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Songs without Sunrise: Irish Victorian Poetry and the Risorgimento

Frederik Van Dam
Radboud University - Holland

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Abstract

While the Risorgimento had a profound impact on the shape of English literature, this geopolitical crisis did not leave a similar imprint on Irish literature. Historical circumstances can explain why the nineteenth-century struggle for the unification of Italy did not lead to rapprochement between Italy and Ireland: support for the Italian cause put Irish nationalists in opposition with Catholic interests at home, while in the eyes of Italian nationalists the Irish question weakened the function of Britain as a liberalising power. Even so, a few Irish poets did address the Risorgimento. This article shows how poems by Thomas Davis, James Clarence Mangan, Jane Francesca Elgee, and Aubrey de Vere express a variety of positions (isolationism, catastrophism, liberalism, realism) that are informed by a complex constellation of geopolitical factors. By means of a series of close readings, the present inquiry aims to shed new light on the geopolitical form of Irish poetry in the Victorian age.

Keywords: geopolitics; Ireland; nationalism; poetry; Risorgimento.

After the end of the Cold War, certain thinkers and analysts began to harbour hope for the emergence of a post-national order, in which peace would be maintained through economic interdependence and international institutions. Francis Fukuyama famously maintained that "the world in which [people from the West] live is less and less the old one of geopolitics" and that "the rules and methods of the historical world are not appropriate to life in the post-historical one" (Fukuyama 1992, 283). The Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 is only the most recent reminder, however, that geopolitics, or the "influence of spatial environment on political imperatives" (Howard 1994, 132), remains of

paramount importance. In one of the most-cited articles on the relationship between Russia and Ukraine, prompted by the annexation of Crimea in 2014, John Mearsheimer argues that Washington had been misguided in maintaining that the Kremlin would not interpret military actions near the Russian border as a geopolitical threat:

> the two sides have been operating with different play books: Putin and his compatriots have been thinking and acting according to realist dictates, whereas their Western counterparts have been adhering to liberal ideas about international politics. The result is that the United States and its allies unknowingly provoked a major crisis over Ukraine. (2014, 84)

Mearsheimer's reliance on a contrast between liberal and realist approaches to foreign policy has been subjected to critique from various points of view (e.g., McFaul 2014; Sestanovich 2014). The role of literature and the arts in the formation as well as the response to this crisis deserves further scrutiny, however: like canaries in a coal-mine, cultural artefacts and activities may reveal aspects or perspectives that tend to remain under the radar in political analyses. The 2012 television adaptation of Mikhail Bulgakov's *The White Guard* (1925), for instance, was inextricably bound to the annexation of Crimea: expanding on Bulgakov's portrayal of revolutionary Kyiv in 1918, the series "portrays Ukraine as a hotbed of all sorts of revolutionary chaos and a place which already due to its geographical and cultural proximity poses a constant threat to the stable political order in Russia" (Zabirko 2019, 12). If anything, a consideration of such cultural interventions may help us situate geopolitical crises in their *longue durée*.

To further explore the ways in which culture and geopolitics are mutually constitutive issues, this article examines how the nineteenth-century struggle for the unification of Italy, better known as the Risorgimento, left an imprint on Irish literature of the Victorian age. Although the nineteenth-century Risorgimento and the contemporary situation in Ukraine are vastly apart in space and time, a juxtaposition reveals some surprising continuities in the ways in which these international conflicts are framed. While today's Western commentators tend to talk about the Ukrainian 'crisis', Victorian public moralists such as Matthew Arnold addressed the Italian 'question' (e.g., Bevington 1953). To call a geopolitical conflict a 'question' rather than a 'crisis' is to invoke a range of assumptions. As Holly Case has argued (2018), in the nineteenth century the genre of the 'question' developed into a mode of public discourse that was characterised by a tendency to interweave

disparate issues: by bundling various questions, thinkers could present a solution that would solve different problems in one single stroke. This discourse had different outcomes: it cleared the road for the horror of the Final Solution, but it also contributed to the establishment of a liberal world order invested in the creation of international institutions that would safeguard and maintain global peace. The Second World War seemed to mark the demise of the 'question' as a way of addressing societal issues, in favour of the crisis paradigm. It is telling, however, that in twenty-first-century Russia the question discourse seems to have resurfaced along with the nineteenth-century notion of a Great Game between the different Great Powers. Given the possibility that we may be "on the cusp of another age of questions [...] we might do well to consider what the first one wrought" (Case 2018, xv). A reconsideration of the Italian question from an Irish point of view is a rewarding case study. As recent research has shown, Irish literature was determined not just by its place within the United Kingdom, but also by geopolitical forces that operated on a larger, global level [1]. By situating Irish poetry of the Victorian age in the context of the 'Italian question', I hope to complement ongoing investigations into the geopolitics of nineteenth-century Irish literature, and to thus subject the cultural mediation of geopolitical crises to further scrutiny.

1. English literature and the Risorgimento

The origins of the Risorgimento lie in the Congress of Vienna (1815), which, following the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, restored the map of Europe to its pre-Napoleonic state. Even if the Congress heralded a period of peace and security, its authoritarian tendencies were fiercely criticised by liberals all over Europe (de Graaf 2020). The dismissal of Italian claims to sovereignty was perceived as particularly deplorable [2]. Lombardy and Venice, in the North, were returned to Austria. The smaller Duchies of Parma and Modena were ruled without representa-

[1] In a monograph on nineteenth-century Irish travel writing about foreign spaces, for instance, Raphaël Ingelbien (2016) draws on a wide range of neglected material to show how the Irish participation in mass tourism often subverted dominant trends in Anglo-Saxon travel writing.

