

“From Cork [...] to St. Peter’s Cupola”: The Idea of Italy in the Writings of Francis Sylvester Mahony

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Abstract:

This article reconsiders the comparativist aesthetic of Francis Sylvester Mahony’s “Prout Papers” in relation to the direct cross-comparisons of Irish and Italian circumstances in his later Roman journalism, emphasising the importance of Italy to the two works he published in book form. It traces the development of Mahony’s thoughts on Catholic identity and nationalist politics in his Italian writings. The decentred perspective on contemporary Ireland provided by his commentaries on Italian affairs is used to discuss Mahony’s interest in ‘doubleness’, focussing especially on his sometimes provocative efforts to arrive at political understanding through the dialectical examination of opposed viewpoints.

Keywords: Anglo-Irish Literature, Father Prout, Francis Sylvester Mahony, Italy, *The Daily News*

On June 26 1851, the Cork-born wit, essayist, and journalist, Francis Sylvester Mahony (1804-1866) appeared in London before a parliamentary select committee on the law of mortmain. Called to provide expert testimony on the workings of ecclesiastical law in the Papal States, he drew upon the extensive knowledge of Italian affairs he had acquired as Rome correspondent for the London *Daily News*. A Roman Catholic priest who had long since ceased regular exercise of his clerical duties, he was singularly well qualified to chronicle for his liberal British Protestant readership the momentous events that would culminate in the formation of the Roman Republic in 1849. Mahony was “essentially the right man in the right place” (Mahony 1876, vi), his intimate knowledge of the politics and culture of the peninsula predating his belated entry into the journalistic profession in the mid-1840s. Outlining for the committee his close association with Italy, he claimed to have been resident there “during the reign of Leo 12th, Pius 8th, Gregory 16th, Pius 9th,

since the year 1821 up to the present period; and I have visited it almost annually, excepting since the late sad reaction and its results" (UK Parliament 1851, 386-387) – a reference to the forced restoration of Papal Authority in 1850. Originally domiciled in Italy as a 'scholastic' of the Jesuit order, and subsequently as a clerical student of the Sapienza, he further claimed to have visited the country as "companion on several occasions to wealthy young English or Irish gentlemen" (*ibidem*, 387). His classical training under Jesuit educators in Ireland, France, and Italy instilled in him a lifelong respect for both ancient and Christian Rome. He would later ascribe his "wonderful familiarity with Latin" to having "lived in an atmosphere of it" (Mahony 1876, 7) as a young pupil. It was this exceptional facility with ancient and modern continental languages that underpinned his first success as "Father Prout", the mock scholarly persona he adopted for his essayistic contributions to *Fraser's Magazine* in the mid-1830s. His early reputation was founded on the idiosyncratic combination of serio-comic classical learning and pungent politico-cultural comment that typified his compositions for this progressive Tory and staunchly Protestant London periodical. His Prout essays were collected and republished as *The Reliques of Father Prout* in 1836, and met with immediate success, establishing Mahony's name in metropolitan literary circles as a cosmopolitan *littérateur* known, it was said, "from Cork to Constantinople [...] from Paris to St. Petersburg [*sic*] [...] from Paul's Cross to St. Peter's Cupola" (Rattler 1847, 443).

Mahony's enduring interest in Italy was one of the connective threads that bound together his early periodical career and his later journalism. But it was also an aspect of his writings that would undergo radical change over the course of his correspondence for *The Daily News*. That he had been interviewed by a parliamentary select committee for his views on Italian affairs gives some indication of the weight and respect which his Victorian contemporaries accorded his Roman journalism (now largely forgotten in modern accounts of his writing career). Nonetheless, the same committee meetings saw Mahony closely questioned on the precise nature of his clerical status, his attempted use of 'private documents' as supporting evidence, and his accusations of corruption against Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman, who would later attend in person to refute Mahony's allegations as "one tissue of untruths, every word of it" (UK Parliament 1851, 398-399, 548). A pugnacious, controversial figure, with a reputation for literary feuding compounded by a public spat in 1842 with the popular historical novelist, William Harrison Ainsworth, Mahony was a Catholic outsider in literary London unafraid to test Victorian sensibilities by challenging religious and political boundaries. The present article will reassess Mahony's Italian writings – principally, his two-part "Songs of Italy" series for *Fraser's Magazine* and his Roman journalism for *The Daily News* – in order to trace his journalistic re-interpretation of the key religious and political components of his trademark Catholic un-

ionism: an unorthodox authorial stance, in contemporary Irish terms, that would later see his literary productions denounced by some commentators as anomalous or even ‘shameful’. It will re-examine, too, the evolution of his work from the comparatively muted treatment of Catholic political themes in the Tory Protestant context of *Fraser’s Magazine* to his impassioned reports on the emergence of a highly politicised Italian Catholicism during the early papacy of Pius IX. His characteristic attraction to political ambiguity and cultural complexity will be investigated in relation to his journey from the conservative classicist of the “Prout Papers”, who used the signature theme of ancient Rome as a cultural counterweight to the forces of change at work in 1830s Britain and Ireland, to the committed, pro-nationalist political commentator of the Roman letters who was willing to revisit his unionist politics in light of fast-moving developments in 1840s Italy.

