

“And from the writings of these three I could construct the  
case for Irish Separatism”:

The Irish Republican Tradition and the “Ghosts” of Anglo-  
Ireland.

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## 1. Anglo-Ireland, Pearse, and the Irish Republican Tradition.

I can think, again, of three great political thinkers of Anglo-Ireland before Tone: Berkeley, Swift, and Burke. And from the writings of these three I could construct the case for Irish Separatism. But this would be irrelevant to my purpose. I am seeking to find, not those who have thought most wisely about Ireland, but those who have thought most authentically for Ireland, the voices that have come out of the Irish struggle itself. And those voices, subject to what I have said as to Parnell, are the voices of Tone, of Davis, of Lalor, of Mitchel.<sup>1</sup>

In this passage from his essay “Ghosts”, which borrows its title from the Ibsen play of the same name, Padraig Pearse sets up a dichotomy between pre- and post-Tone thinkers that, when reading the speech in isolation, raise several ambiguities which leave his message open to interpretation. For Seamus Deane, Pearse sets up a fairly unambiguous dichotomy between Burke and Swift who represent the “glories of the Ascendancy tradition” which W.B. Yeats championed, and the lineage of Tone, Davis, Lalor, Mitchel, or Emmet who were far more politically forthright in terms of the national question.<sup>2</sup> For Deane, this is linked to “Pearse’s evangelism against mean-spiritedness, cowardice, caution [and] commercial wisdom” which parallels precisely the “old Victorian-Romantic

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<sup>1</sup> Pearse, *Political Writings and Speeches*, p. 246.

<sup>2</sup> Deane, *Celtic Revivals*, p. 65.

crusade against the spiritual atrophy of middle-class rule”.<sup>3</sup> Under this reading, Burke and Swift are seemingly analogous to the type of ‘unimaginative’ prevaricating English conservatism which Deane suggests both Pearse and Matthew Arnold set themselves against.<sup>4</sup> Deane goes on to argue that Pearse creates a ‘Corkery-like’ opposition when talking of the wisdom of the earlier Anglo-Irish tradition as opposed to the authenticity of this later, more politically active, nationalist lineage. Deane seems to be suggesting that this post-Tone tradition is being presented as if it were part of the tradition of Corkery’s ‘Hidden Ireland’,<sup>5</sup> a tradition which separates Gaelic- from Anglo-Ireland.<sup>6</sup>

It might be argued that Deane is putting too fine a point on this distinction here. Pearse himself precedes this statement with the qualification that he “could construct the case for Irish Separatism” from the tradition of Anglo-Ireland that Yeats promotes. This caveat is seemingly omitted by Deane as it does not quite fit the dichotomy which he is attempting to formulate, where Pearse is presented quite forcefully as an uncompromising spiritual ideologue who sees himself as a messianic, singular hero who “incarnates the potential of his race”.<sup>7</sup> This version of Pearse finds it necessary to reject anything but “the voices that have come out of the Irish struggle itself,” because for him, these are the only voices that cohere with his ideal of virility and advanced nationalism.<sup>8</sup> This omission similarly helps to set up Deane’s parallel with Matthew Arnold’s analysis. While this portrait of Pearse is by no means inaccurate, there is something lost to this dialectical generalisation. Pearse’s argument here should be looked at in terms of its

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 69.

<sup>6</sup> Cullen, “The Hidden Ireland: Re-Assessment of a Concept”, p. 47.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

intention, not to deny the Anglo-Irish Tradition that came before Tone, but to emphasise the later tradition which at the time had received comparatively little attention. This aspect of what Pearse is allowing for is somewhat lost in the flow of his argument and is perhaps intentionally understated or dissimulated for the purposes of his own rhetoric, but it is there, ultimately, to be read. Pearse even admits that drawing separatist arguments from the former tradition would be “irrelevant to [his]<sup>9</sup> purpose,” which seems to show that he is conceding that his own argument is subjective, and is again, only emphasising a certain tradition while not doing so at the expense of the other. It might be argued that Pearse is only doing this to provide himself with a level of plausible deniability in case of the event of his being confronted with accusations of sectarian reductionism. While those in the know might glean the more egalitarian reading, it is possible that the bulk of his readers will skirt over his qualification on behalf of Berkeley, Swift and Burke.

This essay will make the argument that the Anglo-Irish tradition did in fact have a noticeable influence on the Separatist Republican tradition. This influence is often somewhat dissimulated in order to combat thinkers such as W. B. Yeats, who might have exploited this fact to argue for a form of continuation for the ascendancy position in an independent Ireland. It will, therefore, require significant analysis to unpack and reveal the scope of this influence. This essay will do this initially by interrogating how John Mitchel co-opts Swift and Berkeley for the cause of the Irish Confederation in his *Irish Political Economy* (1847) and will then examine how that influence carried on into Pearse’s day. It will begin by examining how Mitchel draws Swift’s economics into a

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<sup>9</sup> ‘my’

contemporaneous relation with The Famine. Subsequently, Mitchel's reading of Berkeley's *The Querist* (1737) will be investigated by analysing the accuracy of his claims in relation to what the text actually represented in Berkeley's era. It will also explore how certain elements of Berkeley's metaphysical and moral thought may have ended up having a problematic influence on Mitchel's views on Slavery. These views may also have given Republicans such as Pearse a good reason to draw attention away from this influence in the interest of their own picture of Mitchel. Finally, it will explore the relationship of Thomas MacDonagh to Berkeley's metaphysics, with particular regard to his one act play *Metempsychosis* (1912) which draws on Berkeley in order to parody the views of Yeats. It will also touch on MacDonagh's dissimulated adaption of an argument about the nature of language from Berkeley's *Alciphron* (1732) in his *Literature in Ireland: Studies Irish and Anglo-Irish*, (1916) and will demonstrate how this might suggest further tentative avenues of inquiry. Ultimately, this analysis will show that MacDonagh was keen to maintain this Anglo-Irish influence on the Separatist Republican tradition, despite the fact that it was likely hidden for political reasons. This will also shed light on the true nature of Pearse's attitude towards Anglo-Ireland given their close association.

## 2. John Mitchel's Image of Johnathan Swift

That Pearse's argument was more a matter of emphasis than a denial of the Anglo-Irish tradition is particularly evident when considering the fact that this post-Tone tradition actively draws on the earlier thinkers of 'Anglo-Ireland'. Mitchel, who Pearse put at the head of his lineage, in particular attempts to establish a genealogy of Irish political thought via Swift and Berkeley. His *Irish Political Economy*, (1847) which he introduces

as a “publication [that] is made in the smallest space and cheapest form possible” so that “everybody who can read in all Ireland [might] have an opportunity of learning what his country’s complaint is”, argues that Swift and Berkeley provide an ‘infallible remedy’ to this complaint.<sup>10</sup> Mitchel is attempting here to establish a mass national political consciousness through two of the Anglo-Irish men that Deane argues Pearse dismisses. In order to do this, Mitchel provides extensive notes alongside the extracts he chooses from Berkeley and Swift. These notes serve several purposes. Of particular note are his attempts to recontextualise their eighteenth-century outlooks with contemporaneous developments in thought and Irish history. In a footnote to Swift’s *A Short View of the State of Ireland* (1728) for example, Mitchel draws attention to the fact that the idea of ‘Political Economy [as a] “science”’ didn’t exist in the way that it came to be understood after the publication of Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (1776), and he asks the reader to allow for this when examining the nascency of Swift’s thought.<sup>11</sup> Mitchel simultaneously draws attention to, and challenges this later development. He does this by the placing the word ““science”” in ironic quotation marks, which suggests that he is trying to cast doubt on the idea that such a thing as politics and the economy can ever be considered a true science given the number of uncontrollable variables involved. In the same passage he goes on to make further use of irony when he says that “it may seem surprising that a simple Irish clergyman should have had the presumption so long before the “Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations” was published, to enumerate the causes of a country growing rich”.<sup>12</sup> Here the intended inference seems to be that this shouldn’t be considered surprising because Swift was actually much more than just the ‘simple Irish

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<sup>10</sup> Mitchel, *Irish Political Economy*, p. vi.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

clergyman' that he may have been mistaken for, and in fact, may have preceded the thoughts of Smith in many ways.

Building on this qualification, Mitchel presents a note on the following passage from Swift: "The first cause of a kingdom's thriving is the fruitfulness of the soil, to produce the necessaries and conveniencies of life, not only sufficient for the inhabitants, but for the exportation into other countries".<sup>13</sup> In his note, Mitchel argues that Swift already has the idea of surplus in the more modern sense, but that he has a much more ethical idea of it because he places emphasis on the fact that the needs of the inhabitants of the kingdom must first be met before anything is exported. He compares this to the Classical Liberal ideal of "'surplus'", which, again, he puts in ironic quotation marks and allies to the "doctrines inculcated and enforced by Sir Randolph Routh and Lord John Russell".<sup>14</sup> He then makes the analogy between this passage from Swift and a more contemporaneous speech from Isaac Butt in which Butt says "*I know of no surplus produce until all our own people are fed*" (Mitchel's emphasis).<sup>15</sup> In doing this, Mitchel provides two Irish thinkers who effectively anticipate the mechanisms which would cause The Famine. In the case of Swift, this is presented as particularly prescient because he made his analysis without recourse to Adam Smith's "'science'", and because he made it so long before the fact. Furthermore, Swift's main aim in his statement is to argue for the necessity of a kingdom's having enough to export; the incidental way in which Swift happens on Butt's assertion helps with Mitchel's message in this comparison, by showing that, for Swift, it almost goes without saying that meeting 'the necessaries and conveniencies of life', must constitute

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.



an a-priori in any discussion about what would come to be referred to more commonly as a Kingdom's surplus.