[2] The following summary is based on Chapman n.d.

tive assemblies, as were the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and the Kingdom of Sardinia, although the rulers of these last two were comparatively enlightened. The centre was governed in despotic fashion by the Pope. In the South, the Bourbon empire maintained its hold over the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. In the course of the decades following the Congress of Vienna, however, significant advances were made towards a unified country. A series of small insurrections culminated in the revolutions of 1848, which resulted in the foundation of a number of short-lived republican states. A more permanent consolidation was achieved a decade later, when the Kingdom of Sardinia, led by Count Cavour, made a pact with France, led by Napoleon III. In 1859, this alliance liberated the North of Italy, while at the same time Garibaldi overthrew the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in the South. Catholic support for the Pope in France put a stop to further Unification, however: unrest at home prompted Napoleon III to shield Rome from the nationalists and to end the war prematurely. Coupled with the fact that the French also annexed the territories of Nice and Savoy, this withdrawal was widely perceived as deceit. As a result, English liberals could sweep in and assert themselves as Italy's true liberators. British support made it possible for the two states which remained under authoritarian rule, Venice and Rome, to be gained in 1866 and 1870, respectively.

The British followed the Risorgimento with keen interest. The presence of Italian exiles in England and the existence of English colonies in Italy ensured that the Risorgimento became a central topic for Romantic and Victorian poets (Chapman and Stabler 2003; Pfister and Hertel 2008; Isabella 2009). In general, their response was a mixture of admiration for the country's beauty and dismay at its abject political condition. Matthew Reynolds (2005) has argued that these responses can be situated on a continuum that ranges from elegy to prophecy. The third stanza of the fourth canto of Lord Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1818) offers an instance of the former:

> In Venice Tasso's echoes are no more,
> And silent rows the songless gondolier;
> Her palaces are crumbling to the shore,
> And music meets not always now the ear;
> Those days are gone – but Beauty still is here.
> States fall, arts fade – but Nature doth not die,
> Nor yet forget how Venice once was dear,
> The pleasant place of all festivity,
> The revel of the earth, the masque of Italy! (Byron 1818, 4)

Lines such as these set up a causal relation between the splendour of the country and the fatalism of its politics. Venice is here figured as longing for the lost accomplishments of the past, as a dream-like place in which action in the present is impossible. Lamartine famously described Italy as "la terre des morts" (Reynolds 2005, 83), the country of the dead, a phrase that would seem to apply to Byron's vignette as well as to his descriptions of many other Italian cities.

Thirty years after Byron's effusions, however, the gondoliers were no longer without songs. Many English poets were inspired by the Risorgimento and tried to support it: they took "questions which were raised pre-eminently by Italian nationalism, and elaborat[ed] them imaginatively in a realm of verse" (Reynolds 2005, 125). The most emphatic example of such an attempt is arguably Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851), in which she describes how the 1848 revolutions promised but failed to deliver the creation of a Florentine republic. Hers is a prophetic work, as the following lines from part II may illustrate:

> Meanwhile, let all the far ends of the world
> Breathe back the deep breath of their old delight,
> To swell the Italian banner just unfurled.
> Help, lands of Europe! for, if Austria fight,
> The drums will bar your slumber. Had ye curled
> The laurel for your thousand artists' brows,
> If these Italian hands had planted none?
> Can any sit down idle in the house
> Nor hear appeals from Buonarroti's stone
> And Raffael's canvas, rousing and to rouse? (Barrett Browning 1851, 75-76)

In these lines, the artistic accomplishments of Italy are figured not as a cause for elegy but as a call for action. Whether this call was successful is debatable. Barrett Browning's poem met with a cold reception; as James Eli Adams notes, it "aroused little enthusiasm, in part because readers did not much care for poetry immersed in the intricacies of foreign politics" (Adams 2012, 132). She renewed her efforts ten years later, during the war of 1859, in *Poems before Congress* (1860), but again she failed to garner public praise (cf. Dyck and Stone n.d.). Perhaps the most significant attempt in the prophetic mode was Algernon Charles Swinburne's *Songs before Sunrise* (1871), notable for its personal animus directed at Christianity, and published as the Risorgimento reached its culmination. Between Swinburne and Byron there is a continuum on which many other mid-nineteenth-century works of English literature

may be situated. In Arthur Hugh Clough's *Amours de Voyage* (1858), for instance, the Risorgimento is treated with scepticism and irony. Victorian novelists, too, were receptive to the lure of Italian nationalism: it prompted George Eliot to try her hand at a historical novel, *Romola* (1863), and George Meredith tried to do for the novel what Swinburne did for poetry with his 1867 romance about the war of 1848, *Vittoria* (Huzzard 1959).