1. “*The Songs of Italy*”

Published successively in the February and March 1835 editions of *Fraser’s Magazine*, “The Songs of Italy” series, along with the four-part “Songs of Horace” and the four-part “Songs of France”, formed part of an extended cross-cultural discussion in the “Prout Papers” of the song and ballad history of continental Europe. Accompanying as they did Mahony’s own renderings of and original contributions to Anglo-Irish folk balladry, the selection of Italian songs presented here was part of the learned Father’s ongoing efforts “to compare and collate the Tipperary bagpipe with the Cremona fiddle; to remember the forgotten and attend to the neglected ballads of foreign nations; and to blend in one harmonious system the traditionary songs of all men in all countries” (Mahony 1860 [1836], 317). This last stated ambition allowed the Cork-based Father Prout to ironically leap frog the influence of the literary metropolis by using foreign song “to break the monotonous sameness of modern literature [...] [and avoid] the hackneyed barrel-organs that lull and stultify the present generation” (*ibidem*). Although clearly of a piece with the jaded post-Romantic aesthetic of *Fraser’s Magazine*, Mahony’s apparent preference for foreign song over tired British literary convention is complicated somewhat by his accompanying description of the conservative unionist Prout’s “singular theory, viz. that the true character of a people must be collected from their ‘songs’” (*ibidem*) – a commonplace notion of early nineteenth-century cultural nationalism, and one which formed the background to Mazzini’s and Young Ireland’s programmes of national renewal. While this may explain the appeal of Prout’s balladry to the Romantic nationalism of Young Ireland – Charles Gavan Duffy, for example, included Mahony’s popular Cork anthem, “The Bells of Shandon” in *The Ballad Poetry of Ireland* (1845) – it does not, however, reflect any direct endorsement of national ambitions. Indeed, the opening paragraphs of “The Songs of Italy”

scorn the “literary orgies” (319) and “playing the devil” (318) of Lady Morgan in her Italian writings, the most notable of which was her ‘masterwork’ *Italy* (1821), an important Risorgimento precursor text that helped influence “British (and, consequently, also Irish) public opinion in favour of Italy’s aspirations to cast off foreign rule” (Badin 2014, 207). Loath to discuss Lady Morgan’s campaigning on behalf of unification in her Italian works (concisely denounced by him as “the vilest and most unjustifiable invasion of Italy”, 318), Mahony indulges instead in ad hominem abuse, expressing a familiar Fraserian condescension towards female authorship.

Nonetheless, it is this very interplay of competing perspectives, be they colonial or metropolitan, national or cosmopolitan, Romantic or post-Romantic, that imbues the “Prout Papers” with their characteristic open-endedness. Like “old Prout” himself, the prevailing ‘genius’ of these essays is “‘Protean’ and multiform, delighting to make [its] [...] appearance in a diversity of fanciful shapes” (Mahony 1860 [1836], 316). Accordingly, the first essay in the Italian series rehearses once again the seriocomic accusation of unacknowledged literary borrowings made famous in “The Rogueries of Thomas Moore”, where Mahony had satirically undermined the nationalist verse of “The Bard of Erin” by inventing foreign-language ‘originals’ for a number of his “Melodies”. Moore’s illicit ‘appropriations’ are here illustrated by some quoted lines from Petrarch’s *Canzoni*, which are subsequently compared to classical sources in Quintus Curtius and Silius Italicus, thereby relativising, in another familiar textual irony, both the modern ‘copy’ and the supposed authoritative original. Other recognisably ‘Proutean’ elements include his interpolation of incongruous Irish references into his translations from the Italian poets, his mock revelation of the role of the Irish monks of Bobbio in Dante’s pioneering decision to compose the *Divina Commedia* in the vernacular, and, more generally, his inveterate digressiveness, learned allusiveness, and vitriolic denunciations of the Catholic nationalist leader, Daniel O’Connell.

Yet, despite the obvious affinities with Prout’s “classical namesake” (*ibidem*), Mahony is keen to emphasise the underlying consistency of his central protagonist, stressing, in an untypical move, his “candour and frankness, his bold, fearless avowal of each inward conviction, his contempt for quacks and pedants, [and] his warm admiration of disinterested patriotism and intellectual originality [...] recognised throughout his writings” (*ibidem*). Partly a jibe at the “begging-box” of O’Connell (*ibidem*), his endorsement of “disinterested patriotism” had also been an issue in the preceding series, “The Songs of France”, where Mahony had translated and explored the politically radical verse of prominent French Romantic figures like Victor Hugo and Pierre-Jean de Béranger, offering a striking instance of his willingness to enter into dialogue with opposed political viewpoints. Thus, while censuring, for example, the “failings and errors” of the youthful Béranger, he nonetheless praises the “frankness, single-heartedness, and candour” of a poet who

was unquestionably of “*the people*” and never “sought to convert his patriotism into an engine for picking the pockets of the poor” (*ibidem*, 299), thus closely anticipating his comments on the constant, unvarying qualities of the Prout character in the later Italian series. In other words, Mahony frames “The Songs of Italy” in a manner that serves to emphasise consistency and identity of character over the troubling complexity that politically unorthodox authorship might elsewhere have suggested for his Fraserian readership.

Accordingly, Prout, alone in his Watergrasshill “mountain-shed”, turns to youthful recollections of his sojourn in the Italian states as a form of respite from “all the boisterous elements of destruction hold[ing] a ‘radical’ meeting on yonder bog” (*ibidem*, 319). Equally importantly, in a marked departure from “The Songs of France”, Mahony deliberately confines his study of Italian song to a pre-Romantic era when

Alfieri had not yet rekindled the fire of tragic thought; Manzoni had not flung into the pages of romantic narrative a pathos and an eloquence unknown to, and undreamt of, by Boccaccio; Silvio Pellico had not appalled the world with realities far surpassing romance; Pindemonte had not restrung the lyre of Filicaia. (*Ibidem*, 321)

Significantly, then, while not seeking to “undervalue” (*ibidem*) the accomplishments of these key figures in the neoclassical/Romantic revival of national feeling (Walsh 2014, 110) which helped pave the way for Giobertian nationalism and Mazzinian Republicanism – two central preoccupations of Mahony’s Roman journalism – Prout makes clear that his cross-cultural comparisons of European literature in the “Prout Papers” do not extend to contemporary Italy. No mention is made, therefore, of the vital literary “re-awakening” (Baldoli 2009, 176) of ideas of national destiny in the theatre of Vittorio Alfieri (1749–1803); nor does he ponder the guarded Christian Romanticism of Alessandro Manzoni (1785–1873) as conveyed in his coded attack on Austrian oppression in *I promessi sposi* (1827); nor indeed does he elaborate on the sufferings of Silvio Pellico (1789–1854) in *Le mie prigioni* (1832), a dignified portrait of the author’s brutal incarceration in the Austrian prison system. Viewed from an Irish perspective, where Moore’s literary nationalism had given memorable voice to longstanding native resentments, Romantic narrative was invariably seen as a possible conduit for messages of political dissidence. Any overt discussion of anti-imperial cross-currents or potential politico-cultural analogies between mid-1830s Irish and Italian circumstances is therefore neatly sidestepped by Mahony, wary perhaps of pointing up for his Fraserian audience common separatist grievances or nascent liberal-democratic initiatives for the politicisation of the impoverished Catholic lower classes.

