester was not merely an irritant to the local Nazis, but his stance was noted with displeasure in Berlin which took steps to isolate and embarrass him. This campaign culminated in an episode known

as “the Leipzig incident” in June 1936, when the Danzig gauleiter, Albert Forster, engineered a crisis aimed at forcing Lester out of the free city. This involved a deliberate snub, when the officers of a visiting German cruiser, the *Leipzig*, acting under instruction from their government, refused to pay a courtesy call on the High Commissioner. The episode received wide publicity with the result that Lester, who at the best of times had received only lukewarm support from the League of Nations Council, became an embarrassment to the League and his position was rendered untenable. The episode was followed some time later by his resignation, which was clearly a contrived affair, and return to Geneva on promotion. With his departure the authority of the League in Danzig was fatally undermined, while one of the last significant obstacles to the Nazi takeover of the city was removed.

While this is a depressing story, Paul McNamara tells it fluently and well and enlivens his narrative with sharp political judgments on the motives and self-deceptions of the various state actors in the drama. As someone who lives in Poland and speaks that language, he has been able to make good use of material from the archive of the Polish Foreign Ministry of the inter-war period. Polish diplomacy of the 1930s has been much criticised. The author is, quite properly, is concerned to rebut some of the more outlandish accusations made against 1930s Poland and argues persuasively that, although authoritarian and unattractive in some of its policies, it was in no way comparable with the monstrous regimes to its east and west. That having been granted, Poland’s record during Sean Lester’s period as High Commissioner is not an impressive one. Considered in terms of national self-interest, Lester was an obvious ally of the Polish state; as a robust guardian of the Danzig constitution he had a role both in maintaining the Polish interest in the city and blunting the Nazi push to incorporate it into the Reich. Instead, in what can only appear an extraordinary act of folly, Foreign Minister Józef Beck chose to go over the head of the League and, acting in the belief that his country was a major European power, deal directly with Berlin. Although Poland’s representative in Danzig pointed out the obvious in his reports to Warsaw, the message failed to get through to Beck, who seems to have conducted diplomacy as a one man band. As a result, during the period of maximum Nazi pressure on Lester, when its diplomatic support could only

have been helpful, Poland failed to support the High Commissioner. Two years later, faced with an unchallengeable Nazi ascendancy in Danzig, Beck found himself desperately trying to reinforce the authority of the League in the city. By then, of course, it was too late.

The tragedy which befell Poland in the years between 1939 and 1945 was noted with sadness in Ireland, with secular and religious leaders expressing sympathy for Polish suffering. One commentator, writing in *The Catholic Bulletin* in October 1939, summarised a widespread feeling when, making use of the Irish language term for affection or love, he observed, “All true Irishmen have a *gradh* for Poland, by reason of past history, and Poland reciprocated this regard in the days when Adam Mickiewicz read a Young Irelander’s book as he died.”⁷⁶ The Polish Consul General in Dublin, Waclaw Dobrzyński, recalled meeting with the President of Ireland, Dr. Douglas Hyde, “sometime in the course of that disastrous – for Poland – summer of 1945.” During a long meeting, having asked Dobrzyński “to tell him all I knew about Poland’s tragic situation,” the elderly President was visibly moved and had tears in his eyes when he said farewell to his visitor.⁷⁷ This sorrow was shared by others, including Sean Lester. The latter’s judgment was inevitably a mixed one as, on hearing that Germany had seized Danzig and invaded Poland, he reflected with some bitterness on that country’s “claim to play the role of a great power, their exercise of a raw type of power politics, [and] their stupid support of Germany when the latter was destroying the League.” To these sour thoughts he added the more charitable reflection, “But Beck and his satellites are not the Polish people ... Poland’s history is so like our own. No Irishman can have other than sympathy and admiration for the Poles.”⁷⁸

In spite of a sustained interest in developments in Poland, Irish writers have been slow to engage in a more formal way with Polish history. To the best of my knowledge, Paul McNamara’s book is the first work having an aspect of Polish history as its subject since Bernard Connor in the early eighteenth century. Polish historians have been equally slow to write about Ireland. One exception in recent decades has been Adam Zamoyski who, in a notably engaged and provocative essay of 1989, reflected on Ireland’s “many

similarities and parallels with my own subject; Poland.” As might be expected from a distinguished Anglo-Polish historian, Zamoyski’s comparative perspective resulted in a number of challenging insights on experiences common to both countries. His discussion, to take one example, of the impact of emigration proved to be particularly interesting. Emigration, he believed, “siphoned off the most vital and disruptive element in the rural community, thereby reinforcing – or at least – preserving the rural ethos, conservatism, and religious conformity ... In very tangible ways it permitted those left behind to perpetuate archaic patterns of life, while the remittances helped create a continuing sense of dependence on outside help.”⁷⁹ This is certainly suggestive and, like much good generalisation, constitutes an invitation to debate, if not to complete agreement.

