Young Ireland and the Superannuated Bard: Rewriting Thomas Moore in The Nation

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11 Young Ireland and the Superannuated Bard: Rewriting Thomas Moore in The Nation

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The journalists of the Young Ireland movement acknowledged Thomas Moore as the leading Irish poet. Yet, in The Nation and in the influential poetry collections published in the Library of Ireland series, authors Thomas Davis and Charles Gavan Duffy constantly identified a deficit of nationality and passion in Moore’s oeuvre. The Young Ireland movement thus engaged in a complex redefinition of the influence of Moore’s works upon Irish literature, which ranged from critical detraction to tacit emulation and to the explicit creation of a new national poetry.

This essay examines the three main vehicles the Nation authors employed for their criticism: articles in the newspaper; literary anthologies in the Library of Ireland book series; and two editions of Spirit of the Nation (1843 and 1845), collecting the Nation’s own poetical productions. It compares the poetry of the Nation and of Thomas Davis with Moore’s Irish Melodies, to assess their claims about the adoption of a more national language, of a more vehement diction, as well as their attempts to reach a more popular audience. In particular, it assesses how the responses from Davis and other Nation authors such as Michael Joseph Barry and Denis Florence MacCarthy varied between attempts to rewrite the vocabulary of Moore’s patriotic poetry to acknowledgements of a shared continuum of cultural nationalism, leading from the United Irishmen to Thomas Moore, the Nation and beyond.

This subject has received critical attention by detractors and defenders of Moore (Thuente; Leerssen, Remembrance and Imagination; H. White, The Keeper’s Recital and Music and the Irish Literary Imagination; L. Davis; Connolly; Campbell, Irish Poetry; A. MacCarthy). This
chapter re-examines the primary sources, now easily available in digital form, and reassesses the full articulation of the Nation’s reception of Moore, from the enduring questioning of its lead authors Thomas Davis (1814–1845) and Charles Gavan Duffy (1816–1903), to the warmer praise of other members of the Young Ireland movement.

Moore in the Nation

From its inception in October 1842, the Nation acknowledged Moore’s pre-eminence within Irish literature. Within a fortnight Davis (not Duffy as mistakenly stated in the Field Guide to Irish Literature) devoted the first of his “National Gallery” articles to Moore (T. Davis, “National Gallery”). This prominent position suggests that the young newspaper harboured some admiration for the poet. Yet, despite Duffy’s claims that the article “proved very agreeable to the poet” (Duffy, Thomas Davis 96), Davis’s piece strongly qualified its praise of Moore. The article deserves closer analysis as it became the foundation for a three-year sustained interrogation of Moore.

Moore’s inclusion in a gallery of illustrious Irishmen was no surprise. Six months previous (April 1842), the Dublin University Magazine had published a biography and critique of the poet in its Portrait Gallery series (White, The Keeper’s Recital 55–56). The DUM reviewer (identified in the Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals as J.T. Ball) admitted that Moore had flaws but stated that “we are proud, and we feel his country should be proud, of Moore. We are opposed to him in politics, in religion. . . but we . . . recognize and acknowledge the genius of the author” (476). The article then compared Moore and Byron, “[t]he most popular poets of the last generation”, sharply contrasting Byron’s portrayal of the “intensest and loftiest emotions of man’s nature” with Moore’s “smiles and sunshine” (476). Of Moore’s poetry Ball observed,
“[t]here is too much light: too much anxiety to be always brilliant” and wished “that his verse were sometimes unpolished...; the perpetual glitter relieved by a little plainness” (Ball 476–77). Despite his opposing political views, much of nationalist Thomas Davis’s criticism paralleled that of the unionist *Dublin University Magazine*. Davis’s article deplored Moore’s excesses of polish and elegance but crucially added some further specific accusations. Moore was censured for his use of an over-refined and un-Irish language; for his melancholy, defeatist tone; and for his apparent choice of an upper-class, mostly British audience. Davis began by attributing Moore’s residence in England (“the land of the oppressor”) as “weaken[ing] the fire of his passions and corrupt[ing] his taste”; most of the *Nation* writers, by contrast, lived in Dublin or its environs. He echoed the *Dublin University Magazine*, bemoaning the “too much chiselling and polish, and too little rough vigour and plain words” in Moore’s poetry. This critique, in both its national and nationalist credentials, dominated the *Nation’s* reception and interpretation of Moore’s work and would be expanded in the *Library of Ireland* book series (J. Kelly 260). Davis still acknowledged the “truthful and inspiring patriotism” of certain of the *Irish Melodies* but weighed them against his scorn for the “so-called ‘History of Ireland’”, which he labelled “cold, feeble, and English”. He spared some of Moore’s prose works, including the biographies of Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1821) and Lord Edward Fitzgerald (1831), *Memoirs of Captain Rock* (1824) and the *Travels of an Irish Gentleman in Search of a Religion* (1833) since they “belong to the Irish people”. He especially praised *Captain Rock*, calling it “the wisest, wittiest, and most successful attempt ever made to interest the honor [sic], humanity, the imagination, and good humour of the oppressor, in the cause of the wronged”. This passage remains the only sustained analysis of Moore’s prose in the *Nation.*
Davis’s article then challenged Moore over his audience and the formats chosen for publication, claiming, “Moore’s purse may have been served, but his fame has suffered from the law of copyright. There is no edition accessible to the people of any part of Moore’s works except for a few of the ‘Melodies’. Again – the ‘Melodies’ were meant to be sung, and yet, the music is out of print and enormously dear”.