Instead, like many of the Italian authors cited above, Prout reaches back to the beginning of the vernacular tradition, drawing upon his superior knowledge of Catholic literary history to concisely survey for a Protestant

readership the prevailing qualities of Italian song. Released, it seems, from the burden of political commentary, Prout the elderly Catholic priest is now free to expatiate on the songs of Petrarch, for whom he feels a certain “partiality” as one who “belonged to ‘my order’” (Mahony 1860 [1836], 323). An uncharacteristic tone of reverential eulogy, noticeably distinct from the more subversive tenor of other essays, pervades his analysis of and translations from the verse of Petrarch, especially the *Canzoni*, “the model and the perfection” (*ibidem*), in his view, of love poetry. Petrarch’s celebration of what is termed his “Platonic” (324), unrequited affection for Laura has, for Prout, a religious significance rooted in the subtle admixture of piety and poetry that distinguished the rhyme of “the father of Italian song” (346):

Relenting, on my grave,
 My mistress may, perchance,
 With one kind pitying glance
 Honour the dust of her devoted slave [...]
 And while for me her rosary she tells,
 May her uplifted eyes
 Win pardon from the skies,
 While angels through her veil behold the tear that swells! (*Ibidem*, 326)

His eloquent translations of Petrarch’s lyric poetry convey a sense of the “exalted excellence and cherished purity” (*ibidem*, 346) of Laura, enshrining in solemn, heartfelt language the view of her as both an idealised source of poetic inspiration and a quasi-religious paragon of virtue. His earnest rendering, for instance, of Laura’s continuing posthumous significance for the grieving Petrarch in “the last major encounter poem” (Hainsworth 2014, 167), “Quando il soave mio fido conforto”, even goes so far as to portray her as “spiritualised into an angelic essence” (Mahony 1860 [1836], 367) – a not uncontentious view, in an early nineteenth-century context, that strongly contrasts, for example, with his Fraserian colleague Thomas Carlyle’s deflationary judgement of Petrarch’s muse as merely an artful “little coquette” (1822).

Genuine religious feeling also suffuses his loose translation of Michelangelo’s famous sonnet, “Giunto è già ‘l corso della vita mia”, which, in Mahony’s version, explicitly defends the solemn function of art:

Yet why should Christ’s believer fear,
 While gazing on yon image dear? –
 Image adored, malgré the sneer
 Of miscreant blasphemer.
 Are not those arms for me outspread?
 What means those thorns upon thy head? –
 And shall I, wreathed with laurels, tread
 Far from thy paths, Redeemer? (*Ibidem*)

Petrarch, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Tasso, Raphael, Sannazaro, Bembo, Brunelleschi, and many other “imperishable names”, are all lauded as displaying an “unfeigned devotedness to the doctrines of Christianity” (*ibidem*). Rapid advances in print technology in the early nineteenth century had seen the periodical press become a modern ‘pulpit’ which provided a powerful forum for the dissemination of often tendentious opinion on the still intertwined arenas of religion and politics. Obligated to negotiate the strongly-held Fraserian ethos of “Church and State” Protestant Toryism, Mahony adopted ecumenism as one of the guiding principles of his early writing career. Hence the recurrent emphasis in “The Songs of Italy” on ‘Christian’ subject matter, encapsulated in his bold statement “of the incontestable truth, that the poet who would suppress all reference to Christian feeling has voluntarily broken the finest chord of his lyre” (*ibidem*). Yet, crucially, despite the seeming anomaly of Father Prout’s inclusion in *Fraser’s Magazine*, Mahony nowhere disavows his Catholic identity. On the contrary, he trumpets Prout’s religious difference, arguing strenuously for the cultural depth and richness of the Catholic literary tradition, while ensuring, all the while, that he does not directly offend Protestant sensibilities. If, on the one hand, this strategy sees him actively avoid religious controversy, it also clearly involves Mahony in a form of dualistic thought that requires him to see the world from both Protestant and Catholic perspectives simultaneously, so reinvoking the heterogeneous aspects of the Prout character he ostensibly set aside in contemplating the pre-Romantic Italian song tradition.

Furthermore, despite Mahony’s stated intentions, a sense of Italian politico-cultural separateness also re-emerges from his particular selection of representative Italian song. His value as a guide to Catholic literary culture is made readily apparent in his treatment of lesser known Italian poets, many of whom were largely unfamiliar to an English-speaking Protestant readership. Translations from canonical poets like Petrarch and Dante are accompanied in the Italian series by brief discussions and verse interpretations of more obscure figures such as Jerome Vida (1485?-1566), Claudio Tolomei (1492-1556), Vincenzo da Filicaja (1642-1707), Benedetto Menzini (1646-1704), Alessandro Guidi (1650-1712), Giovan Battista Felice Zappi (1667-1719), Jacopo Vittorelli (1749-1835), and Giulio Cesare Cordara (1704-1785), among others. Thomas Davis singled out this aspect of Mahony’s work for consideration when criticised by O’Connell for “praising writers not entitled to be praised” (Duffy 1880, 169). Catholic exoticism undoubtedly played a part in sustaining general early-nineteenth-century British interest in Italian themes; however, fashionable Italophilia, which looked to Rome “as the cradle of civilisation”, would eventually yield to the impression that British Romanticism, in its selective reimagining and idealisation of the peninsula, had ultimately failed to see beyond the veil of appearances (O’Connor 1998, 20-22, 36-37). Something of this is caught in Mahony’s condemnation of the

“barbarian” (Mahony 1860 [1836], 318) cultural invasions of Lady Morgan, Leigh Hunt and Samuel Rogers, as well as in Prout’s negative comparison of Moore and Byron’s modern articulation of “mere animal passion” (323) with Petrarch’s idealised depiction of love – the difference, for him, between aesthetic excellence and its simulacrum.