In the case of Butt, it is even more tragically prescient for Mitchel because the argument he quotes here is from Butt's *Protection to Home Industry* which Mitchel had reviewed for *The Nation* in 1846.<sup>16</sup> By the time Mitchel had published *Irish Political Economy* in 1847, Butt's warnings, promoted by Mitchel, had not been heeded, and the Irish Famine had entered its most destructive year. This was thanks to the insistence of Lord John Russel on the doctrine of laissez-faire economics, which broke with the relief efforts of the previous Tory government of Robert Peel so that food could continue to be exported to England at the height of The Famine.<sup>17</sup> Here, "surplus" was being exported without it actually being surplus under Butt's terms, and under Swift's terms in the way that Mitchel reads him. Ultimately, it was the inhabitants of Ireland that entered into this category of "surplus" because of this fundamental fault that the Russel administration had forewarning of. Here, Mitchel establishes an ideological dichotomy which sets an Irish Ideology, which is given historicity via the link between Swift and Butt, against that of their oppressor Britain, represented by Smith. Mitchel seems to imply that a key aspect of what lead to this situation was Britain's perception of itself as inherently rational and scientific. This form of self-identification would cause Britain to apply the category of "science" to arenas of thought which cannot be contended with through the sort of abstractions such a mode of thought implies. In this respect, British 'rationality' is shown

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<sup>16</sup> This collection contains lectures from Butt's time as Whatley Professor of Political Economy at Trinity from 1836-1841 and so the arguments began their influence at an earlier date. Mitchel also makes the point that Butt's published postscript was written before Russel's controversial policies were being discussed by British legislature, highlighting his prescience. Mitchel, *The Nation*, Saturday, February 28, 1846, p. 314.

<sup>17</sup> Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger: Ireland 1845-1849*, pp. 87, 106-108.

as a form of abstracted madness which misses the specifics of the situation it deals with. Mitchel's attitude to this dynamic is exemplified by his review of Butt's work as he paraphrases his argument that questions of economic protectionism "must be answered for each country – not upon any universal principles laid down by political economists, but with reference to the circumstances of that country, to the nature of its produce, to the amount and actual working of the duty."<sup>18</sup> This polarisation between the nations is given emphasis by Mitchel as he shows that Britain had both Swift and Butt's warnings available to them via the Irish tradition, but chose to ignore this historical and contemporary precedent on the basis of ideological purity and a lack of respect for Ireland. Mitchel emphasises Swift's continuity with the Irish side of this dynamic by showing that he is in still tune with the specific contemporaneous economic patterns of Ireland as they are expressed by Butt.

Butt had already admitted to the influence of Swift and Berkeley. While he was suspicious of Swift for his potential partisan motivations, he refers to those of "the great and good Bishop Berkeley [as being] open to no such suspicion."<sup>19</sup> Butt was not quite as keen to present this as a unified tradition in the way that Mitchel was then. While Butt was never a separatist nationalist, he did transition from his background as an Irish Unionist and an Orangeman to a position of wanting a form of Federalism for Ireland after his experiences during The Famine. This move was signalled firmly when Butt began to defend co-conspirators of Mitchel's Young Ireland rebellion in 1848, the year after the publication of Mitchel's tract. He would go on to become president of the Amnesty Association to

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<sup>18</sup> Mitchel, *The Nation*, Saturday, February 28, 1846, p. 314.

<sup>19</sup> Butt, *Protection to Home Industry*, p.64.

secure the release of imprisoned Fenians in 1869,<sup>20</sup> and in 1870 he would found the Irish Home Government Association, the precursor to Parnell's home rule movement.<sup>21</sup> By leaving room for thinkers such as Swift and Berkeley in the Young Ireland tradition, Mitchel also left space for conservative unionists such as Butt which potentially would have helped with this moderate progression in the direction of their revolutionary cause. This is also significant given the fact that Mitchel himself is from a somewhat similar northern dissenter background, his father being a non-subscribing Presbyterian minister of Unitarian sympathies.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, as Michael Davitt suggests in his *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland; or, The story of the land league revolution*, Isaac Butt's family was related to "the famous Bishop Berkeley, the author of *The Querist*."<sup>23</sup> This shows that Berkeley was still thought of positively in political terms in the slightly later tradition of national agitation.<sup>24</sup> Davitt is also keen to establish a nationalist pattern of historical progress here when proposing the argument that if "James Fintan Lalor [a contemporary of Mitchel's and another one of Pearse's "four master minds"<sup>25</sup>] was the prophet of Irish revolutionary land reform, Isaac Butt was its immediate if more moderate precursor."<sup>26</sup> This shows that this proposed link to thinkers like Berkeley did not stop with Mitchel, and had continued into Pearse's day.<sup>27</sup> Davitt's book was published in 1904, by which time Pearse had become politically engaged via his involvement in *Conradh na Gaeilge* (The Gaelic League) which he had joined in 1896.<sup>28</sup> By 1903 he had become editor of its

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<sup>20</sup> Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>22</sup> Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel* (1888), pp. 4, 88.

<sup>23</sup> Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland*, p. 78.

<sup>24</sup> Davitt himself began his career as a member of the IRB as well as becoming the co-founder of the Irish National Land League with Charles Stewart Parnell in 1879.

<sup>25</sup> Pearse, *Political Writings and Speeches*, p. 240

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>27</sup> This non-sectarian attitude also aligns with the arguments of Wolfe Tone in his *Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*. This suggests a concurrence with Pearse.

<sup>28</sup> Flanagan, 'Patrick H. Pearse'.

newspaper *An Claidheamh Soluis* (*The Sword of Light*)<sup>29</sup> and so by the time he finished writing “Ghosts” on Christmas day of 1915, it was quite likely that he was aware of the lineage proposed both by Mitchel and Davitt. Again, when Pearse says, for example, “when I have named the four names, there will be hardly any need to name any other names”,<sup>30</sup> the reason is that at least one of these four, Mitchel, had already made the links to the tradition of Anglo-Ireland. Add to this the fact that Pearse’s contemporaries, such as Davitt, were already aware of these links, whether through Mitchel or through common knowledge, and referring to this heritage again becomes unnecessary. In addition to this, Arthur Griffith, founder of Sinn Féin, refers to Swift in glowing terms in his *Resurrection of Hungary: a Parallel for Ireland* (1904), praising him as the “giant genius [that] united all Ireland, peer and peasant, Catholic, Protestant, and Dissenter, Norman, Cromwellian, and Gael in opposition to England”.<sup>31</sup> To elaborate any further on the influence of this tradition would be “irrelevant to [Pearse’s] purpose” then, not because Anglo-Ireland was irrelevant to him, but because it would be a needless digressive repetition of arguments that had already been made.

In addition to the example cited above, Mitchel attempts to contemporise several of Swift’s economic arguments, again, doing the work of drawing them in to the tradition that Mitchel and, by extension, Pearse promotes. For example, he shows that the absentee rents that Swift criticised had multiplied by a factor of nine by Mitchel’s day.<sup>32</sup> In his notes to Swift’s *A Proposal for the Universal use of Irish Manufacture* (1720) he draws a parallel between the language of “prodigious condescension” used by ‘the prince’ when passing

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Pearse, *Political Writings and Speeches*, p. 240

<sup>31</sup> Griffith, *The Resurrection of Hungary*, p. 83.

<sup>32</sup> Mitchel, *Irish Political Economy*, p. 13.

laws concerning Ireland which Swift decries, and the fact that in his day “every relaxation of penal and oppressive legislation is called a *boon*” (Mitchel’s Emphasis).<sup>33</sup> For Mitchel: “Nothing raised the indignation of Swift so high as the cool insolence on the part of England, and slavishness on that of Ireland”.<sup>34</sup> Mitchel goes on to cite Swift’s fourth Drapier’s letter in his notes, the comments in the square brackets are Mitchel’s:

And as we are apt to sink too much under unreasonable fears, so we are too soon inclined to be raised by groundless hopes [promises of ‘comprehensive measures,’ and the like], according to the nature of all consumptive bodies like ours. Thus it hath been given about for several days past, that *some body* in England [perhaps his name was Russell] empowered a second *some body* [qu. Trevelyan ?] to write to a third *some body* here [possibly a Mr. Labouchere], to assure us that we should no more be troubled with these halfpence.<sup>35</sup>

Here Mitchel’s insertions again contemporise Swift’s thought by linking his three ‘*some body[s]*’ (Mitchel’s Emphasis) to the characters of Lord Russell, Sir Charles Trevelyan, and Henry Labouchere, who held the positions of Prime Minister, Assistant Secretary to the Treasury, and Chief Secretary for Ireland respectively. All three were notorious for their role in The Famine.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Charles Trevelyan is perhaps the most notorious of the three and is perhaps also most archetypal in relation to the type of political science that Mitchel is decrying. Trevelyan came under the formative influence of the Reverend Thomas Malthus while at the East India Company's college at Haileybury.<sup>36</sup> Malthus's key doctrine was that the world could only support a certain number of people, and that the rate of growth of the food supply produced by a population will always be outstripped by that population's rate of growth. For Malthus, this inevitably leads to famine, "the last, [and] the most dreadful resource of nature."<sup>37</sup> The Malthusian approach treats famine almost as if it were an inevitable phenomenon, predicable by the natural sciences, again, typifying the type of ideology which Mitchel criticises. This influence is often cited with reference to Trevelyan's infamous comments on the "surplus population in Ireland",<sup>38</sup> a phraseological term which equates human capital with all other forms of material capital.

Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* was also a set text for Trevelyan at Haileybury.<sup>39</sup> For Smith, the 'natural' greed of 'the rich' ensures the employ of the thousands of poor workers who they need to meet their 'insatiable desires'. It is this process, directed by an 'invisible hand', which, for Smith, leads to the equal division of wealth.<sup>40</sup> This influence can perhaps be felt in Trevelyan's insistence that The Famine was the fault of the Irish gentry and nobility's failure to act on behalf of the poor. Trevelyan blames this on a "defective part of the national character" which expects the government to pick up the slack and "open shops for the sale of food in every part of Ireland".<sup>41</sup> This links back to

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<sup>36</sup> Simon Schama, *A History of Britain*, vol. III, p. 210.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Malthus, 1798. *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. Chapter VII, p. 61

<sup>38</sup> Trevelyan, *The Irish Crisis*, p. 28.

<sup>39</sup> Laura Trevelyan, *A Very British Family: The Trevelyans and their World*, p. 25.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, pp. 264-265.

<sup>41</sup> Monteagle Papers, National Library of Ireland Ms 13,397.11, 9 October 1846

Smith because Trevelyan essentially sees this not as a moral failing, but as a failure of ‘the rich’ to act on their natural greed by opening up shops to sell their surplus. Trevelyan ignores the fact that the starving poor had no money to buy anything, hence the necessity of direct government intervention in the first place.

The sort of ideological insistence on the mechanisms propounded by laissez-faire thinkers such as Malthus and Smith is what Mitchel is criticising when putting the word “science” in ironic quotation marks. It is also what he is driving home with his insertion of Russel, Trevelyan, and Labouchere into the passage from *Drapier’s Letters*. The “groundless hopes [promises of ‘comprehensive measures,’ and the like]” will always prove to be so because their three main executors all subscribe wholesale to the same faulty ideology. Mitchel brings Swift in as an ally to his cause by suggesting that he had presaged this dynamic in the *The Drapier’s Letters* as in both cases England insists on employing its language of “prodigious condescension”. Mitchel goes on to promote Swift’s nationalist credentials by continuing to quote the *Drapier’s Letters*: “by the laws of God, of Nature, of Nations, and of your Country, you ARE and ought TO BE as FREE a people as your brethren in England” (Swift’s emphasis).<sup>42</sup> Here Mitchel is highlighting Swift’s belief in a sort of inalienable set of civil rights which are linked to all peoples that can consider themselves part of a nation. Swift’s exhortation provides a counter to thinkers such as Trevelyan, who propounded the belief that The Famine was down to a national defect, as nations are expressed here as coterminous with the laws of God and Nature and therefore cannot truly be considered ‘defective’. Mitchel goes on to draw attention to Swift’s successful appeals against the charges of sedition brought against Swift’s fourth letter.

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<sup>42</sup> Mitchel, *Irish Political Economy*, p. 23.

Mitchel suggests that Swift's intention was to "rouse the national spirit"<sup>43</sup> through his letter, allying Swift's message with his own and providing a sense of continuity with the contemporaneous national struggle. At a time when the potential for economic solutions had seemingly passed as The Famine had entered its most destructive stage, Mitchel's parallels were perhaps intended more to fortify this national spirit than they were intended as a genuine economic remedy. Mitchel's implied message here is not that the Irish ideas he would like to promote are something to be implemented in the present, but rather that they are what could have been implemented, were they not ignored by Westminster. The message seems to be then that this Irish economic tradition, which Mitchel tries to argue is continuous, must adapt into something more advanced and spirited. This type of argument would have continued to resonate into Pearse's day.

### 3. John Mitchel's Readings of George Berkeley.

While Swift's arguments often fall quite neatly into Mitchel's narrative, when it comes to Berkeley, he is forced to make somewhat more of an intervention as an editor. To begin with, the text that he includes, Berkeley's *The Querist* (1737), assumes the format of a long series of questions. It is often down to the reader to decide the answer Berkeley presumes of them in each case. This is perhaps best evidenced by Mitchel himself in his review of Isaac Butt's *Protection to Home Industry* for the Irish nationalist newspaper *The Nation*. In this review, Mitchel argues that "In short, Mr. Butt's argument is precisely that of Dean Swift in the 'Drapier's Letters,' and of Bishop Berkeley in 'The Querist.' He despises and

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid



tramples under foot the modern doctrine of political economy.”<sup>44</sup> This prefigures many of the parallels Mitchel would go on to make in his *Irish Political Economy*. When dealing with *The Querist* in the review, Mitchel quotes a series of ‘the good bishop’s’ questions, giving them the answers that he “apprehend[s] Swift, Berkeley, Doyle, and Butt, would give them”:

“Whether trade be not then on a right footing, when foreign commodities are imported in exchange for domestic superfluities?” Yes.

“Whether the quantities of beef, butter, wool, and leather, exported from this country, can be reckoned the superfluities of this country, when there are so many natives naked and famished?” No.

“Whether she would not be a very vile matron, and justly thought either mad or foolish, that should give away the necessaries of life from her naked and famished children, in exchange for pearls to stick in her hair, and sweetmeats to please her own palate?” Surely. A very vile matron; and the children and neighbours ought to take the purse from her, to allowance her, and, if necessary, to tie her up that she should not go abroad.

“Whether a nation be not a family?” Yes; but sometimes a family in which there are many step-children, and in which the mother is no better than she ought to be.

“Whether there be a people that so contrive to be impoverished by their trade, and whether we are not that people?” Yes; for the present we are that most unfortunate, most long-suffering, and most infatuated people.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Mitchel, *The Nation*, Saturday, February 28, 1846, p. 314

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

Here, pre-figuring what he would go on to do in his *Irish Political Economy*, Mitchel invokes the voice of a sustained national tradition represented by ‘Swift, Berkeley, Doyle, and Butt’, in order to answer these questions. In the instances Mitchel picks out here, these answers are easy enough to give as this national persona because they are all relatively leading. For instance, it seems unlikely that anyone would choose a superfluity over a commodity if given a choice. In his *Irish Political Economy* however, Mitchel must make more of an effort.

In most cases, the parallels Mitchel draws with Swift are relatively straightforward to draw because his arguments line up neatly with contemporaneous circumstance. Mitchel can then leave open the inference that, had Swift been around in his day, he would have stood with the separatist cause because the dynamics that he was criticising had become much worse.<sup>46</sup> Thus, Mitchel does the work of co-opting Swift for the cause of the Irish Confederation. In the case of Berkeley however, Mitchel has to be more interventionist in his co-option due to the multiple ambiguities and potential contradictions in Berkeley’s attitudes which might conflict with his narrative. Mitchel sets up this contradiction in his introductory footnotes to the section on *The Querist* in his *Irish Political Economy*:

His views have by no means the boldness and decision of Swift's; and some of his queries may be called even slavish — as where he suggests that Irishmen ought not to think of carrying on any woollen manufacture, seeing that England had

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<sup>46</sup> Mitchel also does this by showing how export statistics have become worse since Swift’s day. See, Mitchel, *Irish Political Economy*, p. 13.

decided on keeping it to herself, lest they should excite the anger of their masters. Yet the clearness and force with which he exhorts his countrymen to self - reliance and enterprise, make his "Querist" a valuable manual of Irish Political Economy.<sup>47</sup>

Mitchel later includes this 'slavish' section where Berkeley asks, "whether the employing so much of our land under sheep be not in fact an Irish blunder?" and also "whether our hankering after our woollen - trade be not the true and only reason which hath created a jealousy in England towards Ireland? And whether any thing can hurt us more than such jealousy?"<sup>48</sup> Assuming the answer to these questions is yes, Berkeley contradicts Swift's view on this matter in *A Short View of the State of Ireland*, included earlier by Mitchel, where his fifth maxim for the prosperity of Ireland necessitates "the privilege of a free trade in all foreign countries which will permit them, except to those who are in war with their own prince or state."<sup>49</sup> Mitchel also includes a section from *The Querist* which seemingly goes against Swift's invective against Wood's Copper Halfpence in *The Drapier's Letters*, which Mitchel includes without reference to this argument, when asking "whether gold, silver, and paper are not tickets or counters for reckoning."<sup>50</sup> Mitchel avoids these complications by not making note of the contradictions between Berkeley and Swift's thought. Mitchel draws attention away from such contradictions by marking out Berkeley for praise as a precursor of the idea that 'the land and industry of a country are its real wealth', which are only represented by currency instead, an analysis which he attributes to David Hume.<sup>51</sup> Allying Berkeley's economics with the cause of the land here

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<sup>47</sup> Mitchel, *Irish Political Economy*, p. 28.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p. 32.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

also helps contemporise him for Mitchel because it suggests a resonance with the struggles to control the wealth of the land that Ireland was facing during the famine.