These different examples cannot be fully understood outside of the context of British geopolitics. By writing in support of the Risorgimento, be it in the form of elegy or prophecy, British authors were in effect contributing to the development of a liberal foreign policy: "The Italian issue [...] allowed Liberals to combine national assertiveness with the defence of oppressed peoples, and to marry a commitment to constitutional liberalism with a triumphant hostility both to the untrustworthy Napoleon and to the more traditional conservative forces of Austria and the papacy" (Parry 2001, 230). For Irish nationalists, in contrast, support for the Risorgimento was fraught with ambiguity (cf. Barr *et al.* 2015; Carter 2015). Initially, many of the writers associated with the Young Ireland movement sought to give the Irish struggle an international appeal by identifying with the Young Italy of Mazzini [3]. At the time of the Irish Famine and the revolutions of 1848, as Roy Foster notes, *The Nation* developed a cult "with Ireland as 'the Italy of the West', England playing Austria's villainous role, and France as a possible deliverer for both" (2011, 74-75). Italian nationalists held different views, however. Two of the important Italian nationalists, Cavour and Mazzini, actively argued against the case for Irish nationalism. Count Cavour provides an analysis of this problem in his *Considerations on the Present State and Future Prospects of Ireland* (1846). In this booklet, originally written in French and translated into English, Cavour "accepts the legitimacy of past Irish grievances, but insists that Britain is a liberalizing power that functions as a globally stabilizing force and so must be protected from Irish disturbances that are only local in importance" (Wright 2010, 2). Ignoring the fact that Daniel O'Connell was celebrated as a liberal statesman throughout much of Europe (Grogan 1991), Cavour argues that the possibility of an effective liberal foreign policy is thwarted by Irish nationalism, which he presents as "parochial rather than liberal,

[3] Historians have long held that Giuseppe Mazzini influenced the Young Ireland movement, but Colin Barr (2008) has argued that his influence on Irish bishops was more substantial.

as the agenda of the 'Catholic party' and not of the Irish people as a nation" (Wright 2010, 11). Italian nationalists were working very much in opposition to the Pope who, indeed, did not want to see the Papal States submerged into a greater Italy. Irish nationalists were thus caught in a double bind: they could not uphold Italian nationalism as an exemplar and at the same time defend the Pope's temporal sovereignty. It is indicative that while by 1860 Garibaldi was able to recruit soldiers in England, the Irish were sending soldiers to defend the Papal States. As Anne O'Connor puts it, "The Italian Risorgimento brought Italy and England closer together but it only served to further distance Ireland from any empathy with either country" (O'Connor 2010, 405). It is not surprising, then, that in Ireland there was not the same flourishing tradition of writing about the Risorgimento as in England. Even so, some Irish poets did intervene in the debates sparked by the Risorgimento. The aesthetic qualities of their poems are markedly different, however, and highlight the contradictions of the geopolitical context in which they were written. Suffused with darkness, Irish poems about the Risorgimento do not herald the dawn of a new era: to adapt Swinburne's conceit, they are songs without sunrise [4].

[4] The representation of the Italian question in Irish fiction, too, awaits further scrutiny. Irish novelists used Italian subject matter to play with a commonplace in Irish literature, the marriage plot of the national tale, which has been so helpfully analysed by Mary Jean Corbett (2000). In this tradition, the relationship between the protagonists is an allegory for the Union of Ireland and Britain. It informs minor fiction that critics have yet to scrutinise, such as Hamilton Geale's *Ernesto di Ripalta: A Tale of the Italian Revolution* (1849) and Edward Maturin's *Bianca: A Tale of Erin and Italy* (1852). The former is critical, while the latter mildly supportive; both have Gothic overtones. Charles Lever's similarly neglected but more artful *Tony Butler* (1865) evinces an approving attitude towards the Italian freedom struggle. The eponymous hero becomes a follower of Garibaldi and is wounded fighting outside Naples. For his portrayal of the revolution, Lever could fall back on his experiences as Consul at La Spezia and Trieste, and he makes cogent parallels between Irish and Italian affairs (Bareham 2011), and is critical of both. Anthony Trollope uses Italian nationalism to throw a sidelight on Irish nationalism (Van Dam 2018). While Trollope was working in Ireland as a Post Office surveyor, his brother was living in Tuscany, writing in support of the revolution. Trollope thus had a special stake in this event. A recurrent theme in his novels and short stories is that his English as well as his Irish characters fail to see Italy through the eyes of the Italians, and that their skewed perspective leads to conflict, often cast in the form of comedy. As such, Trollope implies that the intermingling of the English and the Irish in Italy will cause a rupture in the United Kingdom.

2. Isolation

One would assume that Thomas Davis (1814-1845), as the leader of the Young Ireland movement and founder of *The Nation*, would have tried to foster rapprochement between Young Italy and Young Ireland. After all, *The Nation* "exalted Irish nationalism as a 'spiritual essence', in a romantic conception of the nation that invites comparison with Mazzini's vision of *italianità*" (Huggins 2013, 36). Consider, for instance, Davis's thirteen poems about the Irish Brigade, the regiments of Irish soldiers that were an important part of the French army in the eighteenth century. These soldiers were exiles and generally travelled to France with smugglers who entered them on the ships' books as "Wilde Geese". In his poems about the exploits of the Brigade, Davis begins with the 1691 flight of the Wilde Geese in "The Death of Sarsfield", and ends with an epitaph for Wolfe Tone, one of the leaders of the 1798 Irish Rebellion. "The Surprise of Cremona" (1702) deals with Irish interference in Italian affairs. In this battle, the Austrians captured the eponymous town, which was controlled by the French, at night: Austrian soldiers entered the town through a secret passageway and surreptitiously opened the gates. The French garrison was thus taken by surprise and lost control of the city, with one exception. The Po-gate was guarded by two Irish regiments, commanded by Daniel O'Mahony and John Burke. They warded off the Austrian attack, pursued their advantage, and expelled the Austrians from the town. Davis's interest in this battle from a bygone age may seem nostalgic, but the poem has a topical intent: it resonates with contemporary events in Italy where, in the North, Austria was re-asserting its control. Irish nationalists used the Italian resistance to this occupation as a source of inspiration for their resistance to British rule; in *The Nation*'s editorials, the struggle between Italy and Austria was mapped unto the relation between Ireland and England, with France playing the role of deliverer for the oppressed.