If, by contrast, his post-Romantic narrative attempted to go closer to the heart of the culture, it did so, as Davis’s comments suggest, by collating from disparate Italian songs a sense of religio-cultural separateness that also had political implications. Importantly, Prout, for whom “Poetry is the nurse of freedom” (*ibidem*, 352), commends the patriotic verse of Petrarch and hails the efforts of those who “sung the anthem of independence” (330). His interpretation, for instance, of a poem by Filicaja here entitled “Alla Patria” sees the speaker address a feminised, “prostrate Italy”:

The fatal light of beauty bright with fell attraction shone,
 Fatal to thee, for tyrants be the lovers thou hast won!
 That forehead fair is doom’d to wear its shame’s degrading proof,
 And slavery’s print in damning tint stamp’d by a despot’s hoof! (*Ibidem*, 331)

The allegorisation of national suffering, and the heightened language of “shame”, “slavery”, and “tyranny”, clearly recall the tropes and terminology of Moore’s mournful nationalist lamentations in the “Melodies” on Ireland’s fallen state. Yet, the significance of such parallels resides less in what they apparently say about a residual Catholic nationalist sympathy embedded in Mahony’s translations, than in the complex dialectic they reveal in “The Songs of Italy” between Catholicism and Protestantism, conservatism and nationalism, and Romanticism and post-Romanticism. A comparative study of national song, in which an eccentric Irish priest explicitly set out to find the “true character of a people” in their verse tradition, the Italian series was compelled to address the generative power of Italy as a political metaphor from an Irish (as opposed to a British Romantic) viewpoint. Despite Mahony’s seeming retreat into the cosmopolitan literary past, such cross-cultural comparisons would, in the hands of the ‘multiform’ Father Prout, invariably come to broach ‘dangerous issues’ common to Irish and Italian experience, “such as the meaning of national identity, the loss of dignity under foreign occupation, the right to rebel and shake off the oppression of that same foreign power” (Badin 2013, 132). It was these very issues that would push Mahony’s thinking on Irish-Italian parallels in new and unexpected directions in his Roman correspondence of the following decade.

2. “*Don Savonarola*”

In the Italian series, Mahony had set out to celebrate the literary culture of Italy. One important consequence of this was that Prout’s enthusiastic nar-

rative managed to avoid stock Romantic notions of the superiority of modern Britain, and was notable in its refusal to impose an improving metanarrative on contemporary Italian squalor and deprivation. Stranded, unlike his British counterparts, among an ‘ignorant’, restive peasantry, Prout used the idea of Italy to fulfil a positive, multi-purpose role in his scholarly writings. Italian culture provided the elderly cleric with an enduring model of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic perfection, drawn from ancient Roman, Christian, Petrarchan, and Renaissance sources, which he could quietly contemplate amid the social unrest and political upheaval of post-Emancipation Ireland. Commissioned, however, in late 1845 to contribute Italian letters to Charles Dickens’s newly-founded newspaper, *The Daily News*, Mahony was forced to revisit the guiding ideal of Italy enshrined in his Prout writings, revising his views to take account of developments in pre-revolutionary Rome. Mahony would later invite Dickens to edit and introduce a collected volume of his Roman journalism – covering the period from January 31 1846 to June 18 1847 – but, perhaps suspecting a commercial motive, his former editor demurred in favour of a preliminary ‘notice’. On its eventual publication as *Facts and Figures from Italy* (1847), the correspondence was prefaced by a perfunctory, single-sentence statement from Dickens tersely asserting the formal literary relationship between the two authors: “Having engaged the Father who signs himself ‘D.J. SAVONAROLA’ to enter on this correspondence, it only remains for me to say these *are* his Letters”. The italicised “*are*” said something of both the aforementioned reputation Mahony had acquired as “a wild dissolute character” (Macready 1912, II, 370) and the famously mercurial nature of the author of the “Papers Papers”, who had now taken on the guise of an elderly Sardinian monk, “Don Jeremy Savonarola”. As was his wont, Mahony retaliated by interpolating additional paragraphs in his opening letter from Rome criticising Dickens’s largely apolitical, ‘impressionistic’ (Tomalin 2011, 166) travelogue, *Pictures from Italy* (1846) for having “simply *daguerrotyped* the glorious landscape, the towered cities, and the motley groups” (Mahony 1847, 18). Offering only faint praise for a “pleasant” (*ibidem*) work, Mahony, in other words, used the opening paragraphs of his first book publication since the *The Reliques* to align Dickens – whose “glance”, he declares, “was but transitory” (*ibidem*) – with the Romantic travellers he had castigated in the “Prout Papers”.

