

“This cemetery is a treacherous place”. The Appropriation of Political, Cultural and Class Ownership of Glasnevin Cemetery, 1832 to 1909

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Abstract:

Dublin’s Glasnevin Cemetery became a focus of nationalist commemoration after 1832. The Irish diaspora in America celebrated it as the resting place of nationalist heroes, including Parnell, O’Connell and others linked with Irish Catholicity or culture. American newspapers reported on commemorations for the Manchester Martyrs and Parnell. The Dublin Cemeteries Committee (DCC) managed the cemetery. In the early 1900s, the DCC lost a political battle over who should act as guardian of the republican tradition in a tiny area of political property within the cemetery. A critical sequence of Young Irelander or Fenian funerals (Charles Gavan Duffy, James Stephens, and John O’Leary) marked the transfer of authority from the DCC to advanced nationalists. The DCC’s public profile also suffered during the 1900s as Dublin city councillors severely criticised the fees charged for interments, rejecting the patriarchal authority of the cemetery’s governing body.

Keywords: Commemoration, Diaspora, Glasnevin Cemetery, Parnell

1. Introduction

Dublin’s Glasnevin Cemetery opened in 1832 as an ideal of the nineteenth-century garden cemetery. Daniel O’Connell’s Catholic Association successfully worked to repeal the surviving Penal Laws against Irish Catholics, leading to Catholic Emancipation in 1829. In part, the campaign had focused on the need for new regulations to allow for the establishment of Catholic cemeteries such as Glasnevin, formally known as Prospect Cemetery. The cemetery immediately became a focus of Catholic and national-

ist commemoration. The Irish diaspora celebrated it as the resting place of the heroes of constitutional nationalism (including Charles Stewart Parnell and O'Connell), and other figures associated with Catholicity or Irish political culture. The Irish diaspora in America eagerly followed the burial rituals associated with prominent individuals, especially those associated with the struggle for freedom. The "Manchester Martyrs" referred to three Fenians, William Allen, Michael Larkin, and Michael O'Brien, who were executed for the murder of a police officer in 1867. While they were not buried in Glasnevin, papers such as the *New York Times* regularly reported on their annual commemorations held in Glasnevin. The cemetery became, as outlined in Glasnevin's first history (printed in 1879), a "place of pilgrimage to all in our own land, and to visitors from different lands who would meditate over the hallowed graves of many Irishmen whose memories are immortal" (DCC 1879, 34).

In the first decade of the twentieth century, a two-pronged assault upon the guardianship of the governing body known as the Dublin Cemeteries Committee (DCC) eroded its control over commemorations within its boundaries. Up until then, the DCC had controlled all activities, including the wording of inscriptions on monuments. Significantly, advanced nationalists insisted that they would no longer allow the DCC to dictate the rules of remembrance for those from their political tradition. A critical sequence of funerals from the 1900s involving Charles Gavan Duffy, James Stephens, and John O'Leary diminished the DCC's control over a tiny yet influential area of political property within the cemetery. Advanced nationalists rejected the DCC's role since 1832 as gate-keeper, guardian and exhibitor of Irish nationalism's "sacred bodies". In addition to this political dimension, local councillors in Dublin rejected the DCC's monopolistic, elite and patriarchal status, severely criticising its interment fees and alleged manifestations of disrespect towards the dead.

2. Establishing a national cemetery

From its establishment in 1832, the memorialization of prominent citizens took precedence over family and other private sites in the cemetery. National cemeteries testified to an imagined community – a nation – and its shared history as represented by its honoured special dead (Laqueur 2015, 212). Ariès, in 1976, concluded that celebration of prominent political activists demonstrated how the cult of memory in the late nineteenth century spread from the individual to society, with the cult of the dead emerging as one of the forms or expressions of patriotism (73, 75). In 1907 Chart described Glasnevin as an "open air Pantheon or Westminster Abbey of Catholic and Nationalist Ireland". He stated that the place was "so beautifully kept that the visitor is not overwhelmed, as he is at Westminster, but merely saddened

to a tender melancholy and to wistful musings on the whys and wherefores of political strife" (Chart, 321). By 1909, the *Irish Independent* [II] could declare that Glasnevin was "precious to millions of men and women of Irish blood in every quarter of the globe" (21 September 1909).

Richard O'Duffy in his 1915 *Historic Graves in Glasnevin Cemetery* considered that the "great" Irish liberation movements that arose immediately before or after 1800 were represented in "this great necropolis of Ireland, either in leaders or their adherents" (2-3). In his view, the two O'Connell circles within the cemetery contained many who aided O'Connell's "noble and unselfish efforts to make his country the home of civil and religious freedom" (*ibidem*). O'Duffy celebrated Thomas Davis's cultural Irish-Ireland principle. The ideals of Davis, a Young Irelander, poet and journalist, influenced major figures such as Arthur Griffith, Patrick Pearse, and Éamon de Valera. O'Duffy noted that four of the founders of the Young Ireland movement (but not Davis) had been "granted in after years to pillow their heads" on Glasnevin earth (5-6), and he complimented the "Committee of the Dublin Cemeteries" for recognising the "traditional love of the Irish for the departed of their race" (203). In his epilogue, O'Duffy also considered that the "carn, the dun, the rath and the keep" indicated that the "memory of the dead" had always been held in "tender reverence in Ireland" (204-205). The *carn* (a misspelling of *cairn*) served as a place of burial in megalithic Ireland, while the other terms – rath, dun, and keep – have no association with burial practice, and it is unusual to see them cited as such.