Moore was therefore reproached for choosing forms of dissemination aimed at an elite, wealthy audience. Yet the Nation were ascribing Moore greater control on copyright than was the case. Moore had sold the copyright of the first number of the Melodies to the Power brothers, James and William, for £50 and subsequently accepted from them an annual stipend of £500 in exchange for his continued supply of music. He eventually sold his copyright to the Powers in its entirety for £350 (R. Kelly 494). The two brothers later fell into a protracted dispute over control of the Melodies (Hunt, “Moore, Stevenson, Bishop, and the Powers” 86–87). By the early 1840s, Dublin had been marginalised as a centre for publication of Moore’s Melodies, which explains Thomas Davis’s observations on their scarcity (L. Davis 141–44). Previously, copyright in the texts of the Irish Melodies (without music) had been purchased by Longmans, who together with James Power published frequent editions in London depending on demand and included them in the Poetical Works of Thomas Moore, released in ten expensive volumes at five shillings each between 1840 and 1841. In these transactions, Moore’s role was as little more than an interested party, certainly not as a decision-maker. Thomas Davis conceded there could be hope for the future, observing that “these songs are no longer as they were, popular only in the drawing-rooms of Europe and America; they are gradually becoming known to the middle classes in Ireland, and the Irish translation [by John MacHale, published in 1842 by John Cumming] bids fair to reach the mind of our peasantry” (T. Davis, “National Gallery”). However, Moore’s
failure to reach the middle and especially lower classes of Irish society was to remain a sticking point in the *Nation*’s appraisal.

Davis’s article was the first in a series of sustained critiques regarding Moore, where some grudging admission of his significance as an author was always qualified with an assessment of his unsuitability as bard of contemporary 1840s Ireland. A few months later, Duffy as editor of the *Nation* refuted rumours – started by the *Belfast News-Letter* – identifying Moore as the author of the extremely successful *Spirit of the Nation* poetry anthology. The journal perceived “clearest evidence of his style” in a publication expressing a seditious stance irreconcilable with Moore’s status as a government pensioner (“Tom Moore’s Treason”). Duffy conceded that Moore had written “many things which we might adopt without anybody discovering the smallest incongruity in time or place”. However, he observed that the “note of woe or tone of defiance” needed to grow stronger, implying that Moore’s poetry was not sufficiently bold to truthfully represent the new “spirit of the nation” (“Tom Moore’s Treason”).

In subsequent articles, Thomas Davis and Duffy bestowed some further grudging recognition of Moore’s significance to national literature. They acknowledged his decisive influence over the poetical tastes of the middle classes, but when numerous imitators submitted Moore-like verse to the *Nation*, the editors decided not to publish (*The Voice of the Nation* 105–06). They suggested that the *Melodies* should be purchased by the popular reading rooms they (together with Daniel O’ Connell’s Repeal Association) were promoting, in a list that also featured *Captain Rock* (*The Voice of the Nation* 128). They identified the *Melodies* as prime sources of inspiration for Irish historical paintings (T. Davis, *Literary and Historical Essays* 169–70). Davis even reluctantly acknowledged, in his “Irish Music and Poetry” essay (29 June 1844) that, if reprinted at lower prices, Moore’s *Melodies* “would probably restore the sentimental music of Ireland to its natural
supremacy” (“sentimental”, a significant qualifier, will be examined later). But Davis once again tempered his praise, lamenting the lack of new music in Ireland since the death of harpist Turlogh O’Carolan (1670–1738), and the dependence of current Irish composers upon a foreign public. The identification by Leith Davis (L. Davis 174) of Moore as the “one among us . . . who can smite upon our harp like a master”, whom Thomas Davis praised for his “patriotism”, “genius”, and “friendship” (T. Davis Literary and Historical Essays 218–19) is not fully supported by the evidence. The final descriptor especially eliminates Moore, for he was not known personally to any of the Nation authors. Thomas Davis wrote this article for a new edition of Spirit of the Nation, and so probably referred to William Elliot Hudson (1796–1853), who wrote music for this collection (T. Davis, Literary and Historical Essays 218–19).

**The Library of Ireland and Moore**

The Library of Ireland book series escalated this slow but constant erosion of Moore’s standing as national bard. Its twenty-two volumes were written by the Nation authors and published by Dublin bookseller James Duffy (no relation to Charles Gavan Duffy) between 1844 and 1847. Competitively priced at one shilling each, the most successful titles achieved sales in the tens of thousands. Anne MacCarthy has analysed its several anthologies of Irish literature, which expanded the critique of Moore along the three lines already highlighted (diction, national language, and audience).

*The Ballad Poetry of Ireland* (1845), edited by Charles Gavan Duffy, comprised over eighty poems. In a lengthy preface he delineated a new national school of poetry that ascribed only a secondary role to Moore. Central to Duffy’s poetics was a call to adopt an Anglo-Irish language capable of combining English with “the strong graphic language of the people” (Duffy,
Introduction xxvii–xxviii). On this basis, Moore was put into contention with other claimants for the title of Irish national poet. First was John Banim (1798–1842), whose ballad “Soggarth Aroon” – anthologised together with three of his other poems – Duffy praised as “perhaps the most Irish ballad in existence” (Ballad Poetry xxix). James Clarence Mangan (1803–1849) was lauded as master of metre and rhythm; Samuel Ferguson (1810–1886) was praised for his “romantic or historical” ballads (Ballad Poetry xxx–xxxii). Duffy chose to include only two poems by Moore, against ten by Ferguson and four by Mangan.