Zamoyski’s reflections on emigration are modest, indeed almost empirical, compared to the main thrust of his argument, which is nothing if not wide ranging. Ireland emerges in the *Encounter* essay as a country misled by an essentialist concept of itself, which is both politically mischievous and false to its plural and multi-layered identity. “Irish national dreams,” in the author’s view, while not of the same order as those which led inter-war Germany to disaster, “have nevertheless been highly destructive and continue to weigh on the country, impeding its evolution and condemning it to endlessly rehearse the canons of its own inadequacy.” Ireland is a country which is unwilling to accept its own diversity. Although “Irish historians since the 1940s have ... been at pains to re-evaluate and to ask difficult questions ... this has hardly affected the popular version of Irish history clung to by the public mind. Here, amnesia is cultivated on a staggering scale, allowing the persistence of a negative and sectarian consensus.” As a people the Irish need to come “to terms with reality” by jettisoning “myths and artifices”, including or “rich and complex baggage of escapist culture.”⁸⁰

As a newcomer to Irish studies, whose knowledge of the subject in 1989 was, by his own account, based on a reading of Roy Foster’s *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* and a trip to Galway, Adam Zamoyski was not afraid to draw conclusions. Inevitably, as readers, we turn to the historical analysis offered to see how far it supports the author’s bold

generalisations. One such moment, when the argument turns to specifics, concerns the cultural nationalism of the 1840s, seen as an example of Ireland imposing false categories upon itself and failing to acknowledge its own diversity. The relevant passage reads:

As the Young Ireland movement struggled to define “Irishness”, it clutched at increasingly mythical notions of *volk*. By leaning more heavily on perceptions of the Gaelic and Catholic nature of “the true Ireland”, they managed to unite one segment of the population by giving it a largely spurious identity, alienating in the process those Irishmen who were neither Gaelic nor Catholic in origin. By the 1890s, these, who made up the majority of the population of Ulster, were made to feel that those who were striving to create the new Ireland did not consider them to be true Irishmen.⁸¹

This may not be the best of examples to support Adam Zamoyski’s case. One of the most astonishing features of the Young Ireland movement of the 1840s was the popularity of its weekly newspaper *The Nation*, with a claimed readership of a quarter of a million. This was unprecedented in the history of Irish literacy as, for the first time, a newspaper secured a mass readership through such devices as Repeal Reading Rooms and the practice of literates reading aloud to their non-literate neighbours. Other interest groups at around the same time, ranging from the conservative *Irish Penny Magazine* to the non-sectarian liberalism of the *Irish Penny Journal*, had attempted to connect with and influence an emerging peasant readership with disappointing results. One factor in explaining the success of *The Nation*, apart from the popularity of its Repeal politics, was the editors’ policy of encoding its message in ballad poetry and patriotic verse on themes resonant of Irish life and history. This turned out to be a winning formula, as the verse of *The Nation* proved to be hugely popular. This was not confined to the newspaper’s immediate readership but, by means of the frequently reprinted anthology *The Spirit of the Nation*, extended over several generations. So successful indeed was the cultural strategy of Thomas Davis and his associates that at the end of the nineteenth century an exasperated W. B. Yeats was calling for the de-Davisization of Irish poetry.

Those who supplied *The Nation* with its verse were certainly a miscellaneous group. In addition to the high Anglican Davis, they included the impoverished and arthritic schoolmaster Edward Walsh, whose roots were deep in Gaelic Munster, the Dubliner James Clarence Mangan, and the flamboyant mother of Oscar Wilde, Jane Francesca Elgee. It is,

to say the least, improbable that, unlike the rivals in the penny magazines, this eccentric group should have fabricated a false consciousness which they contrived to foist upon their readers. Their success in connecting with what Victorian commentators called “the lower Irish” lay rather in the familiarity of their message. *The Spirit of the Nation* can be seen a re-articulation in print of sentiments, narratives and lore, which had been current among the Gaelic Irish and which proved acceptable to them in this new guise, as they moved towards the English language and literacy. This did not, of course, constitute the whole of the Young Ireland enterprise, but without an underpinning of cultural authenticity *The Nation* could hardly have enjoyed its extraordinary success.

Adam Zamoyski’s analysis of Irish history has as its focus divisions consequent on the great land confiscations of the seventeenth century. For one who attaches such importance to this motif, his argument is marked by a striking lack of attention to elementary discriminations. This is particularly striking in his conflating of the multi-class Protestant community of north-east Ulster and the much more thinly spread and socially less variegated landowning interest throughout the rest of the country. Moreover, far from it being the case that “nationalists relentlessly ignored”⁸² confessional divisions, it can be shown that this was a recurrent preoccupation. The need to transcend ethnic and religious divisions, which was a leit motif in Young Ireland writing, found regular expression in the poetry of Thomas Davis. The deeply felt, yet at the same time strained and aspirational, nature of this desire may be inferred from the brittle and overstated quality of Davis’s rhetoric, as in the following stanza from “Celt and Saxon”:

What matter if at different shrines
 We pray unto one God –
 What matter if at different times
 Our fathers won this sod –
 In fortune and in name we’re bound
 By stronger links than steel;
 And neither can be safe nor sound
 But in the other’s weal.⁸³