At first sight, Davis's poem seems to stress the longstanding military collaboration between the Irish and the French, and to suggest that the Irish have a role to play in the defence of Italy. Curiously, however, the Italian citizens of Cremona are never mentioned, as the eighth and final stanza illustrates:

> News, news, in Vienna! – King Leopold's sad.
> News, news, in St. James's! – King William is mad.

> News, news, in Versailles! – 'Let the Irish Brigade
> Be loyally honoured, and royally paid'.
> News, news, in old Ireland! – high rises her pride,
> And high sounds her wail for her children who died,
> And deep is her prayer – 'God send I may see
> MacDonnell and Mahony fighting for me!' (Davis 1857, 137)

The difference with contemporary English poetry is marked. Unlike Lord Byron and unlike Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Davis is interested in the history of Italy only for what it tells about the Irish ability to defeat oppressors; the fate of Italy itself does not fundamentally concern him. Failing to look at Italian concerns through Italian eyes, his perspective is an isolationist one.

The poem's form and genre, too, make it different from English writing. The poem is written in anapaestic tetrameters, often with an iambic substitution of the first foot. Although this metre normally has comic overtones, it suits the dynamic action and enhances the poem's sense of trepidation and energy, as in the sixth stanza:

> 'In on them', said Friedberg, – and Dillon is broke,
> Like forest-flowers crushed by the fall of the oak;
> Through the naked battalions the cuirassiers go; –
> But the man, not the dress, makes the soldier, I trow. (137)

In the second line of the stanza above, for instance, Davis changes the metrical pattern to a pentameter consisting of three iambs followed by two anapaests, which briefly halts the rhythm. The line catches up with itself, thus giving the image of the falling tree a sonic echo. At the same time, this stanza illustrates how the poem lacks the formal playfulness that one finds in the work of Barrett Browning or Clough. Davis is happy to use the tropes and mannerisms of the ballad form, as is indicated by the archaic use of "trow" (meaning 'to believe'). More generally, Davis's reliance on the form of the historical ballad echoes the work of Walter Scott, a strong supporter of the post-Waterloo settlement, rather than that of Scott's political and poetic nemesis, Lord Byron. As such, "The Surprise of Cremona" seems slightly mannered and quite conservative. The stymied nature of its style ties in with the insularity of its content.

3. Catastrophe

The work of James Clarence Mangan (1803-1849) yields a very different impression. Davis and Mangan were kindred spirits; Mangan's early poetry predates the Young Ireland movement, but his later works appeared in *The Nation*. Mangan's contributions are less obviously patriotic, however. They are written as if from behind a mask, an impression that would seem to dovetail with his experience as a translator: Cóilín Parsons (2014) has shown how Mangan's translations and pseudo-translations of German, Persian and Turkish poetry are marked by disruption and irony, which results in an aesthetic of failure on the level of their form, and a critical cosmopolitanism on the level of their politics. As such, Mangan's translations thus challenge the principles of British Orientalism. This detached attitude filters through in his later translations from the Irish, as well as in his own compositions.

Only one of Mangan's poems is set in Italy. Strangely, "Gasparo Bandollo: An Anecdote of the South of Italy" (1820) was published in the *Dublin University Magazine*, which may seem an anomaly, since this periodical radiated a Unionist context from which Mangan had become estranged. Although Mangan's first poems were published in this Tory outlet and did not challenge its Tory politics, he then crossed over to Davis's *The Nation* and later to the militant pages of John Mitchel's short-lived *United Irishman*. One explanation for the poem's unusual place of publication can be found in the poem's date: it appeared in May 1849, at a time when both the *United Irishman* and *The Nation* had been suppressed. One may assume, then, that Mangan, who had to keep the wolf away from the doorstep, may have had no choice other than to publish it in the *Dublin University Magazine*.

That said, "Gasparo Bandollo" is perhaps not at odds with the more conservative politics of *Dublin University Magazine*. It is clear, in any case, that the poem itself does not fit neatly alongside the kind of poetry that Davis wrote. Mangan's poem refracts and distorts the form of the ballad as Davis practised it: as in his translations, the perspective is detached, almost cynical. The poem's origins confirm this impression: it is an adaptation of a poem by the German poet Adelbert von Chamisso, which was itself an adaptation of a story by the French poet Prosper Merimée (Chuto 1988, 50). Mangan changes the names of the principal characters and changes the setting from Corsica to Calabria, thus obscuring the poem's literary antecedents. At the same time, "Gasparo

Bandollo" is imbued with a raw energy that seems to have originated in Mangan's personal past. As Mangan points out in his autobiography, the poem symbolises the troubled relation with his father:

> [My father's] temper was not merely quick and irascible, but it also embodied much of that calm concentrated spirit of Milesian fierceness, a picture of which I have endeavoured to paint in my Italian story of 'Gasparo Bandollo'. [...] It was his boast, uttered in pure glee of heart, that we 'would run into a mouse-hole' to shun him. (Mangan 1968, 13-14)

In her biography, Ellen Shannon-Mangan (1996) builds on these confessions to argue that we should read the poem as an expression of Mangan's tortured inner self. One can also discern a political statement, however: in Mangan's tragic vision, the Italian question comes closest to what we would now call a crisis, an epoch-altering catastrophe in which there is no reprieve for one's past sins.