The issue of language in Irish literature was for Duffy and Davis broader than simply an opposition to Moore’s diction. Although their essays were produced before the Famine (1845–1849) had dealt a severe blow to Irish-speaking communities, these Nation authors were living through a time of profound linguistic change. Duffy argued that, because of it, the old bardic songs were “locked up from the mass of the readers” (Introduction xi). In order to supply this deficit, Duffy called for the growth of “Anglo-Irish ballads; the production of educated men, with English tongues but Irish hearts” (Introduction xv). While regretting the decline in the use of Irish (“one of the proudest and tenderest ties that bound our people to their country”), Duffy asserted the existence of a distinctive Anglo-Irish language and advocated its poetical use, following the example of Robert Burns, who had made “the literature of Scotland . . . the most national in the world” (Introduction xxxvi–vii). Duffy praised several Irish poets for this ability to teach “the native Muse to become English in language without growing un-Irish in character” (Introduction xxiii). His list included Gerald Griffin, John Banim, Jeremiah Joseph Callanan, Samuel Ferguson, Samuel Lover, Thomas Davis, James Clarence Mangan, Edward Walsh, and others, but significantly, it omitted Moore.
Issues of heteroglossia and diglossia have been identified as central to the self-definition of separate Scottish and Irish cultural identities (Pittock 26–27) during the Romantic period. Each literary tradition used native language as part of its claim to a distinctive national identity. In Scotland, Burns, Alan Ramsey, James Macpherson, and others each adopted at least one of the following strategies: writing in the Scots language (Pittock 147), adapting Scots and Gaelic metrical forms (Pittock 39 and 77), and incorporating Gaelic motifs (Pittock 73) in their poetry. Duffy granted Moore the title of “our greatest living poet”, but immediately distanced him from the new literary school he was delineating by stating that he “sang our wrongs in the language of the wronger”. Duffy even suggested that Moore “ha[d] not the gift of tongues”, an accusation that certainly jars with Moore’s fluency in multiple languages and his mastery of registers and voices as shown in Captain Rock and Lalla Rookh. Duffy grudgingly conceded that Moore’s style was dictated by his addressing a primarily British audience and was “possibly . . . better for the fame and even for the utility of Moore” because it allowed his songs to sink “into the heart of England”. This deficit of national character in Moore’s language, he argued, had seriously hampered Moore’s reception “in his native country”. His disapprobation reprised Thomas Davis’s claims about the class and location of Moore’s intended audience, contrasting Moore’s chosen “saloons of fashion” with “the circle gathered round the farmer’s hearth”, who would fail to understand him (Introduction xxx).

Duffy used his power as anthology editor to frame the ballad genre so as to marginalise Moore from the new national canon, opposing the “narrative” elements of the ballad with the “sentiment or passion” of song (Introduction xvii–xviii note). In addition, Duffy controversially claimed that “the best modern ballads. . . were certainly written to be recited, not sung” (Introduction xli). While demoting Moore to the role of mere sentimental songwriter, this assertion fundamentally
misrepresents the role of music in Moore’s poetry. This dismissal of music, also continued by Davis, contrasted sharply with Moore’s known assertions about the primacy of music in the *Melodies*. Harry White among others has shown how much of Moore’s diglossia, his mastery of multiple languages, lay in his use and reinterpretation of Irish music, whose meaning he translated into language (White, *Music and the Irish Literary Imagination* 48). Duffy failed to appreciate this aspect of Moore’s oeuvre, proposing a narrow interpretation of the ballad genre that decoupled it completely from music and demoted Moore within the canon of Irish national literature.

Duffy’s *Ballad Poetry of Ireland* proved an immense success, reaching five editions within a few weeks of publication and a thirty-ninth edition by 1866 after selling 76,000 copies over the previous twenty years (A. MacCarthy 149). It was followed in the *Library of Ireland* series by another anthology, *The Songs of Ireland*. Despite Davis’s sudden death in September 1845, his voice continued to resonate. As Preface to the collection, editor Michael Joseph Barry included Davis’s “Essay on Irish Song”, which contained further accusations against Moore.

In this “Essay” Davis acknowledged certain merits to Moore, characterising him as “immeasurably our greatest poet, and the greatest lyrist, except Burns and Beranger, that ever lived”. But he reiterated earlier censure regarding Moore’s lack of “vehemence”, for his avoidance of the “sterner passions”, for his use of “pretty images” that spoiled “some of his finest songs”, for dialect “too refined and subtle”, and – as had Duffy – for being “negligent of narrative” (Davis, “Essay on Irish Songs” 31–32). Davis also returned to the fundamental problem of audience, accusing Moore of not writing for “the middle and poor classes of Irish” (31–32). His songs, stated Davis, “have reached the drawing-rooms; but what do the People know even of this?” (35–36).
While admitting Moore as “a musician of great attainments”, Thomas Davis (as Edward Bunting in 1840) accused him of using “very corrupt” airs for the Melodies, which “should never be used for the study of Irish music” (“Essay on Irish Songs” 39; Bunting 5). Una Hunt observes instead that Moore composed his songs to match the original airs as closely as possible (Hunt, Sources 108) while making “unavoidable” alterations to those that were unsuited to vocal performance (Sources 111). Even Moore’s vituperated co-author Sir John Stevenson adopted Bunting’s harmonies in numerous arrangements (Sources 67). However, Davis’s essay propagated Bunting’s musical criticism to a wider audience and ensured its prominence in subsequent nationalist evaluations of Moore. Harry White has therefore accused Thomas Davis of displaying a “puzzled contempt for art music” that later became a dominant trait of Irish cultural discourse (White, Music and the Irish Literary Imagination 76).

**The Spirit of the Nation Collections**

Throughout three years of articles mixing limited praise with pointed censure, Davis and Duffy constructed Moore’s oeuvre as an outdated achievement in need of transcendence, re-imagination, and re-adaptation for the new, changed national circumstances. Critical essays and anthologies were not the only weapons in the Nation’s arsenal. They also put their words into practice through the original poetry included in their newspaper. The Nation published over 500 original poems in the years prior to Davis’s death (1842–1845), averaging three or four poems per issue. The practice originated from Duffy’s tenure as editor of the Belfast Vindicator, where original poetry had proven popular with the public. In the Nation, Duffy went beyond a mere sale-boosting exercise and used this section of the newspaper to embody the new national school of poetry he later defined in Ballad Poetry. Duffy’s own “Fág a
Bealach”, published in the third number “was the first national poem in the new journal” (Duffy, 
*My Life* 1: 64n1;). Over time, the best of these contributions was reprinted in three anthologies, 
all entitled *The Spirit of the Nation*. The extensive, sustained success of this permanent format 
ensured a prolonged and most profound influence of the poems from this impermanent and 
topical newspaper (Beetham 25).