Davis was aware of the limitations of aspirational politics and, towards the end of his short life engaged in discussions with Northern Protestant interlocutors on the possibility of federal arrangements within a Repeal Ireland. Evidence of a different kind for an

awareness of the need to conciliate may be found in his essay “Hints for Irish Historical Paintings.” This has as its starting point the assertion, “We have Irish artists, but no Irish, no national art.”⁸⁴ What follows is a classic instance of high cultural nationalism as Davis assembles – on the printed page at least – an art collection in which the history of the country is to be given pictorial embodiment. This elaborate imagining of the Irish past takes the form of suggested topic for paintings, extending from “The Landing of the Milesians” to “Father Mathew Administering the Pledge in a Munster County.” Sixteen of the proposed subjects are drawn from the eighteenth century. Two of these, “Cremona” and “Fontenoy”, concern the feats of Irish soldiers serving in continental armies. Five from towards the end of the century deal with the United Irishmen and the insurrection of 1798. The remaining subjects, which are drawn from the history of Anglo-Ireland in its patriotic incarnation, are “Sir Stephen Rice Pleading against the Violation of the Treaty of Limerick”, “Molyneux’s Books Burned”, “Liberty Boys Reading a Drapier’s Letter”, “Lucas Surrounded by Dublin Citizens in his Shop”, “Grattan Moving Liberty”, “Flood Apostrophising Liberty”, “Dungannon Convention”, “Curran Cross-examining Armstrong” and “Curran Pleading Before the Council in Alderman James’s Case”. These episodes, which lie between Jacobite nostalgia at the beginning of the century and Jacobin subversion at its end, are predominantly civic and rational in spirit and have as their unmistakable import that persuasion should be exhausted before recourse is made to arms.

Paintings of the kind Davis wished to see in an Irish national collection are familiar from some of the less visited rooms of many European art galleries, where they are associated with such episodes as the Risorgimento and the more dramatic moments of Czech, Hungarian, German and Polish history. No doubt if the Repeal movement of the 1840s had succeeded, commissions would have issued for paintings based on at least some of the suggested themes. Davis’s imagined eighteenth century is predominantly Protestant and Anglo-Irish and only marginally Catholic and Gaelic. At least two of the subjects – “Dungannon Convention” and “The Belfast Club” – are drawn from the Ulster Protestant experience. A representative of that community visiting Davis’s gallery, far from feeling that they were “in one sense at least, non-citizens,”⁸⁵ would have recognized much that

was familiar. They would, no doubt, have been taken aback by the two final paintings in the sequence – “Conciliation - Orange and Green” and “The Lifting of the Irish Flags of an Irish Fleet and Army” – as Davis moved into prophetic mode. As we now know the conciliation which these paintings envisaged did not take place, however, as even the most cursory examination of the Young Ireland project suggests, this was for reasons other than those adduced by Adam Zamoyski.

Zamoyski’s polemic against Irish nationalism has as its basis a claim of significant affinities between the Irish inability to accommodate diversity and similar failings in Polish society. The author should therefore, by the logic of his argument, be led to deplore (to take two possible nineteenth century examples) the absence of dialogue in Wielkopolska between Polish speaking farmers and Prussian authorities intent on land redistribution and language change, or the failure of the Warsaw intelligentsia to appreciate the commitment to order and conservative Christian humanism underlying the cultural vision of the Procurator of the Holy Synod, Konstantin Pobedonastsev. Adam Zamoyski is a well-known student of Polish history and nonsense of this sort does not form part of his brief. It is true that the Jesuit influenced, seventeenth century redefinition of Polish identity as Catholic, with its concomitant exclusion of followers of the reformed churches and Ruthenian Orthodox from full citizenship, is presented as analogous with the malign consequences of Ireland’s “jumble of folkloric myth, sectarian bigotry, and political reliance on anti-British feeling to forge the national consciousness, keep the national identity alive and promote solidarity.” This is, however, a comparison with which Zamoyski feels less than comfortable, and no sooner has it been introduced than it is qualified; the Polish experience is “more complex” than that of Ireland and the Irish analogy is only “true ... in some ways of Poland.”⁸⁶

Adam Zamoyski’s desire to avoid the full weight of the Irish-Polish comparison is particularly evident in his discussion of the Polish nineteenth century. This is “an area in which different national characters are very much in evidence.”

The Polish argument was carried on with scarcely any bloodletting. It seems remarkably polite next to the rhetoric of vengeance that characterises the Irish disputes, and the occasional eruptions of half hearted and soon forgotten

vehemence contrasts with what Roy Foster call “the pornography of violence” over which Irish nationalists liked to masturbate ... Even in the darkest basement in which they planned their next assassination or train-robbery, the men of Josef Pilsudski’s fighting squads or those of the Home Army’s sabotage units never forgot for long the constitutional niceties of the constitutional system which, five centuries earlier, their ancestors had created and lived by.⁸⁷

Among the many complaints of the new English of the sixteenth century, regarding the people they had come to live among, was the Gaelic Irish fondness for public assemblies at hilltops and other prominent places. These assemblies had long since been forgotten by the early twentieth century, however, the struggle for Catholic admission to parliament and long Irish involvement in Westminster had not. The 1916 insurgents could be seen as the local equivalents to Pilsudski’s fighting squads, both in their advanced nationalism and recourse to force to assert Irish sovereignty. The Irish constitutionalist tradition was reflected in the Proclamation of the Republic, which was read outside the General Post Office in Dublin on Easter Monday 1916. It is notable that this claimed only a “provisional” authority for the government it claimed to establish, and which would be replaced at an opportune moment by “a permanent National Government, representative of the whole people of Ireland, and elected by the suffrage of all her men and women.” The principle reason given by Patrick Pearse for the unconditional surrender of the Irish Volunteers after a week of fighting was “in order to prevent the further slaughter of unarmed people.” Against this background, Adam Zamoyski’s strictures seem unduly harsh.