Mitchel seemingly skirts around such contradictions and tries to keep the focus on Berkeley's Irishness through his footnotes. For example, he argues that though Berkeley was "the most learned and famous man in the Anglo-Irish Church, [he] never was thought worthy of higher preferment".<sup>52</sup> Mitchel subsequently cites one of Berkeley's letters where he writes to a friend that "though his Excellency the Lord Lieutenant might have a better opinion of me than I deserved, yet it was not likely that he would make an *Irishman* primate".<sup>53</sup> Mitchel italicises the word *Irishman* here, driving home the point that Berkeley identified as Irish in this instance despite his Anglo-Irish background.<sup>54</sup> Mitchel again co-opts Berkeley to his picture of a non-sectarian nationalist cause here. He also lessens the ambiguities presented here by promoting 'the good bishop's' benevolence, taking note of his charitable efforts in the period of famine during his time at Cloyne.<sup>55</sup> This proves a similar point by highlighting his willingness to help native Catholics. Mitchel also attempts to hypothetically co-opt Berkeley by contemporising him in a similar way to Swift when glossing the following question from *The Querist*: "Whether England doth not really love us and wish well to us, as bone of her bone, and flesh of her flesh? And whether it be not our part, to cultivate this love and affection all manner of

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p.28

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Berkeley likely came from Staffordshire stock that had Jacobite sympathies. See Jones, *George Berkeley: A Philosophical Life*, pp. 29-30. This also perhaps contributed to the suspicions cast on him with relation to *Passive Obedience* which will be explored later.

<sup>55</sup> Mitchel, *Irish Political Economy*, pp. 27-28.

ways?"<sup>56</sup> Mitchel ameliorates this slavish question by bringing Berkeley with him into his present and claiming him there as an ally:

If the bishop had lived to see the development and manifestations of England's affection for this country — how Englishmen have thriven upon that warm attachment, and Irish men have regularly died of it — he would, perhaps, have allowed us, at last, to answer the above query in the negative. If this be England's love, then it would be far safer and more salutary to have England's hate.<sup>57</sup>

This footnote again contemporises Berkeley and argues that even formerly conservative thinkers would see the error of their modes of thinking if faced with Mitchel's contemporaneous circumstances. This again helps to ally thinkers like Butt to Mitchel's cause because it suggests a trajectory to outright separatism which is already suggested by the protectionism of thinkers like Butt and Swift. This is a protectionism which Mitchel also cites in Berkeley when including him asking whether, "if there was a wall of brass a thousands cubits high, round this kingdom, our natives might not nevertheless live cleanly and comfortably, till the land, and reap the fruits of it?"<sup>58</sup>

In a sort of reversal of Pearse's own analysis, it might be argued that Mitchel focuses on Berkeley and Swift's virtue as wise thinkers who also considered themselves Irish, rather than as right thinkers within a consistent ideology. Again, this suggests that perhaps Pearse was aware of this and was less dismissing these wise thinkers than he was admitting the work of Mitchel. It is also true however, that Mitchel does not only promote

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 38.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

them as wise, and, especially in the case of his hypothetical contemporaneous co-options, makes a concerted effort to bring Swift and Berkeley into a similar separatist fold to the one Pearse promotes when talking about those who have thought “authentically for Ireland”. Furthermore, it is, at times, difficult to gauge the answers Berkeley expects from the reader, and so it is possible that Mitchel is not necessarily contradicting himself here by including Swift’s opinions because, as highlighted earlier, the answer to some of these questions might be ‘no’ and so Berkeley could be made to agree with Swift. It would be reasonable to argue that the above references to the Irish wool trade and Wood’s Halfpence are in fact self-conscious references to the views expressed in Swift’s *Letters* and other similar works, and that Berkeley would be looking for them to be answered negatively with these allusions being considered. If this is the case however, it is a reading Mitchel misses with his reference to Berkeley’s ‘slavish’ tendencies, as many of the passages he includes to show this tendency are effective only if they are assumed to be answered in the affirmative. Mitchel probably prefers these affirmative readings because they help him argue a hypothetical trajectory for Berkeley from relative conservatism to outright separatism, a trajectory which he would have similarly wished for thinkers such as Butt. It also pre-empts any arguments against Berkeley’s stance in relation to Ireland that might have arisen had he chosen to omit these passages altogether.

There are also pertinent analyses to be made when looking at what Mitchel includes and omits from *The Querist*. For example, while Mitchel includes certain quotes from Berkeley that show his tendency toward a union with England, a tendency he calls ‘slavish’, he does not include the following series of inquiries where Berkeley literally poses the question as to whether or not the poor of Ireland should be enslaved:

381 Whether other nations have not found great benefit from the use of slaves in repairing high roads, making rivers navigable, draining bogs, erecting public buildings, bridges, and manufactures?

382 Whether temporary servitude would not be the best cure for idleness and beggary?

383 Whether the public hath not a right to employ those who cannot or who will not find employment for themselves?

384 Whether all sturdy beggars should not be seized and made slaves to the public for a certain term of years?

385 Whether he who is chained in a jail or dungeon hath not, for the time, lost his liberty? And if so, whether temporary slavery be not already admitted among us?<sup>59</sup>

Before interrogating in more detailed terms what this exclusion might imply for Mitchel's idea of Berkeley, it will be necessary to first explore what Berkeley himself might have meant in writing such a series of inquiries. The answer to this question is by no means straightforward and requires a significant amount of unpacking. To begin with, it is possible that Berkeley made *The Querist* intentionally ambiguous because of the political backlash he received for *Passive Obedience* (1712), which would make it difficult to draw any definite conclusions from the text. *Passive Obedience*, a seemingly straightforwardly conservative text which argued against rebellion on the basis of loyalty to the sovereign

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<sup>59</sup> Berkeley, *The Querist*.

being owed as part of the laws of nature, received criticism because, while its aim was ostensibly to promote loyalty to the current sovereign, William III, it was read as subversive by several people in positions of power, such as Robert Molesworth, who interpreted it as a criticism of the Glorious Revolution.<sup>60</sup> This controversy, as David Berman argues, likely contributed heavily to Berkeley's relegation in terms of preferment, contributing both to the loss of funding for his Bermuda Project, and his failure to receive the living of St. Paul's Dublin.<sup>61</sup>

When it came to writing any further political tract then, it is perhaps reasonable to suggest that Berkeley had learned his lesson from this experience. When creating *The Querist*, he likely chose the format of a series of questions to help protect himself politically by giving himself the cushion of plausible deniability. While some may be more leading than others, none of his questions can technically be said to have concrete answers. His unusual choice of format here also had no real precedent in his contemporaneous literary or political sphere, which would have added to the difficulty of its interpretation. The form was, in fact, likely derived from the style of contemporaneous scientific texts. One possible source in this respect would have been Robert Boyle, who himself had Irish connections, and who was influenced by his time at the Royal Society. Boyle employed a style of Baconian 'heads' and 'inquiries' from the 1660s onwards<sup>62</sup> which was likely influenced by the Society's early concern for systematic data-collection.<sup>63</sup> Berkeley became a member of the Dublin Philosophical society which itself took great inspiration from the Royal society. More specifically, a former graduate of

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<sup>60</sup> Berman, "The Jacobitism of Berkeley's Passive Obedience", p. 310.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 309.

<sup>62</sup> See for example, Boyle, *Heads for the Natural History of a Country*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>63</sup> Hunter, Robert Boyle and the early Royal Society", p. 1.



Trinity College Dublin, Allen Mullen, joined the Dublin Philosophical society in 1683 after having been introduced to Robert Boyle by Narcissus Marsh, then Provost of Trinity College Dublin, in 1682.<sup>64</sup> Mullen held a close correspondence with Boyle to whom he addressed a letter in which he discovered the vascularity of the lens of the eye.<sup>65</sup> Given Berkeley's later preoccupation with lens optics, especially in his breakthrough text, *A New Theory of Vision* (1709), where he argues against the convergence of the abstracted diagrams of mechanical optics and the actual experience of seeing,<sup>66</sup> this is a likely avenue via which he might have encountered Boyle's thought through the society. He subsequently might have become aware of the form he appropriates in *The Querist* through this link. While Berkeley was an active member during second revival of this society, which began in 1707, it is likely many ideas were carried over given the short breaks in the society's existence and this iteration being initiated by Samuel, son of William Molyneux, who had founded the original society in 1683.<sup>67</sup> Berkeley evidenced a distaste for Boyle through the many disputations of his corpuscular hypothesis which frequent his major works.<sup>68</sup> This suggests that, by using a preferred format of his, he might have had an ironic satirical intention. It would also fit in with Berkeley's more general suspicion of scientific abstractions of which his scepticism against optical diagrams cited above is only one example. His potential encounter with Mullen's work on vascularity might also have led him to question how something that has a proposed material existence could be responsible for the immaterial perceptions experienced by the mind, a theory of Berkeley's that will be explored later.

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<sup>64</sup> Hoppen, *The Royal Society and Ireland*. II, pp. 86-87.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, p. 87.