James Barry, another cemetery chronicler, indicated in 1932 that throughout its history Glasnevin had witnessed scenes of national mourning when "countless thousands" assembled to pay the last tribute "to those who have worked, to those who have suffered, and to those who have died for Ireland". He attributed the popularity of Glasnevin to the presence of the "earthly remains of these immortal dead" that made it a mecca for many pilgrims "who come from foreign lands to pay a tribute of a sigh and a prayer at the gravesides of Ireland's honoured dead" (Barry 8, 13). Aligned with this notion of Glasnevin as a resting place for the great and the good, the DCC in 1837 arranged for the remains of John Philpot Curran to be repatriated. An Irish granite sarcophagus marked the resting place of the well-known politician and lawyer who had died in London in 1817 (Geoghegan 2009). The *Irish Penny Journal* congratulated the DCC for reclaiming "for Ireland the bones of Curran, which were transferred from England to the cemetery over which they preside" (26 June 1841).

As early as 1879, some five decades after the establishment of the cemetery, a commentator in the *Irish Monthly* wrote that it was "startling to find what a long array of names dear to Ireland are already carved in this garden of tombs" (Anon. 1879, 165). But not all celebrity Irish figures accepted the grace and benefit of burial in Glasnevin. Thomas Moore was a writer and

musician, and author of *Irish Melodies*. When he died in 1852, his family declined an offer of £500 from the DCC to bring his remains to Glasnevin from England, a strong indication that the Committee regarded the presence of suitable celebrities there as important to affirming the status of Glasnevin as a national cemetery (DCC 1879, 41-42). The Moore Memorial Fund in 1904, a society of advocates who described Thomas Moore as Ireland's national poet, decided to approach the DCC to see if they could consider bringing over his remains from London for reinternment in the cemetery, but to no avail (*Freeman's Journal* [FJ], 18 June 1904).

On the title page of his 1915 Glasnevin history, Richard O'Duffy placed a quatrain from John Kells Ingram's 1843 poem about the 1798 rebellion, "The Memory of the Dead". Ingram's poem is popularly known by its first line, "Who fears to speak of Ninety-Eight?":

The dust of some is Irish earth,
 Among their own they rest;
 And the same land that gave them birth
 Has caught them to her breast. (O'Duffy, title page)

O'Duffy acknowledged that the privilege of burial in Glasnevin did not extend to those who went overseas – the Irish emigrant yearned for a burial on Irish soil, and Glasnevin nurtured them in its unique exhilaration of "Irish earth". He lamented that the "last hours of the dying Irish exile were saddened by the reflection that his dust would not commingle with his own kindred in the old churchyard at home" (O'Duffy, 205). Gifford in his annotations on James Joyce's *Ulysses* alluded to an equivalent Jewish burial desire to be buried in "native" soil. With the soil of "Palestine" believed to have "special holiness", Jews longed to have a handful of soil from Palestine put in the coffin under their head (Gifford, Seidman 1974, 121).

3. *Hands Across the Ocean*

Laqueur, a distinguished historian of death practices, observed that the reburial of "distant bodies" in "magnificent spaces" during the nineteenth century enabled the deceased to become the "bodies of the nation" (Laqueur 2015, 212). William J. Fitzpatrick, in his 1900 history of Dublin Catholic cemeteries, recorded the consignment of remains from remote places to Glasnevin, with burials originating from Australia, the U.S.A., France, Russia, Italy and India, amongst other foreign consignees (Fitzpatrick, 47). O'Duffy acknowledged that Glasnevin was the "resting place of many who owed no allegiance to Ireland except the hospitality of a home and a grave" (O'Duffy 1915, 3). He noted that the names of Frenchmen, Italians, Spaniards, and Russians peeped "out of their epitaphs from the myriads of monuments that

encircle us" (*ibidem*). Dublin undertakers regularly collected coffins from a variety of railway stations on their way to or from rural destinations, with an occasional one coming from or routed through Britain.

Reaching across the Atlantic, the Glasnevin cemetery sought to crystallise the strong bonds of kinship wrought through emigration by facilitating the reinternment of "distant" bodies. Father Daniel Cahill, a professor of "natural Philosophy", died in Boston aged 68 in October 1864. As a columnist in a very popular Catholic newspaper in mid-nineteenth century Ireland, he was widely read and appreciated. Twenty years later, an Irish committee raised the funds for his repatriation, furthering the concept of Glasnevin as a "holy ground". Cahill's reinternment in Glasnevin took place in March 1885, and it served as a proxy for those who lay in lonely emigrant graves. They could never make the return journey, with their foreign graves never to be visited by grieving relatives (Roddy 2016, 155-157).

Cahill's grave inscriptions, carved in English, Latin and Irish, mentioned that his countrymen had fulfilled his dying wish that his remains be brought back to "his native soil" because of his labours on behalf of "faith and fatherland" (Cahill inscription, Glasnevin cemetery). A Minneapolis newspaper, the *Irish Standard*, chronicling Fr. Cahill's journey from America, reported his internment "among the most revered of Ireland's dead". The newspaper also cited some of his writing, highlighting his belief that the history of Ireland was "learned from the crimsoned tombs of the dead" (30 October 1897).

The trans-Atlantic transfer of bodies was not confined to Glasnevin. Father Eugene O'Growney, the Gaelic revivalist and author of a very popular Irish language primer, died in 1899 in America. His Dublin funeral procession took place in 1903, prior to his burial in Maynooth College. The *Connaught Telegraph* reported that the Dublin district committee of the Gaelic League organised the funeral procession, intending it to "be worthy of the memory of this great priest and a testimony of the deep respect with which Irish Ireland regards his memory" (3 May 1902). When David P. Moran, the acerbic editor of *The Leader*, commented that the funeral procession of the scholar priest was "impressive and meant something", he suggested that it was "more than can be said of every Irish procession" (3 October 1903). According to Arthur Griffith, editor of *United Ireland* and founder of Sinn Féin, O'Growney earned the distinction of having the longest funeral procession, stretching from California to Kildare (*United Ireland*, 3 October 1903).