In Ireland over recent years the democratic legitimacy of the 1916 insurrection has been sharply contested by one strand of opinion, on the grounds that the insurgents were a small, unelected, self-appointed elite. One can well imagine that if this had been put to a tough minded member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, they might have replied that theirs was an undemocratic intervention within a wider context which was itself undemocratic. This was certainly the view of one astute observer, James Stephens, in the reflections which he penned immediately following the suppression of the rising. In his opinion the fundamental reason for what had taken place was that the leader of

parliamentary nationalism, John Redmond, had pledged Ireland to participation in Britain's war against Germany without having the authority to do so. Stephens wrote:

Why it happened is a question that may be answered more particularly. It happened because the leader of the Irish Party misrepresented his people in the English House of Parliament. On the day of the declaration of war between England and Germany he took the Irish case, weighty with eight centuries of history and tradition, and he threw it out of the window. He pledged Ireland to a particular course of action, and he had no authority to give this pledge and he had no guarantee that it would be met. The ramshackle intelligence of his party and his own emotional nature betrayed him and us and England. He swore Ireland to loyalty as if he had Ireland in his pocket, and could answer for her. Ireland has never be disloyal to England, not even at this epoch, because she has never been loyal to England, and the profession of her National faith has been unwavering, has been known to every English person alive, and has been clamant to all the world besides ... Mr. Redmond told a lie and he is answerable to England for the violence she has been guilty of, and to Ireland for the desolation to which we have had to submit.⁸⁸

In the terms in which it is commonly formulated, the objection to non-mandated insurrectionary violence, from Robert Emmet to 1916, is probably unanswerable. In Ireland as in Poland, as those who choose this path were not proto-Leninists, their intervention amounted to a bet that they had read the signs correctly and that what they had done would be approved by their fellow countrymen. One senses that in Ireland's case, those who polemicise against the 1916 Rising are irritated less by its non-democratic character, inevitable in the case of an armed action against the state power, than by the fact it was so rapidly endorsed by public opinion. This took place very quickly in the months following the Rising, as James Stephens's analysis of the eroding legitimacy of John Redmond proved prescient and support shifted from the parliamentarians towards Sinn Féin. The change in the public mood was widely noted. Perhaps the most impressive, if unexpected, witness was General Sir John Maxwell, who had been responsible for the suppression of the Rising and the execution of its leaders. Writing some months afterwards, he claimed that the executions had initially been accepted by the public, but that since then "revulsion of feeling had set in" and that "if there was a general election ... there is a danger that Mr. Redmond's party would be replaced by others perhaps less amenable to reason."⁸⁹

From the mid-nineteenth century Polish observers were uneasily aware of the mutation that was taking place in Russian revolutionary thought, through what they saw as a fusion of eastern despotism and western Marxism.⁹⁰ Although nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland did not possess a tradition of anti-totalitarian commentary comparable to that elaborated in Poland, as a country that was predominantly Catholic and whose most important social group was small farmers, much in the Polish critique of revolutionary Marxism would have found resonance in Ireland. Reflecting the wider bias of their societies, neither Irish nor Polish rebels belonged to the totalitarian strain in the European insurrectionary tradition extending from Robespierre to Lenin. In spite of their use of sacral language, neither shared the terrifying absolutism of the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia. As Brendan Clifford has convincingly argued, Connolly and Piłsudski had much in common with each other and little that they shared with Lenin.⁹¹ Although Adam Zamoyski seems reluctant to concede as much, this can also be said of the movements which they led.

Although the *Encounter* essay of 1989 is presented as a commentary on affinities between Ireland and Poland, its most deeply felt points refer to difference. At their most over-stated the latter assume an almost surreal form, as in the claim that in Ireland “the intentions of ‘the oppressor’ were fundamentally benevolent after the seventeenth century; in Poland they were brutally malevolent.” Thus, while the Irish sense of oppression was at best exaggerated and at worst delusional, “there was never any need to instruct the Polish people that the Germans were an enemy to be resisted – the accent was on survival, and on fostering essential qualities which differentiated the Poles from their oppressors.” It is certainly striking that, following his reading of Roy Foster’s “wonderful” book, Adam Zamoyski proposes an analysis of Irish history whose equivalent he is not prepared to endorse for Poland.⁹² Like the author of the *Głos Wolny* article, he does not wish to travel in the same carriage as the Irish. While this hardly matters, as his grasp of Irish history is – shall we say? – uncertain, the essay is nonetheless revealing, in that it represents a recasting of the author’s sources in terms approaching parody.