<sup>66</sup> Berkeley, *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*, §§ 35, 38.

<sup>67</sup> Hoppen, "The Dublin Philosophical Society and the New Learning in Ireland", pp. 107, 108.

<sup>68</sup> Berkeley, *A New Theory of Vision*, §§ 85, 86, 105; Berkeley, *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, § 47.

The assertion that this format of *The Querist* was intended to be satirical would also concur with Berkeley's more general proclivity for satire, as evidenced most pertinently by his two articles on "The Pineal Gland" in Richard Steele's *Guardian* (1713). Here Berkeley parodies Descartes's idea of a mechanical dualism, based on a mind that sits in the pineal gland, by suggesting knowledge might be gained via a mechanical reaction with a special snuff which would allow for the mind's metempsychosis into other pineal glands.<sup>69</sup> In *Hylas and Philonus*, Berkeley argues for the impossibility of an immaterial thing, the mind, having a root cause in a material thing, the brain,<sup>70</sup> which suggests that here too he is supporting the same argument by highlighting the absurdity of the potential for the kind of mechanical chemically induced Metempsychosis that Descartes's dualistic attitude might imply. This also allies with the idea that Berkeley was satirising thinkers like Boyle through the style of *The Querist*, because Berkeley's problem with both Descartes and Boyle essentially would have sprung from the fact that they both believed in some form of mechanical hypothesis which depended on the distinction between primary and secondary qualities which Berkeley argued against. There is also the satirical precedent set by the Laputa episode of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), which has the Royal Society and Newtonian abstraction as its target, partly as a response to Newton's promotion of Wood's Halfpence as master of the mint.<sup>71</sup> Berkeley would very likely have been aware of this precedent due to his close association with Swift.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Berkeley, "The Pineal Gland" & "The Pineal Gland (Continued)", pp. 186-191.

<sup>70</sup> Berkeley, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonus*, pp. 208-209.

<sup>71</sup> Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, p. 41.

<sup>72</sup> The Irish Times, "A Man of Every Virtue Under Heaven"

Perhaps the most direct suggestion that the form he uses in *The Querist* was ironic would be Berkeley's *The Analyst* (1734), which he had published three years prior. As Geoffrey Cantor suggests, this text's attacks on the rationalistic pretensions of its 'infidel mathematician' draw close to the attitudes presented by Swift in *Laputa*.<sup>73</sup> This is particularly significant in relation to *The Analyst*'s formal influence on *The Querist* because Berkeley uses the heads and inquiries format of the Royal Society in what appears to be a satirical manner here for the first time at the end of this text. These queries are also reminiscent of the ones that complete Newton's *Opticks* (1704), a text which propounds the mechanical tradition of optics which Berkeley criticises in his *New Theory of Vision*, *The Analyst* itself taking aim at Newton's idea of fluxions or infinitesimals.<sup>74</sup> As Clare Marie Moriarty suggests, this text is intended primarily as an ad hominem argument against Newton and thinkers like him.<sup>75</sup> This adoption of Newton's style at the end of *The Analyst* takes the form of a particularly barbed satire in this respect. Whereas this Baconian heads and inquiries style is used primarily for dry scientific inquiry, here it is used unexpectedly as a rhetorical device to question the moral character of scientists and mathematicians:

Qu. 56. Whether the Corpuscularian, Experimental, and Mathematical Philosophy so much cultivated in the last Age, hath not too much engrossed Mens Attention; some part whereof it might have usefully employed?

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<sup>73</sup> Cantor, "Berkeley's *The Analyst* Revisited", p. 682.

<sup>74</sup> Moriarty, "The ad hominem argument of Berkeley's *Analyst*", pp. 431-432.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, p.429.

Qu. 57. Whether from this, and other concurring Causes, the Minds of speculative Men have not been borne downward, to the debasing and stupifying of the higher Faculties? And whether we may not hence account for that prevailing Narrowness and Bigotry among many who pass for Men of Science, their Incapacity for things Moral, Intellectual, or Theological, their Proneness to measure all Truths by Sense and Experience of animal Life?<sup>76</sup>

This dry methodological format contradicts the message it contains, a message which questions the usefulness of the tendency which leads to this type of format to be used in the first place. Through this contradiction, Berkeley is parodying the excessively systematic attitudes of scientists and mathematicians.

What this suggests is that, by lending *The Querist* a format intended for Baconian scientific inquiry and data collection, Berkeley was not proposing that certain political questions could be answered definitively and methodologically as if they were a science, but the exact opposite of that. This juxtaposition of form and content seems to actually suggest something similar to what Mitchel implies by putting “science” in ironic quotation marks; that a moral world (which might be compared to Mitchel’s political sphere) which is made up of interactions between minds,<sup>77</sup> cannot be given concrete answers in relation to a list of inquiries in the way in which a science which deals with material causes would claim to be able to do, as there are no fixed political rules that suit all nations, places, people, or times. Whereas a democratic world of atoms might in theory be predictable under a

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<sup>76</sup> Berkeley, *The Analyst*, p. 102.

<sup>77</sup> Berkeley, *Alciphron*, p. 129.

Newtonian framework, a political world of minds cannot be. This point is most strongly made by Berkeley in his argument against the Earl of Shaftesbury in Chapter 3 of *Alciphron*, where he argues that there is an immediate moral sense that does not depend on deductive reasoning.<sup>78</sup> As Samuel C. Rickless argues, this moral point of view stems from Berkeley's immaterialist metaphysics because it is aided by his argument that the only substance in the world is that of minds and their experience of perception.<sup>79</sup> Whereas for Shaftesbury, as for his tutor Locke, the world is broken up into primary and secondary stimuli, the first being of experience and the secondary more real one being deduced from this experience, Berkeley argues that all the world is made of this primary experiential stimuli because it is impossible to encounter this secondary stimuli directly without the prior aid of the primary.<sup>80</sup> This subjective idealist argument is paralleled in his moral argument in *Alciphron* because Shaftesbury splits a 'primary' 'moral sense' and a 'secondary' reasonably deduced 'virtue' along the same lines. Thus, Berkeley is able to make the argument that politics is actually only based on this primary 'moral sense' because, for him, only primary stimuli exist.<sup>81</sup> Political morals, for Berkeley, as perhaps for Mitchel and Pearse, then are not a matter of secondary reason, but of primary experience.<sup>82</sup> All of this would suggest that *The Querist's* format, which implies that the deductive reasoning of scientific inquiry can provide moral answers, is in use satirically as it is contrary to Berkeley's actual outlook. Under this reading, the above passage on enslaving the native Irish, which Mitchel omits, might be looked at more under the terms

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<sup>78</sup> Berkeley, *Alciphron*, p. 121.

<sup>79</sup> Rickless, "Berkeley's Criticisms of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson", p. 113.

<sup>80</sup> Berkeley, *A New Theory of Vision*, § 51.

<sup>81</sup> Rickless, "Berkeley's Criticisms of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson", p. 113

<sup>82</sup> Think back to Pearse's promotion of "those who have thought most authentically for Ireland, the voices that have come out of the [experience of the] Irish struggle itself." Cited in intro. See also, Lecky, *History of European Morals*, pp. 122-124, for a historical outline of similar dynamics of morality as sense vs moral reason.

of the precedent set by satires such as Swift's *Modest Proposal* (1729), which suggested that the surplus Irish poor should be eaten for the greater good of the collective. Berkeley, like Swift, may well be using shock value to highlight the absurdity of inhumane proposed solutions for the 'Irish question' by following such arguments to their logical conclusion.

The above analyses have several implications for Mitchel's interpretation of Berkeley. Firstly, while Mitchel's assertion that Berkeley was passed over because of his Irishness might contain a notional element of truth, the reason for this underachievement does not necessarily fall neatly along national lines. Instead, it falls, as Berkeley's experience with *Passive Obedience* shows, more accurately along the lines of the Jacobite/ Williamite divide. While this does not preclude the possibility that this suspicion of Jacobitism also fell on Berkeley because of his perceived Irishness, again, supporting Mitchel's argument notionally, it is also of note that Berkeley's Jacobite background already had roots in England through his grandparents in Staffordshire.<sup>83</sup> All in all, it is reasonable to suggest that Mitchel is being reductive in his analysis of Berkeley's persecution as an Irishman in his effort to co-opt him to his cause. This is also true with regards to Mitchel's statement that "The "Querist," if there had been nothing else, would have been enough to stop Dr. Berkeley's promotion",<sup>84</sup> which misses the ambiguity of Berkeley's text and arguably overstates its radical nature. Again, it is difficult to say this conclusively because, depending on the answers given to Berkeley's questions, the text could be read as more or less radically inclined. It is difficult to argue against a speculative argument such as Mitchel's, which places Berkeley in the midst of The Irish Famine, when Berkeley is

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<sup>83</sup> Jones, *George Berkeley: A Philosophical Life*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>84</sup> Mitchel, *Irish Political Economy*, p. 28.

already hedging his bets. Because Berkeley's text constitutes a list of questions, it is easy to imagine them transposed to any given present, with Berkeley seeking a different set of answers given the new circumstances his 'moral sense' might face.