The concept of the cemetery standing as the political memorial point for an absent body emerged in the 1867 procession in honour of three republicans (Allen, Larkin and O'Brien) collectively known as the "Manchester Martyrs". Over 35,000 people marched along the route from Dublin to Glasnevin cemetery for that theatrically patriotic event. A Fenian, John Martin, made an emotional speech by the symbolic plot that highlighted the importance of Glasnevin in that political showcase. He declared that the procession

was “escorting three empty hearses”, since the “three bodies that we would tenderly bear to the churchyard and bury in consecrated ground” were “not here”. They were buried “away in a foreign and hostile land where they have been thrown into unconsecrated ground, branded by the triumphal hatred of our enemies as the vile remains of murderers” (*FJ*, 9 December 1867). A report in the London *Times* (reproduced in the *New York Times* [*NYT*]) recorded the trio’s “ignominious death at the hands of the British hangmen”, while also noting that the funeral procession passed St. Catherine’s Church in Thomas Street, the scene of Robert Emmet’s hanging in 1803 (*NYT*, 23 December 1867). The *Freeman’s Journal* declared also that the spot where Robert Emmet “closed his young life on a bloody scaffold” was regarded by thousands of his countrymen as a “holy place” (*FJ*, 9 December 1867).

Glasnevin’s status as a national cemetery was acknowledged in papers that had an element of outreach to the Irish diaspora. Irish news made its way to America on a regular basis, culled from agency reports or recycled from Irish newspapers. M. D. Bodkin from the *Freeman* reported on the 1904 World Fair in St. Louis where he had met an Irish emigrant who had been twenty-five years in the States and who never ceased to read the paper (*FJ*, 1 June 1904). The cemetery featured in a compelling sequence of articles that appeared in the *New York Times*, which focussed on what Irishmen had suffered at the hands of English oppression, ranging from Emmet in 1803, through the Fenians, down to the death of John O’Leary in 1907. The headline for O’Leary highlighted his role as a “Fenian Leader that spent 5 years in Jail and 15 in exile” (18 March 1907). This reportage fed a powerful association within the Irish diaspora that Glasnevin’s role was to hold in reverence those who had opposed British rule, and had paid with their lives for doing so.

In 1875, the first article on the *New York Times* front page noted that Glasnevin cemetery served as the venue for a demonstration of 40,000 supporters of Home Rule and a campaign for amnesty for Fenian prisoners (8 August 1875, 1). The newspaper recorded in November 1883 how supporters subverted the banning of the anniversary procession for the Manchester Martyrs by the authorities. Small groups made their way to the cemetery and then walked around the graveside (26 November 1883). In 1886, for the same event, the *New York Times* indicated that wreaths had been laid at the grave of “O’Donnell, the slayer of Carey, the Phoenix Park informer” by those who attended commemorations (22 November 1886). James Carey had testified in court against his Invincible colleagues following the murders in 1882 of Lord Frederick Cavendish (the Chief Secretary for Ireland) and Mr Thomas Henry Burke in Dublin’s Phoenix Park. The newspaper gave substantial coverage to the funeral of Parnell in 1891, even reporting that the grave was dug to a depth of seven feet in a plot that had long been used to “inter the poorest people”, a reference to the cholera pit which was chosen for his interment (12 October 1891).

The desire to elicit a close physical link with Glasnevin emerged in New York soon after the death of Parnell. In November 1891, the *Sun* (New York) reported on a Parnell memorial meeting at the Academy of Music in the city. Beneath a portrait of the Irish leader rested a wreath “made of laurel and ivy from Parnell’s grave in Glasnevin Cemetery and shamrocks from the hills of Cork” (16 November 1891). American newspapers regularly carried news of the annual Parnell commemorations held in Glasnevin. In 1893, the *St. Paul Daily Globe* (Minneapolis) newspaper reported on the second anniversary of Parnell’s death, noting that the Independent Irish Party of New York had sent a handsome floral harp. It was five feet high, three and a half feet across, and the “top was made of green and gold immortelles, enlivened by red flowers of the same kind”. The strings were of red immortelles, with “Charles Stewart Parnell” spelt out with white flowers overlaid on the strings. Across the base of New York’s tribute to the dead leader was the inscription, “In Loving Memory, From the Irish of New York” (9 October 1893).

A headline in the *Herald* of Los Angeles in 1893 noted that “Irishmen From All Over the World Visited His Grave”, while the Associated Press report highlighted how the “imposing” commemorative procession was “headed by a black draped wagon upon which were piled memorial wreaths sent from different parts of the country, as well as several from the United States, Canada and from Australia” (9 October 1893). For the 1897 Parnell procession, the *San Francisco Call* wrote that shamrocks took the place of crape, while “nearly every county delegation raised the stars and stripes next to the green flag” (11 October 1897). The *Kentucky Irish American* indicated for its readers that the 1903 Parnell commemoration had been “poorly attended” (17 October 1903).