If, however, the contrasting goal of Mahony’s narrative was to employ an insider’s perspective to “penetrate [...] [the] darker objects” of “our peninsular politics” (*ibidem*), or to generate greater socio-economic depth in his reports, it was not immediately apparent from the fictive preface to the collected letters. In this extended allegory, Mahony presents himself in the persona of a descendant of Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498), the controversial Italian Renaissance campaigner against corruption. A perceived forerunner of Martin Luther, the “sainted Jeronymo” (1) provoked radically different reactions

among mid-nineteenth-century writers, ranging from those who saw him as a Catholic martyr and fearless advocate for social and ecclesiastical reform to those who dismissed him as “a half-crazed person, an imposter, and a knave” (Rattler 1847, 445). In the opening allegorical narrative, Anglo-Irish history is reimagined under the rubric: Sardinia-Ireland, Piedmont-England, Savoy-Scotland, and mined for suggestive analogies. Mahony demonstrates considerable ingenuity in tracing parallels in the respective histories of Italy and Ireland, throwing an unorthodox light on the pieties of Catholic nationalist history, while directly politicising the suggestive cross-cultural comparisons of “The Songs of Italy”. Predominantly unionist in outlook, the preface allegorises the degradation and violence of the native Sardinians, who “sedulously neglect every single department of local, individual, or national amelioration” (Mahony 1847, 8). Their “favourite political economy”, as recorded by *Gli annali dei quattro maestri*, “consisted in cutting each other’s throats” (6). The Anglo-Irish, or “loyal adherents of the Court of Turin” (8), who make up “most of the intelligent, great part of the commercial, and nearly all the landlord class” (*ibidem*), engage in an acidulous “battle of the Citrons” with the opposing “immaculate” Catholic Sardinian faction, resulting in “the common interests of both going to the juice” (10). That “just and honest” figure, “John Taureau” (9) observes their “debilitating internal squabble” (10) from afar, incessant Sardinian infighting being cited as the sole reason preventing the “upright and fair-play-loving” (9) citizens of Turin from lifting the penal laws. In one sense, then, Mahony harnesses the same unexamined notion of Italian alterity conveyed in books like *Pictures from Italy* to rephrase the seemingly intractable “Irish question”, arguing, in a relentlessly negative analysis, for a common idea of the Catholic Irish/native Sardinians as unreformable peoples incapable of practical self-governance.

Mahony’s sustained act of Italian ventriloquism is made convincing for the reader by the depth of feeling that underscores the Irish analogy. Nevertheless, as Ireland and Italy are threaded closer together in his writings, fact and fictional retelling move further apart. Although framed as the preface to a work titled *Facts and Figures from Italy*, his introductory polemic does not adhere strictly to the historical record, as can be seen, for instance, in the portrayal of the O’Connell character, “Dandeleone” – a name suggestive of both leonine qualities and the common dandelion. Mahony represents the “vulgar” (*ibidem*, 11), “brawling” (10) methods of O’Connell as instrumental in delaying Emancipation by fifteen years, claiming, without adducing any supporting historical evidence, that the matter would otherwise have been settled in 1814 through a “quiet interchange of mutual concession” (*ibidem*) overseen by the middle and upper classes. Similarly, in another dubious re-reading of recent historical events, the eventual achievement of Emancipation is attributed to “Gormano Mahon” (Charles James Patrick Mahon, 1800-1891), who is portrayed as “forc[ing]” (14) Dandeleone to elect him as

representative for the “Clara” constituency. Significantly, Don Savonarola is depicted as one of the few who truly understands the objective implications of Dandeleone’s career, having spent his youth with his Benedictine brethren working on “that unrivalled storehouse of history [...] in which every doubtful matter is sifted by reference to authentic records” (11), *L’art de vérifier les dates* (1750) – in fact, a chronology censured for its Jansenist bias, the title of which, according to one critic, should have read “L’art de vérifier les dates et de falsifier les faits”.

Unlike Father Prout, Don Savonarola is presented as a direct participant in public affairs through his spirited opposition to the O’Connell figure. The preface afforded the then forty-two-year-old Mahony a forum to take a fictionalised look back on his literary career, and to claim a position amongst those who sought to prevent Dandeleone’s alleged efforts to profit from the separation of the masses from the gentry. Dandeleone’s skilful manipulation of newspaper opinion consolidates his public position, forcing a response from Don Jeremy, whose “bile” (*ibidem*, 15) is roused by the shameless avarice of “Dan” (a reference to “The O’Connell Tribute”) and his refusal to support a poor-law provision – two of the recurrent bugbears of the “Prout Papers”. Inserting himself in this allegorised history, Mahony states: “For years, as long as it lasted, Jeremy mixt up with all his literary effusions, a continued onslaught on this beggary” (*ibidem*). In reality, Mahony’s “continued onslaught” had been mainly confined to the Prout era of 1834-1836, and was only resumed in earnest with his re-emergence as a newspaper journalist in 1846. Mahony’s ambivalence towards O’Connell/Dandeleone – strongly critical of his destructive political influence but temperamentally incapable of disregarding the scale and status of his fellow Irishman’s achievements – is indirectly registered in his seeming need to advert to how Dandeleone “maligned *him* in a ‘speech of the day,’ at the Corn Exchange” (*ibidem*), with an accompanying footnote temporarily setting aside allegory to reference contemporary Irish newspapers. Although readers of the allegorical narrative might be forgiven for interpreting the Don Jeremy-Dandeleone exchange as a clash between two central figures in the formation of national opinion, this sole recorded reference to Mahony by O’Connell served only to underline the former’s minority status as one of a panoply of anti-O’Connellite critics in the British press.