In his dazzling essay on the seventeenth century text *The Contention of the Bards*, John Minihan recalls the expectation among some members of the Gaelic poetic class that, following the benign pattern established with earlier invaders, “the Nua-Ghail [new English] too would be drawn into the enchanted heart of Ireland” and become part of its “vast continuity”.⁹³ For a range of reasons, of which the impact of the Reformation was probably the most fundamental, this did not take place, with the result that confessional division is a prominent feature of post-plantation Ireland. Reflecting on Zamoyski’s analysis of that division, the thought comes that there is little to be gained by a projection backwards of late twentieth century post-Christian values and concerns on the contending peoples of post-Reformation Europe. Where either Ireland or Poland is concerned, this seems unlikely to produce much by way of insight.

For foreigners faced with the complexity of Polish grammar and the unfriendliness of Polish consonant clusters, the writings of Norman Davies provide an indispensable introduction to the history of the culture of that country. It is striking that Davies, who has interpreted Poland with such insight, should also have written sympathetically of Ireland and should be alert to similarities between the histories of the two countries. Davies is unusual among British historians in rejecting a half-perceived conceptual framework, which views the histories of the other nations inhabiting the islands of Britain and Ireland as appendages to the history of England. His *Heart of Europe* was published in 1984 during the period of repression which followed the suppression of Solidarity and the introduction of martial law. In the concluding section, having chronicled the dismal history of the Polish People’s Republic, Davies was led to protest against the influence of a then modish revisionism regarding the nature of communist power on Western perceptions of Poland. He wrote, “Specialists, one often suspects, exist for the purpose of making simple things complicated, and on an issue such as the present crisis in Poland, anyone who tries to take the broader view, and reduce the multiplicity of events to simple intelligible propositions, is in danger of being charged with the mortal offences of ‘oversimplification’, ‘unwarranted generalisations’, or worst of all ‘schematisation’... Anything which smacks of a clear opinion, or which enters the uncertain world of predictions and probabilities, is generally thought in academic circles to lack the

necessary degree of equivocation...The simple fact of political oppression, for example, which millions of Polish people can recognize instinctively for what it is, proves far too elusive for many academic commentators.”⁹⁴

In contemplating their country’s history Polish intellectuals have found it easy to resist the temptation to euphemism. Although Leszek Kolakowski is far from being a Polish chauvinist, when presented with the view that, in comparison with the state constructed by Lenin and Stalin, Czarist rule was benign and fatherly, he responded emphatically, “Our fathers saw the Russian Czars as hangmen, and rightly so.”⁹⁵ A generation earlier Consul General Dobrzynski took upon himself the task of defending the Polish national narrative against his country’s Western and totalitarian critics. His *Poland- Lights and Shadows of an Ancient Nation* was published in Dublin in 1941, at a moment of unparalleled travail, when the state its author represented had once again ceased to exist. In presenting Polish life and history to an Irish readership, Dobrzynski choose to emphasise its long tradition of religious tolerance, the comparative absence of wars of aggression, and the law-governed and “essentially republican” character of the pre-partition state. Although far from minimising the faults of old Poland, Dobrzyński presented it as “a great, civilized, democratic and tolerant state.”⁹⁶ At one point, in support of this vision of his country’s past, he quoted from the preamble to the treaty of union of 1413 between Poland and Lithuania. This document, which still has power to astonish, must have been truly riveting when encountered in the bleak year of 1941, in a Europe dominated by Hitler and Stalin. The preamble reads:

In the name of the Lord, Amen. May this deed be remembered forever. It is known to all that he will not attain to salvation who is not sustained by the mystery of love, which does nothing wrong, radiates goodness, reconciles those in discord, unites those who quarrel, dissipates hatred, puts an end to anger, furnishes to all the food of peace, brings together the scattered, lifts up the fallen, makes rough ways smooth, turns wrong into right, aids all virtues, injures no one, delights in all things; he who takes refuge in its arms will find safety, and thenceforth, even though insulted, will have no need to fear. Through love laws are established, kingdoms are ruled, cities are set in order, and the welfare of the state is brought to its highest; among all the virtues it is the most to be commended, and if anyone should hold it in contempt he will deprive himself of everything good ... May love unite us, make us equals, us whom religion and identity of laws and privileges have already joined.⁹⁷

Although as a diplomat in 1930s Dublin it was Dobrzyński's task to defend the position of the central government in its sometimes difficult relationship with Poland's national minorities, he seems to have been free of chauvinism. It is typical that he should have shown himself conscious of the role of the press in stirring up ill-feeling between nations and insisted that school-teachers should "be forbidden to abuse their position by arousing in their pupils' minds distrust and ill-will towards foreigners." Speaking in 1940 he emphasised that, unlike the small German minority, Poland's Orthodox and Jewish communities had remained loyal to the state in the moment of disaster. He went on to highlight the suffering of the Jewish population describing the latter, one year before the beginning of the Holocaust, as "subjected to methods of persecution spectacular even against the background of those truly unspeakable conditions to which the Polish populations in general are now succumbing."⁹⁸

Dobrzyński's values were out of step with ideological fanaticism of much of inter-war Europe, and there is something at once forlorn and heroic in his remark of late 1939 that, "speaking for myself, I belong to the old and apparently incurable school of liberal thinking, and goodness knows how much ridicule and derision it provoked in recent times, which refuses to surrender its belief in freedom and democracy." In this moment of Polish defeat he added, "Do not let yourself be deceived by the apparent silence of death which seems to envelope my country. The heart of the nation is alive and beating in unison with the loftiest ideals that ever inspired human beings."⁹⁹ Dobrzyński belonged to a now almost forgotten strand of liberal nationalism, in which local affections were framed by a commitment to the universal values of Catholic Christianity.