The poem opens with the arrival of one Vascoló Sevrini, an Italian nationalist, at a peasant's hovel. Wounded, he asks Giambattista Bandollo, the young boy occupying the cabin, to hide him and give him shelter, saying that "the spot / Is safe if thou betray me not" and arguing that if his wounds "plead not, Italia's wounds may – that Italia *they* destroy" (Mangan 1849, 650). His pursuers find the hut, however: "In burst the slaves of Alien Law". Given the setting in the South of Italy, a contemporary reader might have inferred that the agents of this Alien Law are part of the Bourbon army. The young Giambattista is intimidated and, speechless, reveals Sevrini's hiding place:

> Mute stands yon trembler, but his finger
> Points to the blood-bedabbled straw,
> That blushes for his perfidy. (650)

These lines are moving, with the succession of plosives in "points", "blood-bedabbled", "blushes" and "perfidy", sounds that anticipate the boy's stammering, blubbering response. The enjambment between the first two lines further increases the suspense of this crucial moment. More emotional onslaught follows, as the poem's narrator addresses Sevrini and proclaims his fate in grim details: "And Morn's red rays shall see the ravens / Fleshing their foul beaks in thy corse!" (651). After this grim foreshadowing, the fourth stanza shifts the focus back to Giambattista's circumscribed perspective:

> But Heaven and Earth are hushed once more.
> Young Giambattista's eyes are bent

In fearful glances of the floor.
But little weeneth he or weeteth
Of the deep cry his land repeateth
    In million tones of one lament.
Nought pondereth he of wars of yore,
Of battling Ghibelline and Guelph,
    And bootless fights and trampled lands,
    And Gallic swords and Teuton chains,
    His eye but marks yon dark-red stains.
Those red stains now burn on himself,
    And in his heart, and on his hands! (651)

Giambattista is not concerned with geopolitical actuality and history, be it the revolution of 1820 ("the deep cry of his land"), the struggle between the Holy Roman Empire and the Papacy in the Middle Ages ("Ghibelline and Guelph"), French interventions ("Gallic swords"), or the Austrian occupation ("Teuton chains"). Instead, this little boy is overwhelmed by a primaeval mixture of guilt and fear.

When the boy's father, Gasparo Bandollo, arrives, he notes the blood stains and asks "*Who* sought [his] asylum, and from *whom*?" (651). The word "asylum" resonates with the plight of many Irish who were forced into exile in fear of British persecution, as well as with the particularly Irish concept of hospitality. In ancient Ireland, hospitality was mandated by law. Welcoming a stranger was an enforced cultural norm with a detailed set of customary guidelines and to refuse hospitality was to risk being shunned and sanctioned (O'Sullivan 2004). In modernity, these rules lost their purpose, and were taken advantage of; Irish literary history abounds with anecdotes of guests who outstayed their welcome. But the word also has diplomatic and geopolitical overtones: by dwelling on the notion of asylum, Mangan's poem addresses an important issue in international law, the right of seeking and offering sanctuary. It is unclear whether Giambattista is fully cognizant of his duty. Whereas in Chamisso's original the boy agrees to offer refuge only for a monetary reward and he betrays the wounded fugitive only when the soldiers offer him a watch, Giambattista's behaviour is not explained: it just seems as self-evident that the boy should not object to opening the home to a stranger, as that he should betray this guest when his enemies arrive. Giambattista's father's behaviour is as opaque. As the son tries but fails to explain himself with "disjointed / And feeble phrases [...] / Powerless to gloss the ghastly truth" (652), the father remains silent and responds with a defeated gesture: "He merely turned him to the wall, /

And, with closed eyes, took down his rifle" (652). Giambattista and his father both seem to be the victim of a larger, unconscious forces that they cannot comprehend, a conflict that Mangan's encapsulates as in the half-rhyme of "blood" with "nationhood" (652), as well as in the caesura in a consecutive line: "FATE slayeth him. Thy child is dead" (652). The poem seems to deplore this tragic state of affairs, in which unavoidable geopolitical events lead to intergenerational strife:

> Onwards in power the wide flood rolls
> Whose thunder-waves wake evermore
> The caverned soul of each far shore,
> But when the midnight storm-wind sweeps
> In wrath above its broken deeps,
> What heart but ponders darkly over
> The myriad wrecks those waters cover!
> It is the lowly brook alone
> That winds its way with Music's tone
> By orange bower and lily-blossom,
> And sinks into the Parent Wave,
> Not as worn Age into its grave,
> But as pure Childhood on God's bosom. (652-653)

These sentiments are worlds apart from the rousing call to arms that one encounters in Davis's poem. Rather, it is a Horatian or Epicurean disavowal of the point of political strife and, indeed, political poetry.

In its play with metre, Mangan's poem has already attuned the reader to this debilitating sense of paralysis. It is possible to detect an iambic tetrameter, which is more noticeable in the poem's conclusion, but in general there is no fixed beat; in a peculiar way, Mangan alternates clusters of stressed syllables with clusters of unstressed syllables. The result is not a babbling brook, but a clashing of thunder-waves. The final line illustrates as much: "But as púre Chíldhood on Gód's bósom". One could try to make sense of these stresses by identifying them as a pyrrhus followed by a spondee (twice), or as two instances of the so-called double iamb, but in other lines Mangan ends on three consecutively stressed beats, imitating the arresting metres of Gaelic poetry: "But when the mídnight stórm-wínd swéeps". In short, Mangan refuses to adhere to a certain metre, thus continually upsetting his readers' expectations. His rhyme scheme, too, is erratic. Although the conclusion of the final stanza is quite smooth, consisting of rhyming couplets with the occasional half-rhyme, the poem's eight other stanzas, such as the fourth one cited above, have more complicated patterns, in which

rhymes are nestled in other rhymes. Although this scheme reminds one of Keats's odes, there is no system, only effects: Mangan chooses to be resolutely idiosyncratic. As such, the singularity of the poem's form chimes in with its message: rather than celebrate the Risorgimento, he shows the toll that nationalist beliefs may take on individual lives.