A bridging text between the “Prout Papers” and Mahony’s Roman journalism, the preface derives part of its interest from the modified understanding it displays of the main forces at play in Irish society. Remarkably, Mahony’s Prout essays of the mid-1830s make almost no direct mention of Catholic Emancipation, much less the aforementioned involvement in this process of the middle and upper classes, a fact that surely owed something to the sectarian political opinions of his Cork-born editor, William Maginn. Whereas in the “Prout Papers” Mahony had variously criticised O’Connell as an arch-beggar, a demagogue, or a scheming Catholic landlord, the pref-

ace provides a more nuanced account which sees the middle classes emerge in his writings as a concrete political force and a potential engine of change. Most surprisingly, perhaps, Mahony now appears to regret that O'Connell/Dandeleone had not joined his "native vigour and activity" (*ibidem*, 12) with the gentry, barristers, merchants, and landowners in winning Emancipation earlier. Fraserian anti-O'Connellite polemicising is superseded by a more complex and panoptic portrait of the interconnection between the peasant masses, the Catholic and Protestant middle classes, the gentry and the aristocracy. In addition, although his anti-O'Connellite critiques in *Fraser's Magazine* had self-consciously included Catholics among the landed classes, he now almost exclusively identifies landlordism with the Anglo-Irish – a significant development in understanding the condemnatory reports on Roman agriculture that follow. As we shall see, these modified opinions are not strictly the result of developments in Anglo-Irish affairs in the intervening decade but derive, too, from the observations of pre-revolutionary Roman society recorded in his *Daily News* correspondence. As the preface draws to a close, Don Jeremy's unpopular political views compel him to relocate to Turin (Mahony had, in actuality, already moved to London when he composed the "Prout Papers"), where he keeps up a campaign in the Piedmontese press of "constant hostility" (15) to Dandeleone which is given added urgency by "a rot among the chestnuts" (16).

3. *Letters from Rome*

The reader now turns to Mahony's Italian correspondence, the first section of which is retrospectively titled "The Fag End of an Old Reign". Throughout these early letters, Mahony methodically documents instances of misgovernance, economic backwardness and a "'balance of trade' [...] awfully against the Pontifical dominions" (*ibidem*, 32). Using information gleaned, he emphasises, from official documents "not of easy access" (*ibidem*), Mahony, the Catholic insider, delivers a despairing account of the unreformed condition of native agriculture and industry under the conservative government of Pope Gregory XVI. According to his wide-ranging analysis, basic items such as wool, cotton and silken tissues, iron, brass, tin, lead, zinc, crockery, books, wax, honey, cheese, butter, olive oil, corn, gums, resins, fruits, sugar, wines, and fish, are all imported unnecessarily to the detriment of "this benighted land" (45). He notes, incidentally, that "The *Fisheries* are in as miserable a state of neglect as in Ireland" (43); but in what is, in fact, a Famine-era text, no direct mention of Irish economic distress is strictly necessary. Rather the interplay between the paratextual allegorical preface and the more traditional reports that constitute the main body of *Facts and Figures from Italy* pushes Irish comparisons to the fore in this opening section of Mahony's journalism. Pointed allusions to the "incapacity" (42), "laziness" (*ibidem*), and "beggarly

indolence" (32) of the Roman population also mirror the Irish-Sardinian comments of the preface, but with the crucial difference that the letters attribute the retrograde conditions of Rome to ecclesiastical mismanagement rather than the shortcomings of indigenous character. Conservative reluctance in the "Prout Papers" to tamper with time-honoured practices is replaced by a campaigning reformism in his correspondence for the *Daily News* – a publication that had been specifically envisaged as a pioneering Liberal daily newspaper.

Thus, while he states that "The declamations of Young Italy may or may not be all froth" (*ibidem*, 39), a sceptical reference to Mazzini's attempts to turn the discourse of Italian Romanticism fleetingly referenced in the "Prout Papers" into concrete political action (Riall 2008, 167-186), the more factual approach adopted by Mahony in his correspondence cannot, he feels, be gainsaid "in the fashion of rhetorical flourishes" (Mahony 1847, 39). Direct and frequent reporting of Church exclusion of the "middle classes, the *proletaires*, and operatives" (*ibidem*), accomplished, so he argues, with the active collusion of a corrupt aristocracy, builds cumulatively in his journalism to a chronicle of ecclesiastical incompetence. Economic recession, brought on by persistent crop failures in the mid-1840s, further underlined the inadequacies of Roman clerical rule, confirming, for many, the common perception of the papal regime as the embodiment of "all that was worst about the government of Restoration Italy" (Laven 2000, 62). Yet, notwithstanding the acknowledged failings of papal maladministration, Mahony, in similar fashion to Mazzini's self-conscious attempts to tap into pre-existing Romantic narratives, draws upon the dialectical relationship already in place between imperial Britain and pre-unification Italy. Annemarie McAllister has described Victorian Anglo-Italian relations as an ongoing process of "antagonistic identification" (2007, 1), whereby the political tumult of mid-century Britain was reined in through counter efforts to externalise the representation of revolutionary forces. According to McAllister, Italy had an important role to play "in the emerging English narrative of construction of national identity by exclusion" (2). Notions of British imperial order were buttressed by the contrasting socio-economic chaos of subordinate nations like Italy and Ireland. Newspaper reports on the progress of Italian independence in the Papal States served the dual purpose of promulgating the spread of political liberalism on the continent, where the unleashing of dangerous revolutionary energies might be channelled to positive ends, while consolidating national identity at home. British readers of *The Daily News* were, in effect, being asked to simultaneously endorse domestic order, dissociate themselves from Roman retrogression, and identify with strategic efforts to weaken Austrian absolutist power.

An element of anti-Catholicism (or at least anti-clericalism) was evident in this dialogic process, as can be seen, for example, in two separate review articles of *Facts and Figures from Italy* in the conservative Protestant *Dub-*