When the *Nation* was suppressed in 1848 after the unsuccessful Young Ireland uprising, and the 
Young Irelanders were driven into either exile or incarceration, the *Spirit of the Nation* and the 
*Library of Ireland* continued to circulate “wherever the English tongue is spoken” (C. Duffy, 
*Young Ireland* 2: 156–57).

The first *Spirit of the Nation* was published in March 1843, less than six months after the 
newspaper’s inception. It was quickly followed by another volume in November 1843. These 
collections were cheaply bound in paper covers and retailed for six pence, therefore aiming at a 
working-class or lower-middle-class audience. Duffy called them “brochures” rather than books 
(Duffy, *Young Ireland* 1: 129n1). During 1844, they were joined by a “Library Edition” in eight 
monthly parts, edited by Thomas Davis. Collected in a single volume in 1845, it included 
musical scores and an illustrated frontispiece by Frederic Burton. The price (half a guinea), 
format, and multi-media features of the “Library Edition” reveal that it was aimed at the 
“pianofortes of the rich and educated” also favoured by Moore (“Letter to the Marchioness of 
Donegal” MCP 4: 130). The *Nation* were effectively “tranching up” their publication, reversing 
the characteristic process of gradually cheapening reprints in nineteenth-century publishing (St 
Clair, Ch 11 “Selling, prices, and access” 186–209). In so doing, they were effectively 
challenging Moore’s position in the discourse of cultural nationalism and within a consolidated 
middle- and upper-class market. Perhaps enacting a symbolic handover, Thomas Davis sent
Moore a presentation copy of the 1845 Library Edition of *Spirit*, which is now part of the Moore collection at the Royal Irish Academy (ML/3/F (740)). Its existence, combined with other factors that will be discussed below, suggests that Davis may have tempered his judgements of Moore to a certain extent.

In his “Essay on Irish Songs”, Davis exhorted aspiring Irish poets to “carefully avoid the airs to which Moore, Griffin, or any other Irishman has written even moderately good words” and to employ instead “one set of words always joined with one tune” (39). The opportunities to reuse such airs had already been playfully exploited by Francis Sylvester Mahony’s “The Rogueries of Tom Moore” (Mahony 1: 211–64), where “Father Prout” presented mock-original versions of the *Melodies* in order to question Moore’s status as national poet (Dunne 472).

Despite Davis’s pleas, the two-volumed 1843 edition of *Spirit* showed extensive dependence on Moore and his repertoire of airs. Seventeen poems explicitly mentioned a Moore song (from the *Irish Melodies* or the *National Airs*) as the source of their music; a further sixteen cited traditional airs that Moore had also employed, as shown in Table 11.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collection</th>
<th>Total poems with airs</th>
<th>With Moore songs used as airs</th>
<th>With traditional airs also used by Moore</th>
<th>With newly composed airs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spirit 1843 v.1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit 1843 v.2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit 1845</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11.1. *Spirit of the Nation* poems with airs also employed by Moore in 1843 and 1845 editions

In the 1845 Library Edition, however, Thomas Davis worked to reduce this dependence on Moore. Several poems published in the *Nation* in 1844 were added, but only two were set to
Moore songs. None of the seventeen poems set to Moore songs in the 1843 edition survived unchanged, as illustrated in Table 11.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changes to poems set to Moore songs in 1845 edition</th>
<th>Number of poems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reprinted with newly composed air</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reprinted with traditional air</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reprinted with no air</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not reprinted</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11.2. Irish Melody Tunes with new Lyrics in Spirit of the Nation (Dublin, 1843 & 1845)

Jean de Jean Frazer’s “Song for July 12th”, for example, had mentioned “As Vanquished Erin” in 1843 (Spirit of the Nation 2: vi) but was reprinted as set to “The Boyne Water” in 1845 (Spirit 1845 346), thus bypassing Moore’s intermediation. In 1843, Davis’s “The Men of Tipperary” and “The Vow of Tipperary” had both been set to “Nora Creina”, which Moore had popularised in “Lesbia Hath a Beaming Eye”. Davis appeared painfully conscious of his dependence on this tune and asked his friend and music collector John Edward Pigot in 1844 to find an alternative (Duffy, Thomas Davis 231). Eventually, William Elliot Hudson composed a new air for these poems and for several others in the 1845 edition (Duffy, Thomas Davis 232–33), such as John O’Hagan’s “Young Ireland”, which shed any mention of Moore’s “Fare thee well, my own dear love”.

The best example of Davis’s conflicted relationship with Moore is perhaps his most famous poetical composition, the “Lament for the Death of Owen Roe O’Neill”. The poem first appeared in the Nation on 19 November 1842 and such was its success that it prompted Davis to dedicate
himself to poetry for the rest of his brief life (Duffy, *Young Ireland* 1: 69). The newspaper publication of “Owen Roe” did not include a tune, but in the March 1843 *Spirit*, it was clearly marked as set to “The Last Rose of Summer” (Davis and Duffy vi). Davis was evidently unhappy with this debt to Moore, and asked Pigot to “discover some woeful old air” for the poem (Duffy, *Thomas Davis* 231). It was republished in the 1845 Library Edition without any mention of a tune, in the prominent position of opener of the first monthly part with Duffy’s “Fág a Bealach”.