This ambiguity is also important in relation to Mitchel because of some sections which he does not include. Firstly, while he includes queries which suggest Ireland might be served by the union, he does not include the following pair of inquiries:

91 Whether the upper part of this people are not truly English, by blood, language, religion, manners, inclination, and interest?

92 Whether we are not as much Englishmen as the children of old Romans, born in Britain, were still Romans?<sup>85</sup>

This is one instance where Berkeley's is less ambiguous, as the comparison with the Romans seems to present a situation where the desired answer is in the affirmative. This section would suggest Berkeley's identification with the Anglo-Irish ruling class, an identification based on filial and cultural inheritance that would be much less malleable in Mitchel's speculative shifting of Berkeley's temporal situation, as a similar Anglo-Irish identity still existed during his day. This also relates to W. J. McCormack's analysis when he points out the prevalence of *The Querist's* condescending possessive reference to 'our Irish' which seems to imply the same division.<sup>86</sup> However, on balance, the fact that this text is quite probably meant to contain a certain amount of knowing irony and ambiguity to deflect from any ideas of Jacobitism after Berkeley's experience with *Passive Obedience*, would suggest that it is maintaining this distinction for political reasons. In this respect,

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<sup>85</sup> Berkeley, *The Querist*, p. 112.

<sup>86</sup> McCormack, *'We Irish' in Europe*, pp. 6-7.

Berkeley's more private assertions of Irishness, such as the letter Mitchel cites, and the references to 'we Irish', and we 'Irish men' in Berkeley's *Commonplace Book*, would be more likely not to draw this divide because there is no political danger in not doing so in such cases. While McCormack argues that this self-identification "carries a mildly ironic undertone, as if he were responding to some hostile labelling..."<sup>87</sup> this would be less likely as, on the contrary, it is the public assertions of 'our Irish' which potentially bear the greatest ironic undertone in this context. McCormack also supports his argument by showing that Berkeley's assertions in *The Commonplace* book only ever refer to 'we Irish' in isolation rather than being in opposition to any other country, such as Britain, which he suggests shows that Berkeley is merely referring to an opinion that is generally held in Ireland, but which might just as easily be held anywhere else.<sup>88</sup> This assertion can be combated again, both by the letter Mitchel cites and, perhaps more significantly, by a letter written posthumously by his son, George Berkeley Junior, then Canon Berkeley, to the Scottish philosopher George Glieg on the subject of Berkeley Sr's Bermuda project. In this letter, which David Berman draws attention to here as having received little or no notice, Berkeley Junior argues that 'his father's works' were misrepresented through the ignorance of Samuel Johnson and, significantly for this argument, '[Greig's] countrymen'. Berman argues that this refers to the criticisms of Berkeley both within the Scottish Commonsense School of James Beattie and Thomas Reid, and David Hume.<sup>89</sup> This would support the idea that, contrary to McCormack's assertion, Berkeley Senior was in fact talking about the thought of 'we Irish' in an oppositional, non-generalised sense because he did see certain other nationalities as being opposed to the types of views he expresses as being Irish. It also suggests that he did not take the labelling of himself as 'Irish' to be

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, pp. 5-6.

<sup>89</sup> Berman, *Berkeley and Irish Philosophy*, pp. 209-210, 213-214.



ironic as it is much more doubtful that Berkeley Junior would refer to his deceased father inappropriately via an identification which he had deemed to be inaccurate or belittling, even in an ironic sense.

Berkeley's proclivity for satire is also evidenced when he makes an 'N.B. to rein in yr Satyrical nature.'<sup>90</sup> In his biography of Berkeley, Tom Jones suggests that Berkeley is, along similar lines to McCormack, referring here to his description of himself in his *Notebooks* as 'we Irish' ironically. He does this by arguably misrepresenting Berkeley's quote in the body of his text. Jones says that Berkeley is satirically saying that 'we Irish' are not sophisticated enough to comprehend entities such as a mathematical point that is 'not altogether nothing nor is it downright something.'<sup>91</sup> There is however, no real suggestion in these passages that Berkeley is saying that the Irish aren't 'sophisticated enough'. The part of the passage he quotes in relation to the Irish understanding reads in full: "now we Irish men are apt to think something & nothing are next neighbours."<sup>92</sup> This comes after the passage "There are men who say there are insensible extensions, there are others who say the Wall is not white, the fire is not hot &c We Irish men cannot attain to these truths."<sup>93</sup> In both instances, Berkeley is suggesting the absurdity of insensible extension devoid of qualities. Berkeley is nascently presenting key tenets of his own philosophy here and he presents this as an eminently reasonable position and represents it as something that 'we Irish' can come to an understanding of more readily, not because of an ignorance of science or 'sophistication' but because of an 'apt[ness]'. That 'we Irish' are unable to "attain to [such] truths" is not here suggestive of an ignorance, but of an

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<sup>90</sup> Berkeley, *Philosophical Commentaries*, § 634.

<sup>91</sup> Jones, *George Berkeley: A Philosophical Life*, p. 107.

<sup>92</sup> Berkeley, *Philosophical Commentaries*, § 394.

<sup>93</sup> Berkeley, *Philosophical Commentaries*, § 392.

aptness that understands the closeness of something and nothing, a point which Berkeley propounds in, for example, *Of Infinities*.<sup>94</sup> Again, much as in the case of McCormack, when Berkeley says ‘we Irish’ in his private works, he is much closer to meaning this straightforwardly than many of these criticisms suggest. His warning to himself about ironic restraint would be more likely directed to his later proclamations about ‘our Irish’ in the instance of Jones’s analysis, because such a statement might seem ironically ingratiating in a readership, many of which, like Molesworth, do not consider him to be truly separate from the Irish population as a whole. It is still possible to read irony into this passage insofar as it is perhaps drawing on existing prejudices against the Irish, however, it is also reasonable to argue that this is a less clear reading than Jones and McCormack suggest, and that the alternate, more straightforwardly declarative reading, is at least equally as arguable.

On balance then, while perhaps not quite grasping the full picture, Mitchel may have had a point in promoting Berkeley’s Irishness in a more literal and egalitarian sense than some critics have suggested is accurate. This relationship becomes problematic, however, when looking at Mitchel’s promotion of slavery as a mouthpiece for the Confederate States of America. Due to the ambiguity of *The Querist*, it is perfectly possible for Mitchel to have read query 381, “Whether other nations have not found great benefit from the use of slaves in repairing high roads, making rivers navigable, draining bogs, erecting public buildings, bridges, and manufactures?” and to have answered yes, while also concluding that what Berkeley was implying here was that to enslave Irish people would constitute a satirical absurdity which might only really be permissible for the slaves of

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<sup>94</sup> See Berkeley, *Of Infinities*, pp. 235-238.

‘other nations’ because those slaves should be regarded racially other. This is an argument Mitchel would infamously go on to make when saying that “negro slavery [was] the best state of existence for the negro.”<sup>95</sup> The origin of this quote is a letter to Father John Kenyon, a source which his biographer William Dillon argues is the best explication of Mitchel’s stance because he is forced to defend the arguments that he had put forward polemically in the secessionist newspaper the *Southern Citizen*.<sup>96</sup> His arguments and phraseology in this letter have a distinctly Berkeleian ring. For his position on ‘negro slavery’, he takes a stance that is not unlike Berkeley’s argument for a ‘moral sense’, denying that “any nation can ever *need* to do that which is unjust, any more than an individual can” (Mitchel’s emphasis).<sup>97</sup> This tallies with Berkeley’s idea that there can be no reasonable ‘virtue’ in the sense Shaftesbury means it, which could allow for certain amounts of evil to be inflicted on a mind for the good of the nation or collective. Again, while Berkeley’s assessment in *Alciphron* might seem positive at first, (if something feels immoral, it must be immoral), Mitchel comes close to using this same argument to say that slavery itself must, therefore, be a moral good ‘in itself’.<sup>98</sup> Mitchel was a keen and regular reader of Berkeley’s metaphysics, in addition to his political works, and so was likely aware of his moral arguments.<sup>99</sup> Berkeley might be argued to have gotten around this argument himself in *Passive Obedience* with his arguments for ‘temporal’ suffering under God given rule. Given his opinion of a ‘moral sense’ in *Alciphron*, it would follow that it would be natural to abhor slavery as it is a clear evil to a mind, and something which must generally be felt to be an evil practiced on another soul upon its being experienced first-hand. It would seem, under these circumstances, that the arguments of

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<sup>95</sup> Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, p. 107.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, p. 103.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, p. 107.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>99</sup> Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, p. 308

The Earl of Shaftesbury would be more conducive to slavery, as he is able to argue that the initial displeasure felt at the encounter of slavery is only a primary moral sensation which does not ascend to the secondary, and uniquely human, realm of virtue. This realm, he would argue, is based on a higher reason that is capable of deducing that something that is felt to be evil might be done to someone for the greater good of society. For Berkeley, this secondary reaction is not valid, and therefore, this initial reaction should take precedence. Berkeley, however, also argues for the permissibility of temporal servitude in *Passive Obedience*:

We should consider that when a subject endures the insolence and oppression of one or more magistrates, armed with the supreme civil power, the object of his submission is, in strict truth, nothing else but right reason, which is the voice of the Author of Nature. Think not we are so senseless as to imagine tyrants cast in a better mould than other men: no, they are the worst and vilest of men, and for their own sakes have not the least right to our obedience. But the laws of God and nature must be obeyed, and our obedience to them is never more acceptable and sincere than when it exposeth us to temporal calamities.<sup>100</sup>

It is possible that Berkeley's views shifted after his experiences of slavery in the Americas, which was promoted in its worst excesses by the champions of secondary qualities and virtue, John Locke and his tutee the Earl of Shaftesbury.<sup>101</sup> This is suggested by the fact that, while *Passive Obedience* was published in 1712, *Alciphron* was published in 1732, the same year he returned from the Americas. Given this timeline, his argument against the Earl of Shaftesbury might have been intended by implication to extend to the

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<sup>100</sup> Berkeley, *Passive Obedience*, § XXXIX.