Glasnevin’s stature as a national cemetery attracted a steady stream of visitors. For O’Duffy, “this Valhalla of the Nation” became the “inspiration and the goal of many a pilgrimage from distant lands where the Celt has found a home and liberty”. Visitors knew that the “ground upon which you tread is holy” (O’Duffy 2015, 206). As early as 1880, *Sullivan’s Dublin Guide Book* included a map of the cemetery showing the location of the “principal” graves (*The Nation*, 31 July 1880). In August 1880, Joseph Cowen, an English Liberal MP and journalist, visited Glasnevin. He reported that a Fenian showed him the monument to the “Manchester men” (*ibidem*, 4 September 1880). A tourist from Wisconsin visited the cemetery in 1894. Her local newspaper (the *Wood County Reporter*) stated that there was no monument over Parnell’s grave. She observed that the site featured an Irish harp raised on a tall post with a large Parnell portrait in the centre, surrounded by shamrocks. She also saw that the grave had a covering of glass globes with wax flowers under them (23 August 1894).

The *Waterbury Evening Democrat* (Connecticut), in 1904, reported that Judge Lowe had paid a flying visit to his native Westmeath, and that he had

been to Glasnevin even though he “didn’t have time to tarry” (30 August 1904). In 1886, a letter in *The Nation* written by E. G. McAuliffe, an Irishman from London, showed the intense political and personal emotion behind many of the tourist visits. He stated that his parents were “forced by foreign rule to leave its shores some fifty years before”. McAuliffe visited the patriots’ corner in the “famous cemetery”, admired O’Connell’s tomb and his “splendid Irish round tower”. Some years before that visit, Lowe had made a donation to the “Young Ireland Society” to fund a monument for Leo Casey, a well-known local poet (28 August 1886).

4. *Burying the patriotic dead*

Sir Charles Gavan Duffy (1816-1903), one-time proprietor and editor of the *Nation* newspaper, had been a Young Irishman. He left Ireland in 1855 for Australia. After serving briefly as prime minister of Victoria, he received a knighthood in 1873 (Maume, 2009). In 1903, in line with Glasnevin’s reputation as the national cemetery, the DCC offered the family of Charles Gavan Duffy a free site in “the hallowed spot which holds all that was mortal of many of those who in days long since gone by worked side by side with Duffy in the cause of Ireland” (*FJ*, 14 February 1903). His family, in response, said that they would gratefully “accept tribute, if it be wish of the Irish people to honour their father’s memory”. A delegation of five chose a “beautiful site” in the south-east of the O’Connell Tower Circle, facing the monument of John Blake Dillon (another Young Irishman) (*Cork Examiner*, 16 February 1903; 27 February 1903).

Gavan Duffy’s body lay in state at Dublin’s Catholic Pro-Cathedral from 27 February to 8 March 1903. His funeral cortege to Glasnevin attracted considerable attention with extensive newspaper reports indicating that the boys of the Vincent de Paul Glasnevin Orphanage joined the “Irish National Foresters, Robert Emmet Costume Association” to provide a guard of honour for the hearse and chief mourners’ carriages. Split into sixteen separate units, the *cortège* featured an advance guard on horseback, with general carriages at the back. Thousands of children marched at the front of the procession to the beat of muffled drums. The *Freeman* reporter commented that they were the emblem and embodiment of Ireland’s rising generation (*FJ*, 5 March 1903; 9 March 1903). The spectacle was such that an editorial in the unionist *Irish Times* observed that he was buried “after a demonstration of mourning worthy of the illustrious dead and of the nation upon which his career shed so much lustre” (9 March 1903).

Reporting on the funeral, Fr. Matthew Russell of the *Irish Monthly* underlined the popular conjunction of nationalism and Catholicity in the cemetery, insisting that Duffy’s burial at Glasnevin would ensure that “his body will await the Resurrection under the shadow of the noble Celtic Round

Tower that marks the grave of the greatest Irishman of them all” (Russell 1903, 222). Father John Fitzpatrick, reflecting on Gavan Duffy, put into metrics Glasnevin’s important role as the national cemetery: “His grave be Ireland, for it is but just / That, while our nation lives, from Duffy’s dust, / Be made the shamrock of his native land”. He was “No more an exile from his native skies” (223).

The DCC controlled very strictly the content of inscriptions that appeared on monuments within the cemetery. They banned the use of the term “Fenian”, a clear indication of the DCC’s strong adherence to constitutional nationalism. While the DCC would not allow the term to be inscribed on monuments, Fenian supporters erected monuments that marked their graves. In August 1896, the *Evening Herald* noted that “another of the Fenian poets has had a monument put over his remains in Glasnevin”, this time in honour of Matthew Francis Hughes (15 August 1896). John O’Leary (a Fenian leader born in 1830) had received a twenty-year sentence for “treason felony” in 1865. He anticipated that his death would provide welcome publicity for advanced nationalism. As reported in his London *Times* obituary in March 1907: “Once he was condoled with on the neglect shown him by the people of Ireland in his old age. ‘Ah’, he replied with characteristic irony, ‘they’ll make up for it by giving me a grand funeral’” (18 March 1907). In 1908, a bitter conflict over the use of politically-sensitive descriptors within Glasnevin showed how Irish nationalist sentiment pivoted towards a more radical tinge in the new century. The controversy over the use of the word “Fenian” on O’Leary’s monument took a Jesuitical intervention to ultimately settle matters in 1909.