“The Last Rose of Summer” – a prime example of the excesses of polish and sentimentality that Davis disparaged – may seem an unlikely model for Davis’s historical ballad. Yet it was extremely popular, with sales of no fewer than one and a half million copies in the United States alone (Hunt *Sources* 3). Davis’s borrowing of the tune can be seen as an indirect homage to its popularity and a direct challenge to Moore’s interpretation of the traditional “The Groves of Blarney”. There is, however, a more intriguing hypothesis. Una Hunt has recently observed that “’Tis the Last Rose of Summer” can be read as an oblique homage to the United Irish fallen in 1798 (Hunt, *Sources* 25). The dense vocabulary of roses and petals has, however, long baffled certain readers, who seem to consider it as evidence of Moore’s sentimental “trifles” (Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination* 82). Could Davis have been more perceptive than many a critic before and after him? Whatever his precise motivations, Davis’s fundamental operation was a re-gendering of Moore’s song (L. Davis 174–75), substituting a male Owen Roe O’Neill for a female rose. Once we observe the two poems more closely, Thomas Davis’s graft however appears strangely close to Moore’s original plant (*Figures 11.1 and 11.2*).
Figure 11.1 "’Tis the Last Rose of Summer", Lyrics by Thomas Moore (London, 1813). Courtesy of Special Collections & Archives, Queen’s University Belfast.

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LAMENT FOR THE DEATH OF EOGHAN RUADH O'NEILL.

(COMMONLY CALLED OWEN ROE O'NEIL.)

BY THOMAS DAVIS.

Time—10th Nov., 1649. Scene—Ormond's Camp, County Waterford. Speakers—A Veteran of Owen O'Neill's clan, and one of the horsemen, just arrived with an account of his death.

I.

"Did they dare, did they dare, to slay Owen Roe O'Neil?"

"Yes, they slew with poison him, they feared to meet with steel."

"May God wither up their hearts! May their blood cease to flow!
May they walk in living death, who poisoned Owen Roe!

II.

Though it break my heart to hear, say again the bitter words."

"From Derry, against Cromwell, he marched to measure swords; But the weapon of the Saxon met him on his way, And he died at Cloé Uísínair, upon Saint Leonard's Day."

III.

"Wail, wail ye for The Mighty One! Wail, wail ye for the Dead; Quench the hearth, and hold the breath—with ashes strew the head.

How tenderly we loved him! How deeply we deplore! Holy Saviour! but to think we shall never see him more.

IV.

Sagest in the council was he, kindest in the hall,
Sure we never won a battle—twas Owen won them all.
Had he lived—had he lived—our dear country had been free;
But he's dead, but he's dead, and 'tis slaves we'll ever be.
Figure 11.2 “Lament for the Death of Eoghan Ruadh O’Neill”. Lyrics by Thomas Davis, Spirit of the Nation (Dublin, 1845).Courtesy of Special Collections & Archives, Queen’s University Belfast.

Davis’s setting for his “Owen Roe” seems to answer Moore’s “unanswerable” question in “Last Rose”: “Oh! who would inhabit / This bleak world alone?” (M. Campbell, Irish Poetry 68).
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poem is narrated by the bereft followers of Owen Roe O’Neill, an Irish nobleman who died in 1649, allegedly by poisoning. Yet while the perspective is reversed, the language Thomas Davis uses closely resembles that of the *Melodies*. The speakers repeatedly “wail” and “weep” their loss; their hearts are “broken” when they recall “how tenderly” they “loved” Owen Roe. These words are frequent in Moore, but Davis shows most clearly his debt when he describes Owen Roe as “kindest”, “beautiful”, “soft”, and “bright”. The last term is especially frequent in the *Melodies*, where it occurs a total of sixty-nine times. Unlike Davis’s subsequent compositions, here there is no note of defiance, but instead a pervading sense of despair and defeat. While Owen Roe “rests” in death (another common word in the *Melodies* with 24 occurrences), his companions are forever condemned to be “slaves” (17 occurrences, *Melodies*).

Leerssen calls “oh!” “one of the important words in the *Melodies*” (*Remembrance and Imagination* 82). Yet in “Last Rose” Moore employs it only once, in the last stanza, while Davis uses it twice in “Owen Roe”. Indeed, when we assess the two collections as a whole and eliminate the most common words from analysis, “Oh” is indeed the most frequent word in the *Melodies*, with 146 occurrences, but it is also the fourth most frequent in *Spirit of the Nation* with a total frequency of ninety-five (as measured in the 1843 *Spirit*). In Davis’s posthumous *Collected Poems* (T. Davis, *The Poems of Thomas Davis*), it is similarly the most frequent word with 106 occurrences. “Love” is the second most common term in Moore’s *Melodies* (133 occurrences), the sixth in Davis’s *Poems* (sixty-two) and still the tenth in *Spirit* (fifty-nine). “Sweet” and “dear”, while more frequent in Moore (sixty-one and fifty-two times, respectively), are still clearly represented in *Spirit* (thirty-four and thirty-seven times) and in Davis’s *Poems* (thirty-five and forty-two times).
Besides making free use of his tunes, the *Nation* also borrowed without acknowledgement much of the same vocabulary of nationhood that Moore had deployed in the *Melodies*, and which Moore himself had derived from the United Irish literary tradition. Una Hunt lists a number of Moore’s “trigger or code words” (Hunt, *Sources* 17), many of which, as Table 11.3 shows, were also used by the *Nation*. Moore’s preference for “Erin” over “Ireland”, which he employed only in footnotes, can be explained by Erin being a “much more beautiful word to sing” (Hunt, *Sources* 23); most of the *Nation* poems, however, were supposed to be read, not performed.