<sup>101</sup> See, Bernasconi, Robert & Mann, Anika Maaza. "The Contradictions of Racism: Locke, Slavery, and the Two Treatises."

institution of slavery, it being too politically incendiary, given his position, to attack it directly. Under this reading, *The Querist*, published in 1737, might well have been ironically suggesting slavery as a positive.

If Berkeley was intending this ‘moral sense’ argument to criticise such an institution however, Mitchel bastardises it under post-Darwinian racialist terminology:

I do not perfectly know the position held just now by the Catholic Church with respect to the enslavement of men. Whatever that may be, however, it has no application to negro slaves bought on the coast of Africa. To enslave them is impossible, or to set them free either; they are born and bred slaves.<sup>102</sup>

Mitchel argues for the irrelevance of religious position on slavery here. It is Berkeley’s argument distorted to fit a regressive post-Darwinian worldview.<sup>103</sup> For Mitchel, slavery was justified because it was impossible to be immoral towards a ‘negro slave’ because they were, a priori, biologically, sub-human.<sup>104</sup> The dynamic at play here might be compared to the one described by Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887). For Nietzsche, the difference between the subject’s “being” and “doing” is an illusion caused by a dualism which allows for a neutral “substratum” which is free to express the actions

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<sup>102</sup> Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, p. 106.

<sup>103</sup> See Desmond & Moore, *Darwin’s Sacred Cause* p. 337, for how the Confederacy attempted to appropriate Darwin. Mitchel had also read Darwin. See Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, p. 308.

<sup>104</sup> The suggestion that slavery was a Berkeleian moral good for Mitchel also concurs with a later statement of his with regards to the potential granting of freedom for slaves as a reward for service in the Confederate army. to this idea he responds with this ironic exhortation: “The general further urged that the Government should hold out emancipation as a reward. Now, if freedom be a reward for negroes — that is, if freedom be a good thing for negroes -- why, then it is, and always was, a grievous wrong and crime to hold them in slavery at all. If it be true that the state of slavery keeps these people depressed below the condition to which they could develop their nature, their intelligence, and their capacity for enjoyment, and what we call “progress,” then every hour of their bondage for generations is a black stain upon the white race”. See Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, Ibid, p. 109.

willed by its nature or to not.<sup>105</sup> The elimination of Cartesian Dualism caused by Berkeley's argument in *Alciphron* potentially causes a similar logical conclusion to the one Nietzsche comes to, namely that the actions of a being, which confront the 'moral sense', must constitute the nature of the being itself. For Mitchel, the persistence of African slaves in the state of "negro slavery" may have been evidence enough of their nature as such. This inherent subhuman categorisation of African slaves is a position that Berkeley himself rejected, despite himself owning slaves for the period of two years he spent in Rhode Island preparing for his Bermuda Project. Berkeley described "an irrational Contempt of the Blacks, [amongst the colonists] as Creatures of another Species, who had no Right to be instructed or admitted to the Sacraments, [which has] proved a main Obstacle to the Conversion of these poor People."<sup>106</sup> This, again, is reasonably consistent with Berkeley's moral position in *Passive Obedience*, as outlined above, as he can counter-intuitively argue that, while he might feel an uneasiness about the reduced racial status and 'irrational' treatment of these 'poor People', they are, in fact, doing what is best for their eternal souls if only they could be made open to conversion. Again, it is possible that this thinking adapted over time, and that what Berkeley was getting at in *Alciphron* was that an evil done to a mind at any time was inexcusable because the world was made up of minds. As for Berkeley there was no distinction to be made between the mind and the eternal spirit,<sup>107</sup> this attitude would make sense.

As well as the foundations of Mitchel and Berkeley's arguments being similar here, there are also traces of Berkeley's metaphysical influence in Mitchel's letters that can be

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<sup>105</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, §13.

<sup>106</sup> Berkeley, *Anniversary Sermon*, pp. 121- 122

<sup>107</sup> Rickless, "Berkeley's Criticisms of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson", p. 113.

discerned from his use of visual metaphor. For example, he describes the differing points of view of himself and his addressee as like looking through “variously contorted media [to the extent that they can’t] even perceive it is the same world [they] are looking at”.<sup>108</sup> This instance is reminiscent of Berkeley’s arguments in *New Theory of Vision*, cited earlier, which argue that optics cannot describe the true nature of the world. Mitchel also says that “When I admit myself to be exaggerative, I mean that whatever I take in hand, whatever cause I favour, comes to occupy, for the time being, too much of my field of vision”. This intensely experiential passage is reminiscent of Berkeley’s core idea that reality consists purely of primary sensory data. Ultimately then, given such a reading, the influence that Berkeley had on Mitchel was not a positive one. Mitchel may have seen Slavery as being as natural a form of organisation as the one which Berkeley describes whereby the world of the senses organises itself into patterns that present coherent and consistent objects to human subjectivities according to the will of God.<sup>109</sup> It could be possible that Pearse had more reasons for deflecting from the influence of Anglo-Irish thinkers therefore, as close attention to *The Querist*, having been cited by Mitchel, might lead to more difficult conclusions about how this influence came to shape the less palatable, post-Young Ireland Mitchel who had formed a deeply held belief in slavery and who, in these same letters, proposes that he had less a love for Ireland, than a hate for England:

I have found that there was perhaps less of love in it than of hate - less of filial affection to my country than of scornful impatience at the thought that I had the

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<sup>108</sup> Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, p. 104.

<sup>109</sup> Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, § LXVI.

misfortune, I and my children, to be born in a country which suffered itself to be oppressed and humiliated by another; less devotion to truth and justice than raging wrath against cant and insolence. And hatred being the thing I chiefly cherished and cultivated.<sup>110</sup>

#### 4. Berkeley and Thomas MacDonagh.

Fellow Proclamation signatory Thomas MacDonagh makes a similar distinction between Irish and Anglo-Irish traditions to the one that Pearse makes. The idea that he is making a point of emphasis is perhaps clearer than in Pearse's comparison however:

My exclusion from the scope of these inquiries of the Hiberno-English writers of the eighteenth century has already provoked protests from my friends. They do indeed form a band apart in English Literature, with the common characteristic of adventurous and haughty individualism. But to me, who look rather from the Gaelic stand-point, the attitude of Swift, Steele, Sheridan, Burke, Goldsmith and the rest, for all that they have in common and for all that they owe to their Irish birth or upbringing, is an attitude rather of dissent from an English orthodoxy than of consent in an orthodoxy of their own or of Ireland's.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel*, p. 104.

<sup>111</sup> MacDonagh, *Literature in Ireland*, p. vii



Here, in a similar manner to his close associate Pearse, MacDonagh puts the 18<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Irish tradition to one side, not so as to totally dismiss it, but in order to bring focus on to the Gaelic tradition. Again, while this might be argued to be a ‘Corkery like’ distinction between Celtic and non-Celtic, as Seamus Deane puts it, MacDonagh, unlike Pearse, goes on to clarify his assertion in more detail with reference to a conversation he had had with George Russel:

“Æ has claimed, in conversation with me about this, that all these emigrants, down to Oscar Wilde and Shaw, have that Irish mien of aristocracy that marked our great in the days of the clan system — an aristocracy not of the talents merely, but of character, of self-confident and often self-made leadership. I would not deny their claim. I would not abate their praise. But the two literatures of my choice here have other claims and are worthy of other praise. If I have done a little wrong to the emigrants in one of my Studies, this will undo it”<sup>112</sup>

Here MacDonagh makes it clear that his is a matter of emphasis, he does not deny the claim of this heritage but is rather making a study “to show the value of the old literature, the prospects of the new”.<sup>113</sup> MacDonagh is admitting to only separating these two traditions arbitrarily so as to present how this old Celtic tradition might be brought into the present in order to interact with the newer Anglo-Irish tradition in the interest of literary progress. Given their close association, this perhaps also supports the idea that

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, pp. vii, viii

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

Pearse's distinction was made along similar lines, and that both actually saw a certain continuity between the two traditions which they both perhaps sought to minimise, perhaps temporarily, via emphasis rather than outright separation.