At O’Leary’s 1907 interment, the *Freeman* drew attention to a powerful metaphorical moment. After Fr. Coffey, one of Glasnevin’s Catholic chaplains, had recited the graveside prayers and before the coffin was lowered, “an old woman reverently kissed the lid” (20 March 1907). Jack B. Yeats, in a paean in the *Irish Independent* to O’Leary, declared that he had stood for “Ireland of the past, heroic,” with his “unselfish suffering” leading to his “own detriment and ruin” (20 March 1907). His death provided also an opportunity for James Joyce. According to his brother Stanislaus, he had commented on the *Il Piccolo della Sera*’s report of John O’Leary’s death: “his name had been mutilated as almost to be unrecognisable [*sic*]” (Bulson 2001, 440). Roberto Prezioso, the editor, subsequently invited Joyce to write a series of articles on Ireland. The first – on Fenianism and O’Leary – appeared on 22 March 1907. Joyce drew attention to a bitter “double struggle” between the “moderate patriotic and the so-called party of physical force” that espoused the “dogma of separatism” but “no longer uses dynamite”. He characterised O’Leary as a “figure from a world that has disappeared”, calling him the “last actor in the turbid drama of Fenianism”. Commenting on O’Leary’s death, Joyce insisted that the “Irish, even though they break the hearts of those who sacrifice

their lives for their native land, never fail to show great respect for the dead” (Joyce 1959, 188-192).

At the request of T.A. Finlay, S.J., the DCC donated a site for O’Leary’s burial, as they had for other patriots such as Parnell or Gavan Duffy. An impasse then arose over the wording of an inscription on the monument, after the DCC initially authorised Finlay to approve any inscription. When they learned that the proposed inscription included the term “Fenian Leader”, they declared that it had been “irregularly engraved” without their approval. Rev. Miles McManus, who signed the minutes for 7 October 1908, inserted his objection to the “fact of passing an inscription subject to the approval of a Gentleman not a Member of the Board”. Subsequently, the DCC suggested that the word “Patriot” be substituted for “The Fenian Leader” (DCC minutes 1908). The proposed revision set off a public firestorm. O’Leary’s memorial committee refused to accept the change, as Fr. Finlay had originally approved the inscription. A public meeting of “various National, trade and labour bodies” complained that the DCC’s suggestion was “entirely against the feelings of every true Nationalist and Sympathiser with the Fenian movement” (*II*, 9 November 1908).

In December 1908, Finlay submitted a full list of the various inscriptions for the monument. One of the panels would contain an extract from John O’Leary’s speech from the dock, delivered in 1865: “Dante places traitors in the ninth circle of his hell, I believe, the lowest circle”. Finlay proposed that an Irish translation of the main inscription be carved on the monument. Conceding that the monumental committee had engraved the inscription before “the formal approval of the Board was signified to them”, Finlay suggested to the DCC that the “interests of peace would be served without sacrifice of principle” if they allowed it to stay. Utilising his status and diplomatic skills, Finlay persuaded the DCC to accept the inscription (DCC minutes 1908, 1909). The O’Leary monument controversy over the term “Fenian” marked the disruptive intrusion of contemporary radical politics into the repose of the cemetery. The outcome of the crisis confirmed that the DCC could not continue to act in mindful contravention of Dublin’s radical political society, nor to exclude political terminology that challenged the DCC’s constitutional complexion.

The *Freeman* did not mince its words – “John O’Leary Monument. Cemeteries Board Cave In”. The *Freeman* predicted that a second O’Leary procession would be attended by the “trade and labour bodies of the city, the members of the G.A.A., the Gaelic League, Sinn Fein, the Irish National Foresters, the various bands, and other national bodies” (5 March 1909). The newspaper understood that the unveiling of the monument would provide yet another opportunity for a political parade in Dublin, consistent with James Joyce’s contention that “Now that he is dead, his countrymen will escort him to his tomb with great pomp” (Joyce 1959, 192). The DCC’s inability to insist

on the substitution of the word “Patriot” for “Fenian” found an elegiac coda in W. B. Yeats’s lines from “September 1913”: “Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone, / It’s with O’Leary in the grave”. Yeats admired O’Leary for his “long imprisonment, his longer banishment, his magnificent head, his scholarship, his pride, [and] his integrity” (Yeats 1961, 510). Given his intimate knowledge of O’Leary (with whom he corresponded), Yeats was undoubtedly aware of the inscription crisis. Yeats, although in Ireland at the time, decided not to attend O’Leary’s funeral. Later, he stated that he “shrank from seeing about his grave so many whose Nationalism was different from anything he had taught or that I could share” (Foster 1997, 367). The concession by the conservative DCC ground suggested an additional nexus for the poet’s observation, with the controversy concluding four years before the poem’s publication.

The conflict over O’Leary’s inscription paved the way for a more sustained assault on the autonomy of the DCC whose constitutional tendencies would be further challenged in the revolutionary decade to come. The DCC concern over the use of Glasnevin for theatrical displays of radical political sentiment only deepened as the advocates of advanced nationalism continued to ignore the DCC’s control over inscriptions and orations. Buried in Glasnevin with his coffin “wrapped in the Irish republican flag of green, white and orange”, the *Freeman* reporter noted in March 1901 that the grave of James Stephens, another Fenian leader, was “situated appropriately close to the Martyrs’ plot, where his wife had been already interred” (1 April 1901). On 1st August 1909, Dublin’s Lord Mayor unveiled a Celtic cross dedicated to Stephens. The *Irish Independent* published a photograph of the Lord Mayor beside the large cross, while the *Freeman* reported his speech (*II*, 2 August 1909, 7; *FJ*, 2 August 1909). The engraving on the base of Stephens’s cross eulogised him as “Founder, Organizer [*sic*] and Chief of the Fenian Brotherhood”, another potent reference to Fenian leaders in Glasnevin. The DCC privately considered that the speech violated its regulations, and John O’Connell, the Superintendent of the cemetery, acknowledged that “no officer was present at unveiling, as we had no intimation of same”. He declared that he would have “protested against the breach of the Bye Laws of your Committee, as I have done on many previous occasions” (DCC minutes 1909).