“Owen Roe” is seasoned throughout with words referring to the martial occupations of warfare, such as “swords”, “weapon”, “Saxon”, and “battle”. All of those terms occur in the *Melodies* as well, “sword/s”, for example, appearing twenty-three, against thirty, times in *Spirit*. But while the presence of a shared vocabulary pulls “Owen Roe” closer to certain of Moore’s *Melodies*, there are significant differences in word frequencies which push the *Melodies* and *Spirit* apart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Frequency in <em>Irish</em> Melodies</th>
<th>Frequency in <em>Irish</em> <em>Spirit of the Nation</em> (1843 edition)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sword/s</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battle/s</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 11.3. Frequencies of notable words in *Irish Melodies* and *Spirit of the Nation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Melodies</th>
<th>Nation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saxon/s</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blood</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man/men</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman/women</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perhaps the most glaring discrepancy between the vocabulary of the *Melodies* and that of *Spirit* is in their references to persons. “Man”/“men” occurs only twenty-five times in the *Melodies*, against a staggering 134 occurrences in *Spirit*. By contrast, “woman”/“women” make twenty-two appearances in *Melodies* (almost equal to those of men), but only twelve in *Spirit* (less than one-tenth of the frequency of “men”).

Indeed, if we move from examining single words to the study of n-grams, “the men of” is the most common three-word sequence in *Spirit* with eighteen occurrences. In the *Melodies*, that position is occupied instead by “the light of” (seven times). Repeated word patterns or clusters can be interpreted as “textual building blocks for fictional worlds” (Mahlberg 26). The refrain of “the men of” helped the *Nation* authors in conceptualising a shared world vision with their readers built upon a common sense of masculinity and action (L. Davis 175). Moore’s use of “the light of” points instead most often to a sense of distant hope and redemption. By intensifying the language of nationhood and resistance already present in Moore, the authors of the *Nation* intimated that the time of change dimly foretold in Moore’s vague prophecies had finally arrived.
Duffy called for a new Irish poetry imbued “with the language and sentiments of the people” ([1]xxxiv) rather than Moore’s use of “the language of the wronger” ([1]xxx). The poems in the two 1843 volumes of *Spirit* showed little if any conformity with these exhortations. For the Library edition of 1845, Duffy and Davis resorted to a different and contradictory method. Instead of adopting an “Anglo-Irish” diction or Irish metrical forms, the *Nation* authors decided to include brief passages in the Irish language. With some exceptions (Davis’s “Lament for the Milesians”) these Irish snippets were confined to personal or place names, with translations provided by John O’Donovan and Eugene O’Curry. The two scholars had been employed by the Irish Ordnance Survey (1833–1842) to collect and translate original Irish place names (G.M. Doherty 55–57); their credentials on poetical matters were less impressive. The choice was apparently Davis’s and was resented by Duffy, who complained that the ballads were “to be larded with a Celtic nomenclature” ([2] 99) that contrasted starkly with the surrounding poetry and gave a pretentious and artificial appearance to the Library Edition of *Spirit*. Thus, “Owen Roe” was transmogrified into “Eoghan Ruadh”, John O’Hagan’s pen-name went from Slievegullion to Sliabh Cuillin and D. F. MacCarthy’s “Kate of Kenmare” hailed instead from Ceann-mara. Other Young Ireland members, such as Thomas MacNevin, also lamented the pernicious effect these antiquarian affectations could have on sales of the volume: “We shall have a better chance of success by being less Irish” (Duffy, *Young Ireland* 2: 100). Moore had instead preferred to separate antiquarian lore from poetry, confining erudite quotations to less intrusive footnotes, a strategy that Duffy would also have preferred. This linguistic zeal was part of the antiquarian fervour gripping the intellectual elites of Ireland, represented chiefly by the endeavours of the Royal Irish Academy, of which both Davis and Moore were members. The use of Irish typeface and Irish-language spellings for the titles of the
traditional musical airs included in the edition further increased their appearance of authenticity and antiquity and helped to disguise the *Nation*’s appropriation of several of Moore’s airs.

**Later Young Ireland Publications**

The combined analysis of the *Nation* and of the *Library of Ireland* anthologies up to the death of Thomas Davis in 1845 sees censure prevail over praise, but in addition to the verbal and musical borrowings listed above, there are numerous signs that point to contradictions and doubts in the ranks of Young Ireland. Davis and Duffy’s marginalisation of Moore did not in fact represent the views of all the *Nation*’s authors. Chief among the dissenting voices was Cork barrister Michael Joseph Barry, who at a meeting of the “82 Club³ proposed a toast to ‘the Bard of Ireland, Thomas Moore’”. Barry praised him for having combined “the poet and the patriot” and for daring “to foretell the redress of Ireland”. Barry alone among the *Nation* authors located Moore’s production within a temporal framework, allowing that, while much of “what he has written is behind the spirit of today”, it was nonetheless “far . . . in advance of the spirit of the day in which he wrote”. He even justified Moore’s occasional sorrow and despair, asserting that “Through life he has been true to liberty and true to Ireland”. Barry’s opinion was seemingly not an isolated one, as “the toast was drunk with the most unbounded enthusiasm” (“First Banquet” 455).

A few months later, Barry became the editor of the collection *The Songs of Ireland*, which he dedicated to Moore: “To the national bard of Ireland, Thomas Moore, with feelings of the deepest respect and admiration, this volume the Songs of Ireland, is inscribed by Michael Joseph Barry”. Despite their brevity, Barry’s words were far warmer than Thomas Davis’s perfunctory lines on the presentation copy of *Spirit of the Nation*. Barry selected ten Moore songs, mostly
those that referred to the United Irish rather than to a remoter past (A. MacCarthy 128). The positive dedication and song selection counterbalanced Davis’s censure in his prefatory essay. Denis Florence MacCarthy (1817–1882), editor of The Book of Irish Ballads (Library of Ireland, 1846), was another dissenting voice within the Nation. The book contains only two poems by Moore, but in his preface MacCarthy strongly qualified several of Davis and Duffy’s assertions regarding Moore, rejecting Duffy’s clear-cut oppositions between song (Moore) and ballad (Duffy) while refuting Davis’s accusations of excessive prettiness and scarcity of narrative. By stating that most readers would already be familiar with Moore’s ballads (a generous form of praise), MacCarthy directly contradicted Davis and Duffy’s assertions that the Melodies had enjoyed no circulation among the people of Ireland. MacCarthy articulated most explicitly – in regards to the poetics of the new “Anglo-Irish” literature advocated by Duffy and Davis – that it was possible to “be thoroughly Irish in our writings” without being “ungrateful” to English literature (D. F. MacCarthy, Introduction 23). MacCarthy seemed to advocate a linguistic and literary Act of Union at a time when Irish political developments and the spectre of the Great Irish Famine had radically altered the landscape of cultural production and reception. This harkening to an earlier rhetoric of alliance may explain why MacCarthy was the most lenient of the Nation’s Moore reviewers. MacCarthy did not advocate diglossia as the defining mark of a separate Irish identity and seemed to confine his aspirations to the literary sphere, not the political one, in a stance that parallels his lack of involvement in the Young Ireland rising of 1848.