4. Liberalism

Like Mangan, Jane Francesca Elgee (later Lady Wilde, 1821-1896) shuttled between the worlds of *The Nation* and the *Dublin University Magazine*, "though her contributions to the latter ended after she was found in the office in compromising circumstances with the editor Isaac Butt" (Foster 2011, 69). While Davis lives on as a great nationalist and Mangan as a great poet, Elgee is remembered chiefly as "the mother of Oscar", a title that she bestowed upon herself when her son, Oscar Wilde, eclipsed her in his success (Melville 1999). Yet she was an extremely powerful presence in her own day. It was she who took over the editorship of *The Nation* when Charles Gavan Duffy was charged with sedition. Taking aim at poets such as Mangan, who are "content to express only [their] little soul in poetry", she sought to "express the soul of a great nation" (Ellmann 1988, 9) and considered herself to be "the acknowledged voice in poetry of all the people of Ireland" (Ellmann 1988, 9). In her later works, she successfully began to turn Irish legends and myths into poetry, thus influencing the younger Yeats.

In her youth and writing under the pen name of 'Speranza', she published one of the longest Irish poems about the Risorgimento. *Ugo Bassi: A Tale of the Italian Revolution* (London, 1857) deals with a figure from the revolutions of 1848: Ugo Bassi (1800-1849) was an Italian priest who converted to nationalism when the Pope seemed to support the cause, and who did not recant his newly acquired faith after the Pope's volte-face. Having served as Garibaldi's chaplain, he was eventually captured by the Austrians near Venice and executed in Bologna. The commemoration of a dead hero brings the poem into the register of the elegiac while the deferral of his promise to the future allies it with the prophetic. The poem is divided into two cantos, the first being an ode to Bassi and to Italy, and the second a more novelistic, action-packed story. Both contain elements that illustrate how Elgee's position comes close to the liberalism of her English contemporaries.

Elgee's poem is more melodious than Mangan's: although the poem's subject is war, readers seem to find themselves in the land of orange bowers and lily blossoms. The rhythm is leisurely and moves between iambic and anapaestic tetrameters. In celebrating Italy's unparalleled beauty, the first canto harks back to a well-known trope from English treatments of the Risorgimento:

> The sun beholds no land like thee –
> Earth boasts no second Italy.
> Thy burning skies and blooming shore
> Are fair and radiant as of yore;
> Thy roses, bent o'er every stream
> That glides beneath the summer beam,
> Prove that no earthly power can blight
> Thy native loveliness, nor quite
> Efface the bloom or veil the light
> That makes thee beautiful and bright,
> And smiles as if in hope to see
> Some happier morn arise on thee. (Speranza 1857, 2-3)

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's voice shimmers through in Elgee's images, even if her versification and diction are plainer. An Irish perspective is most obviously manifest in the epigraph of the first canto, which is taken from a poem by Thomas Moore, "From Life without Freedom": "The heroes that bleed / For virtue and mankind are heroes indeed" (1910, 312). In the first canto itself, however, this perspective is noticeably absent, save for a vague allusion in which she describes how revolutionaries "to other climes have gone, / Which skies less favouring look upon" (Speranza 1857, 76), a reference that could apply to Britain as well.

In the second canto, however, Elgee's Irish perspective becomes more apparent. Unlike Davis, whose poem is a list of historical characters, Elgee spins a long-winded narrative that is quite fictional. She introduces an antagonist, Anselmo, who becomes much more important than Bassi as the poem progresses, and who seems to be Elgee's invention. Anselmo's role in the narrative is that of a typical villain: he pretends to aid Bassi and the revolutionaries, but is in fact a traitor. He lives in a mysterious dark edifice, a convent from which a passage leads "Through vaults no sun had e'er made bright, / And caverns wrapt in endless night", where he walks "On purposes of evil bent" (61). Whereas Bassi appears as a saint, the light "like a halo of beauty beaming, / Round Bassi's brow" (14), Anselmo is a ghost:

His dark robed form, and gloomy air,
Half made him seem some lurid sprite,
Whose unreal shape appals the sight,
When looked on as it roams by night. (22)

Ugo Bassi and Anselmo's sister do not seem perturbed by Anselmo's ghostly bearing, however, and trust him. Only at the very end, when Bassi has been captured and Anselmo has been abandoned and disavowed by his sister does Anselmo see the error of his ways. After a delirious scene at Bassi's grave, where he sees his sister's ghost, he returns to the convent, and in a phantasmagorical scene he descends into the underworld. The poem concludes with a description of Bassi's grave, in which Elgee makes liberal use of the so-called pathetic fallacy, thus heightening the supernatural overtones of her narrative:

Far in his native land he lies
'Neath cloudless orbs and sunny skies –
There shines no star on land or billow
Like that which watches o'er his pillow;
Soft southern winds, which breathe perfume,
Waft fragrance to his lonely tomb;
And fields o'ver which green olives wave
Spread wide and blooming round his grave.
And thus by night and thus by day,
While flowers unfold and flowers decay,
Rests truth's lost champion, cold and dumb,
Wreath'd in the light of martyrdom. (115)