Like other Polish diplomats in the inter-war years, Dobrzynski had to deal with the consequences of hostility to his country articulated by a surprising range of figures, extending from Vyacheslav Molotov to such luminaries as Lloyd George, J. M. Keynes and E. H. Carr. In defending the continuity and coherence of Polish history, he displayed a keen awareness of the partisan use of language to de-legitimise the new state by presenting it as "an artificial creation devoid of vitality and inner ties" and knew that the

assumptions encoded in such language had the capacity to poison public opinion. Dobrzynski addressed the claims of his country's critics in a section of *Poland - Lights and Shadows* entitled "Poland must be seen in her Historical Perspective". This argued that, "In spite of some misleading appearances, the history of Poland represents throughout the centuries an uninterrupted chain of antecedents and sequels." The author's awareness of the subordination of history to a political agenda is evident in his warning "against those quasi-historians who think it quite appropriate to subordinate the venerable science of history to some vile aims of dishonest propaganda, who wilfully make you forget or even try to justify the most objectionable crime Europe had ever witnessed – the partitions of Poland at the end of the eighteenth century – and who are responsible for the fabrication of such resonant but senseless slogans as 'Versailles Poland' or 'the Polish Corridor', forged with the intention to represent the reborn Poland in the light of artificiality and transient expediency."¹⁰⁰ Although dealing with the past of another country, Dobrzynski's spirited defence of his countrymen understanding of their own past possesses considerable resonances in contemporary Ireland.

While Norman Davies' strictures are severe, for Polish readers they are unlikely to appear excessively so. The case is perhaps less clear in Ireland. Over recent decades the received version of Irish history, with its unilinear narrative, sharp contrasts and focus upon the experience of conquest, defeat and confiscation, has come to appear unduly simplified and has been subject to increasing academic challenge. One suspects that the impulse towards revisionism has its origin in recoil from the sheer murderousness of what was inflicted on the Irish in the early modern period, and embarrassment with the view of history as martyrology which sometimes resulted. Moreover, historians, like other interpreters, are attracted by complexity and may feel obscurely dissatisfied with narratives which, as is the case for extended stretches of Irish and Polish history, possess an exemplary moral clarity. In Ireland, if not yet in Poland, received popular accounts of national history have, for some, come to be seen as naïve and self-serving, and as inviting deconstruction. Whatever the interpretive gains from the resultant muddying of the waters, these surely fade when contemplating events such as the massacres of Mullaghamast or Katyn. (Although separated by over three centuries, these are marked

by striking similarities. Both involved deception and the killing of unarmed opponents. In each case the victims were local elites, from the Irish midlands and eastern Poland respectively, whose extirpation was part of a strategy of conquest). Faced with the irreducibility of what took place, the reflections of the poet-diplomat Denis Devlin in “To Me: A Greek Country Schoolteacher” come to mind:

“Our enemies said so much we talked too much
That we talked no more, ashamed.
Shamefaced like the Irish about the memory of Cromwell.
But this is wrong, wrong to hide what happened.
It is true; simply true my friend was butchered.
It is true; simply true the town was razed.”¹⁰¹

As even its defenders would concede, the account of their history encountered by Irish people in earlier generations was frequently narrowly focused and inattentive to areas of experience which did not fit the prevailing nationalist model. As the Denis Devlin poem implies, the self-pity and polemic which accompanied such accounts ultimately proved self-defeating. As Irish society changed the questions it asked about the past also changed, with the result that a re-examination of the national narrative came to seem inevitable. Revisionism is arguably intrinsic to the practice of history as an intellectual discipline, as existing interpretations are refined, emphasises shifted and new hypotheses tested. To think to any purpose is inevitably to revise. When, however, all of the revisions on offer tend in a single direction, at times monotonously so, we may begin to wonder whether the enterprise is being driven by an ideological imperative rather than a disinterested search for understanding. Thus, for many Irish readers faced with a questionable problematising of our history, Davies’ insistence on the primacy of narrative, his willingness to call things by their common names, and to take account of the perception of history by those who are its subject, are likely to be experienced as a recall to neglected criteria.

¹ J.M. Hone and P.L. Dickinson, *Persia in Revolution*, (Dublin and London), 1910, pp. 4-5.

² *New Constitution of the Government of Poland, Established by the Revolution of the Third of May, 1791*, (London, 1791), Article 2.