lin University Magazine, both of which focus on the predominantly negative preface and first section of *Facts and Figures from Italy*, largely to the exclusion of the much more positive alignment of Catholicism and political reform portrayed in the second section (Rattler 1847, 442-452; Anon. 1848, 57-74). Anti-clerical in its depiction of ecclesiastical politics – though not anti-Catholic – the opening portion of Mahony’s letters drew its liberal Protestant readership into a seemingly familiar dialectic, only to complicate matters somewhat in the succeeding section, “The Bright Dawn of Better Days”, which enthusiastically details the comprehensive reform programme set in motion after the election of Pius IX. Here Mahony remoulded the self-fashioning ‘English’ narrative of affiliation and exclusion to link Irish and Italian circumstances, shrewdly ensuring a more sympathetic reception for Irish Catholic concerns. However, the rapid movement of Rome into the vanguard of progressive reform also propelled him towards a reconsideration of his role as an Irish Catholic author in the British literary marketplace. Limited in his Prout writing to endorsing Catholic literary culture while repeatedly repudiating O’Connellite nationalism, Mahony now began to embrace the freeing possibilities made available to him by the sudden advancement of revolutionary hopes in the Papal States. His precise, succinct, and clear-eyed evocations of the new political dispensation in Rome were coloured by a novel tone of unabashed enthusiasm, introducing into his descriptions of the attempted reconciliation of “Catholic orthodoxy to principles of freedom, progress, and nationhood” (Soldani 2001, 63) an element of exoticism which had been consciously resisted in Prout’s Italian essays and his initial Roman journalism. Unfettered by the perceived need to constantly reiterate his unionist credentials, he found in his pro-papal journalism a viable means of reconciling his religious and political identities not hitherto possible in his ‘anomalous’ Catholic unionist texts.

As he eagerly set down his views on the unprecedented phenomenon of a reformist papacy, Mahony diligently assembled the emerging facts on an assortment of progressive initiatives, pushing for a measured pace of change. Thus, for instance, he wholeheartedly welcomed the expansion of the press and growth of “a freshly created reading public” (1847, 142), applauded the introduction of a land tax on “leviathan landholders” (196) and the removal of an inequitable and “oppressive” (144) grist tax on corn, noted approvingly the industriousness of the railway board and the establishment of gas works (220), and made a telling comparison of the “effete aristocracy”, who sustained “five-sevenths of the whole population” through agriculture, with the predominantly Protestant “spendthrift squirearchy who have been for ages the curse of Ireland” (227). Mahony’s analysis details the tripartite nature of the political transformation of Rome, recording the separate class-based, socio-economic and national components of change in the three-year gestation period preceding the 1849 Roman revolution. The version of pre-revo-

lutionary events presented in his first-hand account tallies closely with the findings of modern scholarship. Nonetheless, the persistent need to advert to the dangers of “reactionary efforts” (154), and to explain away all evidence of papal conservatism as traceable either to Austrian political intrigue or to Pius being kept in the dark by his ministers, points to Mahony’s efforts to construct an unqualifiedly reformist papacy for his readers, so advocating a patriotic ‘national’ interpretation despite his professed commitment to a strictly objective reporting of “facts and figures”.

In this respect, one of the guiding philosophical figures of his Roman journalism is Vincenzo Gioberti (1801-1852), whose neo-Guelphic proposal for a confederation of Italian states under papal leadership was outlined in *Del primato morale e civile degli Italiani* (1843). Scattered references to the “witty” (Mahony 1847, 166) and “eloquent” (210) Abbé throughout Mahony’s reports of 1846 and 1847 praise the “patriotic theories” of the exiled Piedmontese cleric, whose “liberal views are yet combined with strict adherence to Catholic orthodoxy” (77). Building upon Manzoni’s Catholic Romanticism, Gioberti offered a compelling combination of religious devotion and Italian patriotism. His writings were tailored to appeal to the emergent middle classes, and to disaffected clergymen (such as Mahony) who had previously been moderate or conservative in political outlook. Mahony, the accomplished classicist, could not fail to have been stirred by the Giobertian conception of a resurgent Rome, transformed from Byron’s “chaos of ruins” to a symbolic paradigm of patriotic aspirations – as seen, for example, in his robust comments on Austrian military movements on Italian soil in August 1847: “the popular blood is up, and the old Roman spirit evoked after the slumber of centuries. Guerrillas, more formidable than scourged the armies of Napoleon out of the Sierras, would annihilate the whole Vandalry of Vienna” (*The Daily News*, August 27, 1847). Indeed, Mahony’s Italian views merged the ecclesiastical, liberal-national, and millenarian strands of Giobertianism, yet, crucially, were noticeably more strident in rejecting the Austrian presence in the Papal States. The aforementioned class-based, socio-economic and national elements of the revolution all had Irish parallels in Mahony’s reports, which amounted, as in his trenchant remarks on the misguided conacre system, to an indirect portrait of misgovernment in Ireland amid the calamity of mass starvation. One should recall here the dialectical character of Mahony’s thought, his firm and unswerving anti-Austrianism, for instance, ultimately manifesting itself in a blurring of the boundaries between the twin poles of Roman reform and revolution. Just as Mahony had tapped into a pre-existing Anglo-Italian dialectic, framing Pius’s reformism as a third way between the opposing extremes of liberal Protestant Britain and the ultraconservatism of Pope Gregory XVI, so too did the liberal middle-class nationalism of Young Ireland offer an appealing alternative to the opposing extremes of strict unionism and O’Connellite nationalism.

Yet, whereas Mahony's correlation of the ills of Irish and Italian landlordism are unambiguous, building common cause among marginal European communities, the frequent absence of direct, unequivocal statements on Irish nationalism mean that the depth and extent of his Young Ireland sympathies are more difficult to gauge. Imperial 'thesis' and 'nationalist' antithesis are clearly posited, yet the prospect of a putative 'synthetic' resolution remains stubbornly elusive. What is clear, nonetheless, is that the tendency towards polarising extremes in Mahony's political commentary pushes his analysis further down radical paths than a more measured style of argumentation might otherwise have permitted. In other words, the overriding need to reject O'Connellite nationalism made him more sympathetic towards its opponents. If Mahony, for instance, repudiates Hugh O'Neill and Red Hugh O'Donnell's "hopeless endeavour to create an independent Ireland" (Mahony 1847, 253), he does so while ridiculing O'Connell as one of those leaders who "confine their aspirations against the Saxon to mere talk" (*ibidem*). An accompanying unsourced quotation, citing the need of an independent Ireland to "Right her wrongs in battle line" (*ibidem*), is in fact a direct reference to a polemical piece from the *Nation* which had been publicly censured by O'Connell as a treasonous example of separatist rhetoric, in a speech that reasserted his own commitment to the principle of non-violence (*The Tablet*, September 5, 1846). Nevertheless, Mahony's satiric gibe at O'Connell serves, in effect, to ally Gaelic Ireland with Young Ireland in a patriotic tradition of military resistance, his allusion to the "Saxon" enemy invoking the heated, anti-English rhetoric found, most notably, in Thomas Davis's militant poetry. The central project of Davis's career, "to lift the English rule off Ireland and give our country a career of action and thought" (Mulvey 2003, 171), is echoed in Mahony's contention that the recently deceased Young Irelander was the first who "turned the youthful intelligence of Ireland into pathways of manly independence and self-respect" (231). Though Irish separatism may have been a "hopeless endeavour", it was not necessarily an unjustifiable one.