Apart from its more interesting rhythmical variations, this stanza offers an example of one of the poem's more innovative qualities. Its rhyme scheme is conventional, but the rhymes are striking, as they yoke together very different associations: "billow" and "pillow", "perfume" and "tomb", "wave" and "grave", "day" and "decay", and, most remarkable of all for a poem that seems to celebrate heroic deeds, "dumb" with "martyrdom". These conjunctions introduce a darker note, a concern with death and paradox that can also be found in her use of repetition and wordplay in the following, evocative line: "The dead, the dead, how still are they" (66). As these examples illustrate, Elgee has a penchant for the macabre and the occult. She is much more vivid in her descriptions of decay, as in the following lines about the battlefield around Rome:

Italian slain obstruct their track,
High heaped their stumbling feet beneath,

As if they strove to keep them back,
And aid their country even in death. (67)

This quatrain illustrates how in Elgee's worldview the membrane between the world of the living and the world of the dead seems to be thin.

As such, the poem's form dovetails with the tradition of the Irish Gothic. As W.J. McCormack (1998) and, in more recent years, Jarlath Killeen (2014) have shown, this mode was developed mainly by Irish Protestants. One thinks here of Sheridan Le Fanu and Bram Stoker, but its most prominent representative was probably Robert Charles Maturin, Elgee's uncle by her marriage to William Wilde. Maturin was an inspiration in more than a literary way: like him, Elgee entertained in rooms darkened by closed shutters and lit only by dim, red-shaded lamps. And like Sheridan Le Fanu, she was a close reader of Swedenborg, whose writings she translated. For Irish Protestants, the Gothic was attractive because it suited the feeling of "increasing marginalisation in the new Ireland that was emerging throughout the nineteenth century" (Killeen 2014, 47). As Roy Foster has argued, when "the Catholic middle class grew and began to occupy traditionally Protestant positions in municipal government and local structures of power, Protestants compensated for their loss of power in the real world by reinvesting their energies in another, more obscure, and yet more powerful domain" (Killeen 2014, 58; cf. Foster 1995). By couching her vision of the Risorgimento in such a 'Protestant' narrative, Elgee is in fact writing against the kind of Catholic nationalism which came to dominate nineteenth-century Irish political life, and which would come to oppose Italian nationalism. Elgee seems to have thought that the example of Italy was so important precisely because it offered the Irish a kind of nationalism that was emphatically *not* Catholic. While her use of the Gothic and her celebration of the Risorgimento may at first sight seem incongruous and paradoxical, it is, for a Protestant nationalist, a quite obvious combination.

5. Realism

Like Elgee and Davis, Aubrey de Vere (1814-1902) was part of the Anglo-Irish Protestant minority. Under influence of Cardinal Newman and Cardinal Manning, however, he rejected his faith and in 1851 turned to the Church of Rome. An audience with Pope Pius the Ninth gave

his poetry a new direction. Even so, he was more enmeshed in English literary life than any of the other writers considered in this article, and numbered among his friends William Wordsworth, Thomas Carlyle, and Alfred Lord Tennyson, who wrote his famous "The Splendour Falls" while staying at de Vere's house in Curragh Chase.

In 1888, de Vere made an intervention in the debates about the Risorgimento with *Saint Peter's Chains; or Rome and the Italian Revolution*, eighteen years after the Italian question had been formally solved. Dedicated to the memory of Pius the Ninth, the book expresses a Catholic view on Italian Unification. As de Vere explains in his introduction, the poems "were written at various periods, chiefly subsequent to the abolition of the Pope's Temporal Sovereignty, but some of them in anticipation of that event" (de Vere 1888, iii). He also approvingly cites a remark by Charles de Montalembert, which is a central motif in the poems themselves: "The temporal and religious powers are united at Rome that they may be able to remain separate everywhere else" (iv). Only if the Pope is not subjected to another power, so de Vere argues, can his independence be guaranteed. The Pope's independence is important for a religious as well as a political reason. In de Vere's thinking, the Pope functions as the judge in a pan-European tribunal, as the upholder of "the Christian 'law of nations', through which many a petty nation survived for centuries, side by side with its stronger neighbours" (viii). From this point of view, the Risorgimento, especially in its anti-clerical manifestation as defined by Mazzini, has had dire consequences. The Risorgimento may seem local in importance, but in fact it destroyed the balance of power and also challenged the idea of the balance of power itself. In the words of de Vere:

> We, since then,
> Have seen strange omens, and shall see again;
> Treaties are null! No realm the rest can trust!
> A shameful day draws to a stormy close:
> But whence or when the vengeance no man knows. (50)

If the book's message is Catholic, so is its shape. It is a series of 55 sonnets, that most conservative of forms, divided into three parts. "The Revolt against Christian Civilisation" (21 sonnets) is an attack on the Risorgimento and on French duplicity in particular, which signals the difference from Davis. "The Witness of History" (20 sonnets) dwells on the historical significance of the Pope and focuses on saints and legends. "The Hope of the Future" (14 sonnets) is an appeal to the Italian people

to restore Rome. The last series is also the most carefully wrought: the conclusion of each sonnet leads to the beginning of the next.