-
- ³ M. Carbery, *The Farm by Lough Gur*, (Cork and Dublin, 1973), pp. 276-7.
- ⁴ *ibid.* p. 277.
- ⁵ *ibid.* p. 242.
- ⁶ John Minihan, *The Poems of Geoffrey O'Donoghue. Dánta Shéafraidh Uí Dhonnchadha an Gleanna*, (Aubane Historical Society, 2008), pp.200-1.
- ⁷ A. Zamoyski, *Holy Madness. Romantics, Patriots and Revolutionaries 1776-1871*, (London, 1999), p. 379.
- ⁸ Thomas Bartlett ed., *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, (Dublin, 1998), p. 877.
- ⁹ K. Marx, *Capital*, (Moscow, 1954), Vol. 1, p. 760.
- ¹⁰ A. Zamoyski, *The Polish Way. A Thousand Year History of the Poles and their Culture*, (London, 1997), p. 4.
- ¹¹ A. Zamoyski, *The Last King of Poland*, (London, 1998), p. 197-8, 202.
- ¹² *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, (Cambridge and Chicago, 1958- 78), Vol . 2, p.514.
- ¹³ Zamoyski, (1998), pp. 332-3.
- ¹⁴ Richard Brinsley Sheridan speaking in the House of Commons, 25 April, 1793.
- ¹⁵ E. Burke, *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, (London, 1791).
- ¹⁶ E. Burke, *Thoughts on French Affairs*, (1791).
- ¹⁷ *ibid.*
- ¹⁸ Richard Brinsley Sheridan speaking in the House of Commons, 25 April, 1793.
- ¹⁹ *The Field Day Anthology Anthology of Irish Writing*, (Derry, 1991), Vol.1, p.807.
- ²⁰ Quoted *ibid.* p.395.
- ²¹ Quoted in N. Davies, *Heart of Europe. A Short History of Poland*, (Oxford and New York, 1946), p.426.
- ²² C. Cruise O'Brien, *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commentated Anthology of Edmund Burke*, (London, 1992),
- ²³ M. Arnold ed., *Letters, Speeches and Tracts on Irish Affairs by Edmund Burke*, (London, 1881), p. 367.

-
- ²⁴ Alan Gailey, *Irish Folk Drama*, (Cork, 1969), p.28.
- ²⁵ W. O'Brien, *Edmund Burke as an Irishman*, (Dublin, 1926), v-vi.
- ²⁶ O. MacDonagh, *O'Connell. The Life of Daniel O'Connell*, (London, 1991), p. 598.
- ²⁷ Information received from Seamus Martin, who came across O'Connell's refusal of the Czar's request in researching the historical background for his novel *Duggan's Destiny*.
- ²⁸ *Hansard*, Third Series, Vol. IV, 22 June, 1831, cols. 246-8.
- ²⁹ T. B. Macaulay, *The Miscellaneous Writings and Speeches of Lord Macaulay*, (London, 1889), p. 655.
- ³⁰ *ibid.* p. 645.
- ³¹ *ibid.* p. 650, 655.
- ³² *ibid.* p. 652.
- ³³ Izabela A. Kolanińska, *Dziewiętnastowieczna Irlandia w opiniach Polaków*, (Poznan, 1995), p. 22.
- ³⁴ *ibid.* p. 24. See also Czesław Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature*, (University of California Press, 1983), pp. 170-4.
- ³⁵ *ibid.* p. 174.
- ³⁶ This account of Czapski is based on the entry for him in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, (Cracow, 1938), Vol. 3, pp.187-8. See also Kolanińska (1995), pp. 22-24.
- ³⁷ "To Count Joseph Napoleon Czapski", *The Irish Monthly Magazine*, May 1832, pp. 84-85.
- ³⁸ G. Ensor, *Anti-Union. Ireland As She Ought to Be*, (Newry, 1831), p.85.
- ³⁹ *ibid.* pp. 64-5.
- ⁴⁰ "Poland - Russia - Ireland", *The Irish Monthly Magazine*, May 1832, p. 90.
- ⁴¹ Ensor, (1831), p.30.
- ⁴² J. Chuto, R.P. Holzapfel and E. Shannon-Mangan ed., *The Collected Works of James Clarence Mangan, Poems 1845-1847*, (Dublin, 1997), pp. 153-4.

⁴³ K. Marx and F. Engels, *Ireland and the Irish Question*, (Moscow, 1971), p. 84. I am indebted to Philip O'Connor for help regarding Marx and Engels on Ireland and Poland.

⁴⁴ Quoted J.P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxembourg*, (Oxford, 1969), p.501.

⁴⁵ <http://eserver.org/marx/1848-free.poland.txt>

⁴⁶ <http://eserver.org/marx/1867-poland.russia.txt>

⁴⁷ K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works*, (New York, 1992), pp. 191-193.

⁴⁸ O'Donovan Rossa, *Rossa's Recollections 1838 to 1898*, (Connecticut, 2004), pp. 246-7.

⁴⁹ W. Smith O'Brien, *Lecture on Poland, Delivered by William Smith O'Brien, in Dublin, Wednesday, July 1st, 1863*, (Dublin, 1863), p. 16, 21, 23, 21.

⁵⁰ *ibid.* p.10, 16.

⁵¹ *ibid.* p.13, 14, 17, 16, 15.

⁵² *ibid.* p.10,12-13, 13, 16.

⁵³ A. P. O'Brien, *Petersburg and Warsaw: Scenes Witnessed during a Residence in Poland and Russia 1863-4*, (London, 1864), p. 4.

⁵⁴ *ibid.* p. 2.

⁵⁵ *ibid.* p. 224.

⁵⁶ W. Smith O'Brien, *Du Véritable Caractère de l'insurrection Polonaise de 1863*, (Paris, 1863), p. 4; A. P. O'Brien, (London, 1864), p.171.