The sequence of declining deference in the 1900s towards the DCC started with the burial of Stephens in 1901, continued with Gavan Duffy in 1903, peaked with further “Fenian” inscription debates in 1908 and 1909, before culminating with the graveside orations of Dublin’s Lord Mayor in 1909. For advanced nationalists, the O’Leary controversy confirmed the symbolic value of a republican commemorative space within Glasnevin, an ownership that reached an apex with Patrick Pearse’s speech at the graveside of O’Donovan Rossa in 1915. Pearse underscored the power of tribal remains: “They have left us our Fenian dead, and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace” (Pearse 1924, 137). The graves of O’Leary and Stephens are adjacent,

with O'Donovan Rossa's only yards away in the next line of graves. The DCC lost a symbolic cultural and political battle over a tiny area of property, diminishing its authority and the role it had played during the nineteenth century as guardian and exhibitor of the great and the good of Irish nationalism. The controversy over the use of the Fenian signifier within the bounds of the cemetery pointed to the emergence of a newer society outside the cemetery gates, a society that would soon successfully challenge British sovereignty in Ireland.

5. *"The Pit" and beyond – Critics of Glasnevin cemetery in 1909*

Alongside the O'Leary controversy, another vigorous campaign developed in 1909, threatening to further undermine the DCC's reputation. The Glasnevin district (as part of the township of Drumcondra, Clonliffe and Glasnevin) had been amalgamated with the city of Dublin by Act of Parliament in 1900, thus bringing the cemetery within the remit of a more radically-inclined assortment of critical councillors than previously, when Glasnevin dealt with a more conciliatory local authority. A new range of cemetery by-laws were introduced in 1901, attracting a slew of remonstrance from some of Dublin's trade and smaller municipal organisations that addressed burial practices and the cost of internment. In 1906, the North Rural District Council complained that "pits were being opened beside the public road and coffins left exposed for a considerable time, thereby endangering the public health" (*The Irish Times [IT]*, 3 May 1906). In Britain, it was not uncommon for the term "pit" to be applied to the communal burial grounds, but it was not used as a disparaging term for Glasnevin until the late 1900s, the preferred traditional term being the Poor Ground.

In May 1909, a critical letter from William Richardson to the *Evening Telegraph* sparked a maelstrom of criticism, leading to the establishment of a special group termed the Glasnevin Cemetery (Investigation) Group, with representatives from some municipal bodies in Dublin (*II*, 11 May 1909; 3 August 1909). Between 1909 and 1913, the affairs of the DCC featured twenty-seven times in Dublin Corporation's proceedings, indicating the extent of the campaign to obtain public representation on the DCC, and to promote the establishment of municipal cemeteries. Nineteen items appeared in 1909, indicating the pressure from Richardson's campaign to undermine the DCC's authority (Dublin Corporation, Minutes 1909 to 1913). Dublin Corporation even engaged its law agent to examine the original charter of the DCC to see if they could apply any pressure to lower Glasnevin's charges (*IT*, 10 September 1909). At an early stage of the 1909 controversy, the DCC made a vigorous defence of its operation in a letter to the Corporation. It emphasised the great pressure on the space of the original Cemetery, and the high cost of acquiring and preparing new land. They expressed concern

that “at no distant time” the available burial space would be exhausted (*IT*, 22 June 1909).

Richardson’s letter sparked off a persistent and virulent campaign against Glasnevin. His onslaught was consistent with a changing perspective towards the status as distinct from the function of a cemetery. The moral, uplifting, and educational arguments previously posited in favour of cemeteries dwindled as utilitarian and egalitarian notions came to the fore towards the end of the nineteenth century. Cemeteries began to be written about with similar distaste to that shown to burial-grounds earlier in the nineteenth century (Curl 2001, 177). In 1910, an anonymous article in the influential *British Medical Journal* charted the growth of the cremation movement as an alternative to the traditional burial. Criticising the general practice of “burial in common ground or pit burial”, it cited Glasnevin as a negative instance of the practice. The article dramatically cited some of Richardson’s Glasnevin claims: “spectators standing at a pit burial saw the bodies of ten men and women introduced into one yawning hole without the religious service of any church, seven of the deceased being Protestant and three Catholics”. It stated that there was “not a cemetery in which any common ground did not contain as many bodies, and sometimes more, than were interred at the present time in Glasnevin Cemetery” (Anon. 1910, 579-580).

Joseph P. Nannetti and William Field, Dublin’s highest-profile MPs, were on opposite sides in terms of how to approach DCC reform. Nannetti served on Dublin Corporation and was elected to the DCC in 1908. Nannetti’s inclusion in Pike’s 1908 list of contemporary Dublin biographies confirmed the status endowed upon him by his DCC membership, while William Field, his parliamentary colleague of longstanding and owner of a string of butcher shops, was excluded (Pike 1908, 127). At the DCC meeting of May 1909, Nannetti brought Richardson’s critical letter to the attention of the members, but they just noted it. The DCC took umbrage at charges that they buried the very poor in what is commonly known as a “Pit”. To so do would be “contrary to the instincts inherent in Irish Catholics” (DCC minutes, 1909).