Interestingly, when Mahony came to report on Father Ventura's famously pro-democratic Roman funeral oration for O'Connell, he interpreted its allegedly seditious sentiments in a positive light as raising the "thermometer of popular self-reliance" and alerting Romans to "their power and [...] position in the eyes of Europe" (1876, 462). Marta Ramón observes that "for Irish nationalists, Italy was fundamentally an alternative battleground" (2014, 177); and Michael Huggins has further argued that there was a generic and "ideological connection between Young Ireland and Young Italy" (2015, 35). Remarkably, however, it was the once conservative "Father Prout" who was willing to travel further down radical lines than either O'Connell, who was wrongfooted in the twilight of his political career by Pius's flirtation with revolution, or the *Nation* (after John Mitchel's resignation), which cautiously avoided the charge of anti-clericalism by opting out of active support for

radical democracy in the wake of Pius's anti-revolutionary Papal allocution of April 1848. This latter development was lamented by Mahony and others as marking the beginning of the departure of the Catholic Church from the Risorgimento. Nonetheless, later reports in the *Daily News* go on to praise the "sublime spectacle" (*The Daily News*, August 8, 1848) of Mazzini's voluntary refusal of the role of dictator in Milan in August 1848, and Mahony would make no effort to condemn the brutal assassination by democratic extremists of "that obnoxious politician" (*The Daily News*, November 28, 1848), Pellegrino Rossi, Pius's unpopular chief minister who had belatedly attempted to apply Giobertian principles in Rome. Despite what had been his near hero-worship of Pius, Mahony greeted the flight of the Pope to Gaeta on November 24 1848 with a similar sense of equilibrium:

I have not now the slightest apprehension of any evil results [...] [A]s far as the City of Rome and territory subject to the present constitutional government of this country are concerned, the absence or presence of the monarch will have little or no effect. The unanimity with which the middle classes and the lower orders agree to support the authorities, is an unmistakable symptom and guarantee of social order. The high aristocracy of the clerical and secular class have neither sympathy with, nor support from, those who rank under them. (*The Daily News*, December 11, 1848)

In other words, faced with irrefutable evidence of the "retrograde tendency [...] of one who reigned paramount in the hearts of the people" (*The Daily News*, December 1, 1848), Mahony chooses a secular anti-aristocratic, pro-revolutionary stance over his Catholic affiliations, even claiming in his evidence before the select committee on the law of mortmain to "having frequently assisted at the deliberations" (UK Parliament 1851, 504) of the Roman Assembly that prefigured Mazzini's Republican Rome.

Whether it had, in fact, been sincere eulogy or strategic political interpretation (or, more likely, a combination of both), his uncharacteristic romanticisation of Pius was replaced by a post-revolutionary disenchantment with politicised Catholicism. The bitterness of his feelings towards Pio Nono was registered particularly in the loss of a unified religious and patriotic/nationalist identity which had provisionally reconciled the key dialectical relationships of centre and margin, Protestantism and Catholicism, and unionism and nationalism – the apparently irreconcilable extremes of contemporary Irish authorship to which the "Prout Papers" had been his idiosyncratic answer. Notwithstanding Father Prout's insistent defence of ecumenism, conveyed in his celebration of the riches of Catholic culture contained in Italian song, he would hereafter set aside the 'performative', self-dramatising Catholicism of Father Prout and Don Savonarola to take up the essentially Liberal Protestant identity of his final writerly incarnation as Paris correspondent for the London *Globe*. From the 'doubleness' of Father Prout and Don Savo-

narola, both of whom were represented as reaching beyond religio-political convention to re-explore the Protestant-Catholic divide, he would befriend the apostate Italian Catholic priest, Alessandro Gavazzi, and actively facilitate the translation and publication in the early 1850s of his proselytising, pro-Protestant attacks on the restored papacy (Hall 1990, 351-52; O'Connor 2015, 127-128). His subsequent career reflects the passing of a brief historical moment in early Victorian Britain that witnessed the fleeting elevation of his eccentric brand of Irish Catholic authorship. When viewed in long perspective, Mahony's evolution from the mercurial, shapeshifting diatribes of the conservative (if 'multilateral') Father Prout, to the pro-papal endorsement of advanced reform and anti-Austrian agitation of *Facts and Figures from Italy*, through into his eventual acceptance of secular Roman government in later articles for *The Daily News*, saw the idea of Italy form a core metaphor in his work for the understanding of Irish affairs. The shift in political gravity at Rome from past to future enabled him to set unionist and nationalist politics in dialogue once again, so facilitating his journey from conservative Catholic unionist to nationalist reformer and, finally, pro-Protestant Liberal commentator. It would ultimately allow him to work through the complexity of opinion that underpinned the symbolic power of Father Prout, an ecumenical figure emblematic of the seemingly irresolvable discord of mid-nineteenth-century Ireland, permitting him to eventually settle on the more consistent, if less politically searching and religiously versatile, character of his final journalism.

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