Thomas D’Arcy McGee (1825–1868), editor of the Boston Pilot and later Nation journalist, expressed his opinions of Moore in Historical Sketches of O’Connell and his Friends. The book, published in Boston in 1845, was composed for the Irish-American diaspora – a significantly
different audience from the Library of Ireland series. Moore, the subject of a highly laudatory biography, is listed among O’Connell’s “friends” despite his known doubts over O’Connell’s politics. His distance from the actual conflicts of Ireland can explain why McGee was quick to depict Moore as having lived “but one prolonged effort of patriotism—one endless succession of thoughts on Ireland” (McGee, Historical Sketches 55). McGee was also the only Nation author to praise Moore’s appeal to sentiment, which “melts us into tears, or rouses us to indignation” in the Melodies (McGee, Historical Sketches 55). McGee’s work – together with Barry’s toast and MacCarthy’s preface – reflects the entrenched popularity of Moore within Ireland and also with the Irish emigrant community (see Caraher, “When Thomas Moore” in this volume). This can explain the severity of Davis and Duffy’s reviews, which in carving out a space for their new vision of Irish cultural nationalism, did so at Moore’s expense.

After the failure of the Nation’s political project and of O’Connell’s Repeal Association, certain members of Young Ireland revised their beliefs. From 1880 Duffy, now knighted for his role as Prime Minister of the Australian state of Victoria, undertook a posthumous memorialisation of the Young Ireland movement that contained partial retractions of his stance on Moore. In a discussion of the editorial policy of the Nation, Duffy acknowledged that “Moore had mastered both moods of the national harp”: the medieval “roar of battle choked with sobs” and, under the Penal Laws that limited the rights of Catholics from 1695 to 1829, “the subdued sorrow of hope long baffled and postponed” (Young Ireland 1: 58–59). These brief phrases constitute a more positive assessment of Moore than the Ballad Poetry preface. Duffy then qualified Davis’s observations on the circulation Moore’s songs, admitting that they “were sung in the drawing-rooms of Dublin and Cork, and in mansions and presbyteries; but . . . where the peasants recreated themselves, they were nearly unknown” (Duffy, Young Ireland 1: 58–59). This is a
tacit acknowledgement that the *Nation* was guilty of exaggeration when they had stated that Moore’s works had not yet reached the Irish middle classes. To crown his retractions, when recounting the *Belfast Vindicator*’s mistaken identification of Moore as the author of the *Spirit of the Nation*, Duffy admitted in a footnote that “Some of the young men were of opinion . . . that Moore got scant justice at our hands” (Duffy, *Young Ireland* 1: 69n).

Taken together, Duffy’s retractions and the works of MacCarthy, Barry, and McGee suggest that Moore’s popularity with the middle classes was far more widespread than Davis and Duffy had implied. The *Melodies* were a product of the same cultural milieu as the national tales of Mariah Edgeworth (1768–1849) and Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan (1781?–1859) – sharing a public of British and Irish readers interested in defining “a cultural conception of identity” for post-Union Ireland (C. Connolly 46). Moore’s appeal to the “rich and educated” partook far less of snobbery and much more of a calculated attempt at influencing the key decision-makers of his time. Davis and *The Nation* overlooked that the *Melodies* were published before Catholic Emancipation (with only the tenth number of 1834 postdating this milestone). Joep Leerssen argues convincingly that the public sphere *The Nation* addressed was a result of Catholic empowerment derived from O’Connell’s campaign for Emancipation and did not exist previously (*National Thought in Europe* 161–62). When Moore published the *Melodies*, even in prosperous Britain the potential “reading nation” for such expensive publications was perhaps as small as 200,000. The Irish book market was far more limited, even in relation to Ireland’s smaller population (St Clair 191).

The undisciplined, agitated masses of 1798 still loomed large behind Moore’s “Letter to the Marchioness of Donegal”, which aimed to distinguish his refined *Melodies* from the rabble-rousing outputs of the United Irish (while tacitly acknowledging a commonality of aims). But in
the aftermath of Catholic Emancipation, the balance of power on the Irish question shifted from the British upper classes to the Irish masses, now arranged and disciplined by O’Connell in the Catholic Association in the 1820s and the Repeal Association in the 1840s. This change was reflected on the literary scene in the rise of the new breed of Catholic authors, whose novels supplanted the national tale. Ironically, these authors, the Nation included, addressed the “new Irish Catholic public sphere” that Moore’s Melodies and Captain Rock had decisively shaped (Nolan 54). However, by the 1840s, the Melodies had not yet been completely “tranched down” (St Clair 32) to smaller and cheaper formats that would fall within the reach of this emergent audience. While single songs and editions without music were published in the 1840s in Ireland, the Nation more fully exploited the opportunities of mass circulation through the six pence Spirit of the Nation and the one shilling Library of Ireland volumes. The Nation too, however, may have failed to reach a truly popular audience, by the “firesides” and in “shebeens” mentioned by Davis and Duffy. John Moulden’s pioneering survey of the Irish printed ballad has revealed extremely limited circulation for the productions of the Nation, which were coated in a language that was too distant from “the people’s oral linguistic mode” and were too “politically oriented” (Moulden 1: 284–85).