The Dublin Trades Council convened a public meeting in June 1909 at Smithfield to protest the running of the cemetery. Nannetti, then in London, stated that had he been in Dublin, he would not have attended. Declaring that he did not want to hamper his line of policy by attending public meetings or by writing letters to the press, Nannetti’s contemporaries would have interpreted this as a pointed barb at Field, for whom meetings and letters were meat and drink. Nannetti’s experience convinced him that the way to bring about reform was to “awaken in those from whom reform is to come the justice of the grievances complained of”. This amounted to a classic statement of the Home Rule position, with constitutional nationalists hoping to convince the British government that they deserved a measure of devolved government. Nannetti’s letter justifying his non-attendance was read at the

open-air meeting “amidst interruption”, accompanied by cries of “Throw him out” and “Burn it”. Richardson suggested that Nannetti had never “made a move until he was put in the pillory” over the burials (*FJ*, 28 June 1909).

In line with his constantly critical position on the DCC, Field aligned himself fully with the goals of the new investigation committee. At the Smithfield meeting, he produced one of the quips for which he was noted. Stating that a previous Smithfield gathering had protested “against the over-taxation of the living”, he contended that the current meeting was held to protest “against the over-taxation of the dead” (*ibidem*). In July, Field proposed that a special general meeting of the “Catholic Cemeteries Committee” be held to consider the range of complaints (*FJ*, 7 July 1909). Field had previously recommended that the Corporation should be given the right to purchase Glasnevin. Later in 1909, he suggested that the Corporation might establish a new municipal cemetery so that Dublin citizens could avail of “decent economical burial”. As part of the campaign, he requested that the DCC allow reporters into their meetings (*FJ*, 14 September 1909; 5 October 1909).

The language of the DCC critics bordered on the gruesome and the gothic. A North Dublin Poor Law Union Guardian (C.L. Ryan) described in an unflattering manner the scene at a burial of the “destitute poor” as they were “deposited in the pit” (*II*, 3 June 1909). He said that he had seen quicklime thrown over bodies brought to the cemetery from Dublin’s College of Surgeons, alleged that the “children of destitute people were buried for 1s 6d, if they were brought at 6 o’clock in the morning” and added that “only a shovelful of dirt was cast over the top, and the stench was terrible”. Lorcan Sherlock maintained that it “would take an Edgar Allen Poe to do it justice”. He advocated that a meeting should be held outside Coyle’s house, outside the DCC offices in Rutland Square, and even outside the houses of all the members of the Committee (*IT*, 12 June 1909). At the Smithfield meeting, Daly protested at how the DCC allegedly treated the poor “when sorrow afflicted them”. They were “fleeced in sums which they paid at a sacrifice to themselves and their families (Cries of ‘Scandalous’)” (*FJ*, 28 June 1909).

Richardson insisted that “sentimental souls” would be “shocked and their ears offended by the lurid language in which the average Dublin man or woman will express his or her opinion of Glasnevin”. According to him, this would “shock a policeman, or even a cab horse” (*II*, 23 September 1909). Such strong feelings manifested themselves on the streets during the Father Matthew procession from the centre of Dublin to the Phoenix Park in August 1909. A participant carried a placard with the slogan: “The pit for Irish Catholics”, to which objections were voiced, giving rise to “hostile cries” along the route. At Church Street Bridge, the Dublin Metropolitan Police intervened to stop a “determined attempt” to tear down the slogan. A second fruitless effort to seize the slogan eventually led to clashes between op-

posing crowds. The reporter attributed the clashes to the inscription “being evidently misunderstood” (*II*, 23 August 1909).

In July 1909, the DCC set up a special committee at the instigation of Nannetti to respond to that controversy. They issued an important report that identified the scale of the cemetery’s operation, and the sense of social mission evinced by the Committee. By 1909, Glasnevin was the largest public cemetery in the United Kingdom. It had approximately seventeen miles of walks alone in its care. Regretting that the term “pit” had been applied “to bring discredit upon [the] committee”, the Poor Ground burial area had never been designated as such by any person connected with the cemetery. The DCC was careful to describe how the deceased were treated: “The graves in which the very poor are buried are nothing more nor less than two graves opened side by side as one grave. Each plot is now opened in the shape of a coffin, and each coffin is most carefully and respectfully laid in it” (*IT*, 4 November 1909).

Richardson’s initial campaign had lost traction, but it succeeded in lessening the reputation and status of the cemetery and its members. The DCC’s considered response took the heat out of this controversy, although it could not and did not stifle future criticism. In 1911, Dublin Corporation Councillor Byrne suggested that the DCC be replaced with one involving the Corporation, the North Dublin Poor Law Union, and others. He condemned the composition of the DCC, arising from the right of the committee to nominate its own members, making them “more unrepresentative and irresponsible than the British House of Lords”, accusing them of ruling “more despotically than the Tsar of Russia” (*IT*, 13 May 1911).

The 1909 controversy had implications in terms of a broader United Kingdom debate on cremation as an alternative to traditional burials. One of the most vocal proponents for cremation in Britain had worked for some time at Glasnevin, in the Botanic Gardens that shared a long boundary with the cemetery. In 1880 William Robinson published *God’s Acre Beautiful or The Cemeteries of the Future*, a manifesto arguing for garden cemeteries and the use of cremation (Curl 2001, 186-187). The “Cremation Act 1902” regulated the “burning” of human remains. Strange suggested that Edwardian cremation propaganda failed to take account of the conservative working-class view that the funeral was a means to express identity, affection for the dead and a sense of social status. In addition, cremation publicity from the early decades of the twentieth century drew on the confusion between common and pauper burials by evoking the imagery of the “pauper’s pit” as a means of emphasising the egalitarianism of the crematorium (Strange 2005, 100, 161).