Ostensibly, de Vere's use of the sonnet form ties in with the book's main themes. Since this form was born in Italy and long associated with romantic love, it heightens the tone of cynical condemnation. Qua shape, these sonnets are all relatively uniform and shuttle between Shakespearean and Petrarchan forms. At the same time, de Vere is inserting himself in an English tradition of the religious sonnet, which had been reinvigorated by Wordsworth in his *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* (1822)[5]. De Vere's originality lies in his fusion of the forms of the religious sonnet and the political sonnet. A brief look at the book's third poem, "The Conspiracy against Rome; and the Great Conniving Powers", can illustrate how this political dimension is informed by a realist concern with geopolitics:

> The kingdom-selling king puts forth a hand
> Vile from Church-plunder, leprous to the bone,
> To rend a second spoil from Peter's throne:
> Silent, yet false, a proud yet servile band,
> Europe's 'Great Powers', each from its distant strand
> Applaud the dragon teeth thus deftly sown,
> Nor heed how France in treason's undertone
> Whispers, 'Rome next! Wait, win – and understand'.
> 'Great Powers!' Blind Powers, because they fear to see!
> Old realms that seal an upstart's new decree!
> Think ye this traffic means for you no loss?
> Christ's Vicar bound, what king thenceforth is free?
> Death-doom of Europe's peace and liberty
> Is that your state-clerks smilingly engross! (3)

In this poem, the reader encounters a peculiar hybrid kind of language. The pontificating tone is clear from the beginning, and is given a polemical touch with its reference to the leprosy of the French emperor. The sonnet then contextualises French duplicity by placing it in a geopolitical register and representing the reaction, or the absence thereof, of the other Great Powers – the principal figures at the Congress of Vienna. Along the way, de Vere throws in a classical allusion to the myth of Cadmus, which is most apposite. The goddess Athena told Cadmus to

[5] Rossetti's sonnets are a particularly instructive example, since a few of these deal with the Risorgimento. As Matthew Potolsky has argued (2015), Rossetti criticises France's failure to act nobly toward Italian aspirations by casting their relationship in the register of prostitution, thus subverting the more common image of marriage.

sow the teeth of a dragon he had killed, from which sprang a group of ferocious warriors. He threw a precious jewel into the midst of these fighters, who turned on each other in an attempt to seize the stone for themselves. The five survivors joined with Cadmus to found the city of Thebes. This allusion to pre-Christian antiquity serves to heighten the sacrilegious aspect of the Italian Revolution and to emphasise the necessity for an impartial arbiter in matters of peace.

As such, the sonnet highlights de Vere's concern with the diplomatic ramifications of the Risorgimento for Europe: the fact that other nations, ruled by clearly unscrupulous "state-clerks", recognise the new Italy means an end to the Pax Europeana and the security culture crafted by the Congress of Vienna. In other sonnets, de Vere examines related topics such as the annexation, plebiscites, arbitration, sovereignty, and the law of nations, which, so he writes, "died the death that hour / When Rome, the moulder of the nations, fell" (50). This kind of concern with peace and diplomacy is a theme in Victorian poetry that has escaped critical scrutiny. It is a theme that is also at the heart of other poets whose work has not entered the canon but who were well-thought of in their day, such as Sir Henry Taylor and Richard Monckton Milnes, who were both close friends with de Vere.

6. Conclusion

Attempting to negotiate between opposing points of view, the poems considered in this article do not offer coherent solutions to the Italian question. In fact, by bundling the Italian question with the Irish question, these poems achieve the opposite effect: Irish representations of the Italian struggle against foreign oppression draw the reader's attention to some of the unforeseen consequences of a geopolitical conflict that may seem to have been confined within a particular set of boundaries but that had ramifications throughout the whole of Europe. Not only do these songs without sunrise thus shed new light on the transnational dimension of Irish literature, they also illustrate the significance of geopolitics on Victorian literature. Whereas many English poets turned to the idea of Europe as the grounds for their aspirations towards cosmopolitanism (Keirstead 2020), the Irish poets that this article has considered adopted a very different stance: theirs was not the localised metropolitan experience of the Brownings or Swinburne, who could

support the Italian revolution in a disinterested way, but that of British citizens who were at the same time British subjects and for whom support for a revolution abroad was tied inextricably to the possibility of a revolution at home. This disjunction is an aspect of English writing about the Risorgimento that has eluded critical attention and that should prompt scholars to pay closer attention to the importance of local circumstances when discussing literary engagements with geopolitical conflicts. These poems may also help us reflect on the ways in which we talk about geopolitical conflicts at the present time. Just as Davis's ballad reminded the nineteenth-century reader of the involvement of Irish soldiers in Italian affairs, so is it a matter of time before a novel or film will portray how foreign fighters have flocked to Ukraine. Mangan's poignant poem describes how ordinary citizens are caught within a crisis that is not of their own making, not unlike the experience of Ukrainians living in the Donbas region. Elgee's Gothic narrative revolves around the competing claims of nationalism and religion; her sinister depiction of the Catholic priest Anselmo might make one think of the way in which Patriarch Kirill has given theological cover for the cause of ethno-nationalist militarism. By suggesting that international law can only be upheld by a higher spiritual authority, in contrast, de Vere's religious sonnet sequence highlights the limited reach of such impartial arbiters in today's world, which makes it unlikely that a negotiated settlement in Ukraine will materialise soon, if at all. It will be clear that these poems do not offer an answer to today's geopolitical conflicts: indeed, they question the very notion that geopolitical conflicts should be regarded as questions. By criticising the limitations of the question discourse, they force the reader to adopt a position that is receptive to the multifarious and inscrutable entanglement of humans and their environment.

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