**Conclusion**

The fact that, over thirty years after their first publication, Davis and Duffy were engaging critically with Moore’s oeuvre and especially the Melodies shows how vital and significant his works still were, even in social and cultural circumstances that had changed beyond recognition (thanks in no small part to the Melodies themselves). Their negative evaluations of Moore’s language hid the numerous debts that the Nation owed to him, as well as to their openly
acknowledged literary antecedents among the United Irish (Thuente 195). The Nation emphasised the role of Irish language in their claims of a separate identity, based on “cultural rather than economic or legal arguments” (Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe* 160–61). This disguised their debt to Moore and their adoption of a shared poetic language of Irishness. Simultaneously, the Nation acknowledged English as the language of modernity and of their readers, the product of the first National Schools. The Nation criticised Moore for not having created a hybrid, heteroglossic form of English language that bore traces of the nationally defining Irish Gaelic. In so doing, it ignored Moore’s use of the “musical dimension” of his poetry and of his “dialogue with silence” to both convey Irish nationality and disguise it in forms acceptable to his Anglophone audience (Pittock 115). When the Nation acknowledged Moore’s musical diglossia, it was to critique it as inauthentic and “corrupt”, thus espousing Bunting and O’Donovan’s paradigm of antiquarian preservation of the past rather than Moore’s dynamic reinterpretation in the social and cultural milieu of his present (H. White, *Music and the Irish Literary Imagination* 43). Throughout their collections of original poetry, the Nation struggled to erase all traces of their dependence on Moore in terms of vocabulary and music. Poetically, their attempts to surpass Moore through cultivation of a more national language adopted the idiosyncratic and diverging methods of both simplification of his diction and the addition of an antiquarian gilding. Commercially, their publishing strategies and market diversification were much more successful and, with both popular and library editions, ensured the transmission of their interpretation of national literature into the future. In time, cheap editions of Moore’s *Melodies* were also released, but found themselves jostling for position in a marketplace inundated with texts and collections of the Nation.
The *Nation’s* implicit aim was to write poetry that would stand to the Repeal campaign as Moore’s stood to the struggle for Catholic Emancipation. His role in changing the mentality of his audience on the question of Ireland was acknowledged even by detractors, such as “Father Prout”, who admitted that the *Melodies* “made emancipation palatable”, winning the cause “silently, imperceptibly, but effectually; and if there be a national tribute due to any man, it is to the child of song” (Mahony 1: 246). In the stadial model of nationalism described by Hroch (22–24), Moore and national tale authors such as Edgeworth and Owenson can be seen as embodying phase A, when scholars and men of letters raise awareness of cultural heritage and become, as Leerssen terms it “the cultural carriers of national thought” (*National Thought in Europe* 164). Davis, Duffy, and the *Nation* represent instead phase B, when the cultural self-awareness of Phase A forms the basis of “demands for social reform” (Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe* 164). Yet in challenging Moore’s position as national bard, they also attempted to rewrite phase A to suit the changed circumstances of Ireland. The work of Moore and the national tale authors had indeed led to a phase B with social and economic demands, Catholic Emancipation. O’Connell later sought more sweeping changes through his campaign for Repeal, of which the *Nation* authors were active participants. Moore’s ambitions, however, did not extend beyond Emancipation, which he defined as “the end of my politics” (Thomas Moore to John Murray, 17 April 1829, ML 633–34). Davis, Duffy, and Young Ireland therefore stepped in and created a new cultural phase A that redefined Irish identity in terms more congruent with the political goals of the Repeal Association.

To do so, they subjected Moore’s oeuvre to a critical reduction through the *Nation*, the *Spirit of the Nation*, and the Library of Ireland. The dissenting voices in the *Nation* – such as Barry and MacCarthy – remained marginal, as testified by their sales. Between 1845 and 1881, Barry’s
"Songs of Ireland" went through only four editions and MacCarthy’s *Book of Irish Ballads* through just three (A. MacCarthy 188). This is not to say that Moore was ignored by the Irish public or that he did not enjoy popular success during the Repeal campaign and beyond, but that the continued reprints of *Ballad Poetry of Ireland* and *Spirit of the Nation* contributed to the decline of Moore’s star among cultural nationalist circles. The final nails in the coffin were hammered in by William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), who described himself as a “True brother of that company./ Who sang to sweeten Ireland’s wrong” together with Davis, Mangan, and Ferguson but not Moore, despite their relative poetic merits (“To Ireland in the Coming Times”, *Poems* 234–35). Thus, Yeats and the Celtic Revivalists repeated a similar approach, writing a new phase A that chimed better with their phase C goals of complete independence for Ireland based on total de-anglicisation. Like the Young Irelanders before them, the Celtic Revivalists needed to dethrone Moore in order to stake their cultural claim to Ireland.

**Bibliography**

Works not found here are listed in a concluding Bibliography, which contains references common to more than one chapter.


—. Literary and Historical Essays. James Duffy, 1846.


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1 In Davis’s own copy of *The Nation*, now in the Royal Irish Academy, this article is clearly marked “T. Davis”. See Royal Irish Academy RRG/4 nos. 9–10. Also, see (Duffy, *Thomas Davis* 96).

2 This would be Thomas Moore’s *History of Ireland*, which was issued in four volumes by the London-based publisher Longmans between 1835 and 1846.

3 The ’82 Club was founded in 1844 to commemorate the 1782 Volunteers, who had campaigned for an Irish parliament. Its membership was restricted to gentlemen, who held banquets attired in a military-style costume.