A glut of publications at the start of the century had extolled the mission and success of the cemetery after seventy years in existence. The 1909 controversy sullied that reputation. This slide was shown most starkly in the differences in the portrayal of the cemetery in a comic monthly, *The Lepracaun. Cartoon monthly*. Thomas Fitzpatrick’s benign and affectionate character por-

trait of John O'Connell, the Superintendent, in 1907 morphed into a vicious portrayal of the DCC in a cartoon of November 1909. Entitled "The Glasnevin Shylock, or the Pound of Flesh", the latter featured Glasnevin's iconic tower. A thin, hook-nosed, bearded figure holds a sharp knife engraved with the word "fees", while a poor family grieves over an infant's plain-deal coffin with the inscription, "died of starvation now called consumption". Behind the family is a sign, "this way to the pit" (*The Lepracaun. Cartoon monthly* II 24, 447; *The Lepracaun. Cartoon monthly* V 59, 81).

As if Richardson's criticisms were not enough, the DCC's shortcomings in relation to the provision of religious services for some of the poorest in the Catholic community further diminished their credibility. The burials of still-born and young children "over whose remains the Catholic Church does not consider it at all necessary to have any service" took place "usually" between six and seven o'clock in the morning before the arrival of the chaplain at the cemetery. However, allegations emerged in late 1909 that some adults had been buried early in the morning without the consoling presence of a priest. This led to accusations that Glasnevin did not always facilitate a Christian burial. Acknowledging this possibility, the DCC committed themselves to ensuring that the "burial of any Catholic adult person" would not be allowed "until after the remains have been brought to the chapel for the Burial Service" (*IT*, 4 November 1909). This slack clerical practice led to a serious rebuke for the cemetery's two chaplains. Privately, the crisis strained the relationship between the DCC and its clerical committee members, with the lay majority on the Committee holding the clerics substantially responsible for this controversial practice, one that reflected badly on Glasnevin's reputation. The DCC bluntly informed Bishop Donnelly and Rev. McManus that they "could not defend themselves from censure in their not having the Chaplain in attendance at all hours for burial" and asked them "most kindly" to liaise with the chaplain to ensure that he would be there once adult funerals were taking place. The chaplain committed to saying mass at 7am each day as of September 1909 (DCC minutes, 1909).

6. *Postscript*

In James Joyce's *Ulysses*, as Tom Kernan prepares to leave Glasnevin cemetery after the burial of Paddy Dignam, he declares: "This cemetery is a treacherous place" (Joyce 1986, 215). From its foundation in 1832 the cemetery of Glasnevin played an important role as a sanctifier of racial memory, a function valued substantially by the Irish diaspora. During the nineteenth-century Glasnevin provided a theatrical space for the remembrance of Irish nationalists, especially those of a constitutional persuasion. The O'Leary inscription controversy undermined the DCC's tight regulation over political ceremonies in the cemetery, reflecting abiding shifts in political opinion out-

side the ground's high walls. The appropriation of republican sites of public memory within the cemetery from the conservative management board corroded the high esteem that the DCC had enjoyed as the guardian of an idealised nationalism symbolised by O'Connell and Parnell. Richardson's assault on the DCC's integrity in 1909 further stripped away the bourgeois veneer of respectability that the Committee had nurtured since its foundation. By 1910, the cemetery, with its political aura diminished, was increasingly and principally viewed as a utilitarian private provider of a valuable social and hygienic service to Dubliners.

The debates over Glasnevin's contested spaces during the 1900s prefigured the dramatic political changes that engulfed Dublin and Ireland in the upcoming revolutionary decade. The Fenian funerals, including O'Donovan Rossa's in 1915, determined the ceremonial parameters performed within a definitive republican space in Glasnevin, a notion that gained even further resonance after the 1916 Rising, an ownership that persists into the present day. The funerals also provided an effective template for republican funerals that took place in Dublin and elsewhere (including Northern Ireland) during the remainder of the twentieth century. In the words of David Gross, they celebrated a "constellation of beliefs, or a mode of thinking that exists in the present, but was inherited from the past" (Gross 1992, 8).

The anti-treaty republican groups resisted the co-option of their dead into the founding narrative of the new state. On their behalf, the National Graves Association, established in 1926, promoted the commemoration of "those who died in the cause of Irish freedom" as well as maintaining the graves and memorials of "our patriot dead of every generation" (NGA [National Graves Association]). Ian McBride, who has commented extensively on the differing styles of commemorations relating to the 1798 rebellion, highlighted how Free State governments fought hard to "establish a monopoly on the graves of the patriot dead at Glasnevin and Bodenstown". Neither W.T. Cosgrave nor Eamon de Valera succeeded in "appropriating nationalist remembrance for themselves" (McBride 2016, 206). However, the reburial following state funerals of Roger Casement (1965) and Kevin Barry (2001) reaffirmed the status of Glasnevin as a national cemetery.

In 2005, in advance of a decade of Irish centenaries between 2013 and 2023, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Dermot Ahern insisted that Ireland could "no longer have two histories, separate and in conflict". He envisaged a "shared history" of 1916 in which "we will also remember another event of particular significance for the people of this island – the Battle of the Somme" (Ahern 2005). In line with this political desire, Glasnevin has pursued a broader consensus. Inside its walls, it acknowledges the possibility of a shared or complementary "public memory", engaging with issues and subjects that would previously have been regarded as outside its subtle political and religious remits. Beyond the earlier historical paradigm of consti-

tutional nationalists and advanced republicans, Glasnevin accommodates a new range of commemorative tableaux – a Celtic cross commemorating the Famine dead (2016), a Cross of Sacrifice provided by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (2014), and an artistic installation sponsored by the French government to remember Irishmen who died in France during World War I (2016). As a modern site of “public memory”, Glasnevin continues to interrogate and respond to its historical legacy.

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