⁵⁷ I am grateful to Katarzyna Gmerek, of the Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, for drawing my attention to the mysterious Augustine P. O'Brien. Ms Gmerek's paper "Two Irishmen and the 1863 January Uprising in Poland", delivered to the conference "Ireland Across Cultures", in Veliko Turnovo, Bulgaria (7-9 June, 2007), provides a supplementary perspective on Smith O'Brien to that advanced in this essay. Her doctoral work on Polish-Celtic literary exchanges will provide another chapter to the story of the nineteenth century Polish-Irish interaction.

⁵⁸ Quoted in A. Michnik, *Letters from Prison and Other Essays*, (Berkley and Los Angeles, 1987), p. 227.

⁵⁹ T. D. Sullivan, *Recollections of Troubled Times in Irish Politics*, (Dublin, 1905), p.124.

-
- ⁶⁰ F. Nitti, *Catholic Socialism*, (1911), pp. 385-6.
- ⁶¹ For a translation see Davies, (1986), pp. 276-7.
- ⁶² Michnik, (1987), p. 319.
- ⁶³ Carbery, (1973), p. 278.
- ⁶⁴ Michnik, (1987), p. 241
- ⁶⁵ Domhnall Dubh, “Poles and the Language Question”, *The Irish Monthly*, December 1919, pp. 644-5, 643.
- ⁶⁶ “ Fenianizm w Irlandyi”, *Głos Wolny*, No. 81, 30 September 1865.
- ⁶⁷ E. MacWhite, “Thomas Moore and Poland”, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, Vol. 72, Section C, No. 2, (Dublin, 1972), p. 49, 54.
- ⁶⁸ *The Spirit of the Nation; or Ballads and Songs by the Writers of “The Nation”*, (Dublin, 1866), pp. 100-101.
- ⁶⁹ *The Voice of the Nation: A Manual of Nationality by the Writers of the Nation Newspaper*, (Dublin, 1844), p. 48.
- ⁷⁰ J. Chuto, R. P. Holzapfel and E. Shannon-Mangan ed., *The Collected Works of James Clarence Mangan, Poems 1845-1847*, (1997), p. 449,157.
- ⁷¹ *A Polyglott Anthology*, *Dublin University Magazine*, April 1839, p. 473.
- ⁷² J. W. Jackson and P. Costello, *John Stanislaus Joyce*, (London, 1998), pp.48-9.
- ⁷³ Paul McNamara, *Sean Lester, Poland, and the Nazi Takeover of Danzig*, (Dublin, 2009), p.70.
- ⁷⁴ *ibid.* p.53.
- ⁷⁵ *ibid.* p. 73.
- ⁷⁶ *The Catholic Bulletin*, October, 1939. Quoted in P. Walsh ed., *The Catholic Bulletin on Peace, War and Neutrality, 1937-1939*, (Belfast, 2004), p. 73.
- ⁷⁷ K. Dobrzynská-Cantwell, *An Unusual Diplomat. Dobrzyńki Biography*, (London, 1998), pp. 136-7.
- ⁷⁸ McNamara, (2009), p. 231.

-
- ⁷⁹ A. Zamoyski, “States of Mind. On the Myths of National Identity”, *Encounter*, July-August 1989, p.21 ,22.
- ⁸⁰ *ibid.* p. 23, 25, 24.
- ⁸¹ *ibid.* p. 23.
- ⁸² *ibid.* p.23.
- ⁸³ H. Mulvey, *Thomas Davis and Ireland*, (Washington, 2003), p.244.
- ⁸⁴ T. David, *Prose Writings: Essays on Ireland*, (London, 1889), p.155.
- ⁸⁵ Zamoyski, (1989), p. 23.
- ⁸⁶ *ibid.* pp. 23-24, 24, 23.
- ⁸⁷ *ibid.* p.24.
- ⁸⁸ J. Stephens, *The Insurrection in Dublin*, (Dublin and London, 1916), pp. 74- 76.
- ⁸⁹ B. Barton, *From Behind a Closed Door. Secret Court Martial Records of the 1916 Easter Rising*, (Belfast, 2002), p . 87.
- ⁹⁰ See B. Szlachta, *Polish Anti-Communism and its Intellectual Traditions*, (Cracow, n.d).
- ⁹¹ B. Clifford, *Connolly the Polish Aspect*, (Belfast, 1985).
- ⁹² Zamoyski, (1989), p. 24, 21.
- ⁹³ J. Minihan, *The Contention of the Poets. An Essay in Irish Intellectual History*, (Bratislava, 2000), p. 46, 10.
- ⁹⁴ Davies, (1986), p.446.
- ⁹⁵ L. Kolakowski, “The Devil in History”, in G. R. Urban ed. *Stalinism Its Impact on Russia and the World*, (Aldershot, 1982), p. 263.
- ⁹⁶ W. Th. Dobrzynski, *Poland- Lights and Shadows of an Ancient Nation*, (Dublin, 1941), p. 28, 32.
- ⁹⁷ *ibid.* p. 29.
- ⁹⁸ *ibid.* p. 98, 74, 75.
- ⁹⁹ *ibid.* p. 47, 57.
- ¹⁰⁰ *ibid.* p.60, 58, 69, 59.

¹⁰¹ D. Devlin, “Uncollected Early Poems”, *The Lace Curtin*, Vol. 4, Summer, 1971, p.14.