This is particularly evident with relation to MacDonagh's relationship with George Berkeley. The influence of 'the good bishop' is never quite directly stated by MacDonagh, but it is traceable. One instance of this is the fact that an article entitled "A Great Modern French Thinker: Henri - Louis Bergson"<sup>114</sup> by one Maurice Bourgeois, which reports on a lecture given by Bergson on the subject of Berkeley, and which draws parallels between the thinking of the two, was included in the September 1911 edition of *The Irish Review*, a publication which Thomas MacDonagh both co-founded and edited.<sup>115</sup> This inclusion would suggest that MacDonagh recognised the continuing importance of Berkeley's thought.<sup>116</sup> It also suggests that he is perhaps allied with the idea that W. B. Yeats would later propose as a senator in 1925 when suggesting a continuity between "Berkeley and the great modern idealist philosophy created by his influence",<sup>117</sup> an analysis which helped push Ireland away from the "modern scientific thought"<sup>118</sup> of England, towards the modern idealist tradition which was largely practiced on the continent. While MacDonagh might have agreed with Yeats in this respect, this also touches on why MacDonagh and Pearse might not have vocally supported thinkers such as Berkeley in unambiguous terms, because ascendancy figures such as Yeats would use the importance

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<sup>114</sup> See Bourgeois, "A Great Modern French Thinker: Henri - Louis Bergson".

<sup>115</sup> Foster, *Vivid Face*, p. 92.

<sup>116</sup> Although if MacDonagh's point had been to criticise the type of Metaphysical philosophising practiced by Bergson and Berkeley on the basis that it is something that only the comfortably well-off middle classes had time for, he could not have made up much of better name for its author than "Maurice Borgeois".

<sup>117</sup> Yeats, *The Senate Speeches of W. B. Yeats*, p. 171-7

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

of Anglo-Irish thinkers in Ireland's past to argue for the continuation of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy in a new independent Ireland.<sup>119</sup>

It is perhaps for this reason that the presence of Berkeley is concealed in MacDonagh's writings, despite it being felt. This dynamic is particularly evident in MacDonagh's appropriation of an argument from Berkeley's *Alciphron* to describe the difference between the nature of the Irish and English language: "Modern Irish is much more in line with Old Irish than is Modern English with Old English. This has saved Irish from the introduction of words that are rather labels than names, or, to use my former image, rather counters than coin of intrinsic worth."<sup>120</sup> This image is in fact borrowed from Berkeley: "Words, it is agreed, are signs: it may not therefore be amiss to examine the use of other signs, in order to know that of words. Counters, for instance, at a card-table are used, not for their own sake, but only as signs substituted for money, as words are for ideas."<sup>121</sup> The way in which the two thinkers use this analogy is also not dissimilar. Both essentially use the metaphor to describe how words relate to ideas. For Berkeley, once the value of a counter is decided, it is not necessary "to frame an idea of the distinct sum or value that each represents" every time "these counters are used throughout the whole progress of a game."<sup>122</sup> For Berkeley "it seems to follow, that words may not be insignificant, although they should not, every time they are used, excite the ideas they signify in our minds; it being sufficient that we have it in our power to substitute things or ideas for their signs when there is occasion."<sup>123</sup> For MacDonagh, Modern and Old Irish

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<sup>119</sup> Fitzpatrick, "Yeats in the Senate.", p. 15.

<sup>120</sup> MacDonagh, *Literature in Ireland*, p. 44.

<sup>121</sup> Berkeley, *Alciphron*, p. 291.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. pp.291-292

are more in line with each other than Modern and Old English because he suggests that the modernisation process of many languages like English has involved the adoption of many more 'counters' which help with the efficiency and order of sentences but with the trade-off that these 'counters' become too abstracted from the original 'coins', or ideas that they represent. As MacDonagh puts it, "the modern English author writes well-balanced, well-ordered sentences. But the Saxon King expressed more truly his thought; in him the word order imaged more truly the thought order. The modern writer uses counters where he used coin. The modern writer cannot distinguish between his idea and the set phrase that does duty for its expression"<sup>124</sup> MacDonagh here essentially adapts Berkeley's analogy here to say that there is a spectrum when it comes to how close words or 'counters' are to the 'coins' or ideas that they represent, and that less modern, or less modernised languages such as Irish, while less efficient, come closer to representing the original value of ideas because they have less of a tendency to group a set of ideas, or 'coins' under one word, or 'counter'. MacDonagh uses the example of the word 'noun' that an English child might be taught to use in place of what he understands to be the name of a thing.<sup>125</sup> For this child the word 'name' becomes substituted by the word 'noun' which stands for the "name of a person, place, thing, or idea."<sup>126</sup> In contrast, because for the Irish child the word for 'name' and the word for a 'noun', a general label to describe how names function in a grammatical structure, are the same word 'ainm', he is told that "the words leabhar, mian, fuacht, Baile Atha Cliath, Eoin (book, desire, cold, Dublin, John) are names. He deals directly with his trader."<sup>127</sup> For MacDonagh, the word 'noun' detracts from the notion that every individual thing has a corresponding name, a 'coin' that corresponds

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<sup>124</sup> MacDonagh, *Literature in Ireland*, p. 40.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, p. 44.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

closely to its idea, and acts instead as a 'counter' which represents a grammatical structure that applies equally to all names.

While there are plenty of other thinkers to have used economic analogies to describe the functioning of Language,<sup>128</sup> the similarity of the analogy used in these two cases, down to the close to identical use of phraseology,<sup>129</sup> suggests strongly that MacDonagh was drawing influence from Berkeley. Again, he was perhaps intentionally omitting this influence for political reasons. There is also perhaps a tempting, if speculative, argument to be drawn out when comparing these two thinkers. In addition to this argument in *Alciphron*, Berkeley's attitude to language plays a significant role in his earlier major works of idealist metaphysics, as he believes language to be the cause of the sort of labelling abstraction which leads to the idea that reality is made up of secondary qualities.<sup>130</sup> This argument might be compared to MacDonagh's insofar as a hypothetical trajectory might be imagined whereby someone who is habituated to a more modernised and abstracted Language, which deals largely with 'counters', such as English, encounters a less modernised and less abstracted language, which deals more with 'coins', such as Irish. Such an experience might point towards the realisations that Berkeley came to have in terms of language's relationship to idealism, as it suggests a trajectory from abstractions towards ideas themselves. This is a trajectory that Berkeley could himself have experienced given that Irish had just begun to be taught at Trinity College, Dublin, for the purposes of conversion, at the urging of Narcissus Marsh by the time he was

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<sup>128</sup> For example, Francis Bacon, Plato, Thomas Hobbes, Augustine etc...

<sup>129</sup> Both use the word 'counter', Berkeley opposes this to 'money', whereas MacDonagh opposes it to 'coin', but the parallel is still striking.

<sup>130</sup> Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, § 20

starting there as an undergraduate.<sup>131</sup> This speculative thesis might employ the insights of an Irish Language scholar, who also possesses the skillset of a linguist, to fully explore the accuracy and extent of MacDonagh's argument. If it is accurate, perhaps the Irish language could be the cause of such a trajectory. Such an analysis might also explore how the Irish and English versions of religious texts, that Berkeley might have been consulting in parallel, might communicate their messages differently, if at all. For example, William Bedell's Irish Language bible might be examined, to see if there is a difference in what is expressed in Saint Paul's assertion that "in [God] we live and move and have our being", (Acts 17:28) a passage which has been said to have acted as an inspiration for the 'esse est percipi' argument of Berkeley's idealism.<sup>132</sup> Ultimately, such an analysis might have the benefit of lessening the 'Corkery like' distinction between the Gaelic tradition and the largely Anglo-Irish tradition of the Irish Enlightenment by suggesting a measure of continuity between the two via a sort of linguistic determinism. This continuity has already perhaps been suggested in different terms by Dermot Moran who suggests that Berkeley may have received a certain amount of inspiration from the works of John Scottus Eriugena who he may have read in the works of Bishop Ussher.<sup>133</sup> Berkeley may have been likely to have read him here given his potential relation to Ussher via his grandparents.<sup>134</sup>

MacDonagh's one act play *Metempsychosis* (1912) also seems to play with the Berkeleian experience vs abstraction dichotomy. The character of 'the stranger' is portrayed as believing in the inherent value of Berkeleian experience almost to a fault. His plan to row

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<sup>131</sup> O'Connor, "Marsh's Library and the Irish Catholic Tradition", pp. 235-236.

<sup>132</sup> Jones, *George Berkeley: A Philosophical Life*, p. 80.

<sup>133</sup> Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, p. 199.

<sup>134</sup> Jones, *George Berkeley: A Philosophical Life*, p. 31.

around Ireland in a 'little rowing boat' while hugging the coast, which the play's 'languid' Countess, who is "interested in things exotic", praises as "perfectly natural" suggests a kind of blind naïve nativism which could only be appreciated via the superficial condescension of the disinterested Anglo-Irish class which the countess represents.<sup>135</sup> The stranger himself is markedly Irish. His "knack of emphasising most of his syllables, thus giving a tone of gravity to commonplace remarks"<sup>136</sup> parallels the syllabic tendencies of the 'Irish Mode' that MacDonagh puts forward in *Literature in Ireland* which suggests Irish verse has a tendency to give syllables a more uniform pattern of stress.<sup>137</sup> The character of The Stranger is contrasted to Earl Winton-Winton De Winton who leans heavily on the abstraction of x/y line diagrams to quantify the soul's 'freshness of maturity'.<sup>138</sup> This seems to be a reversal of the Berkeleian principle which argues that lines and geometry are insufficient to represent reality because they cannot exist themselves as anything other than forms of abstract extension which themselves are derived from experience. This principle is evidenced, for example, when Berkeley finds it impossible to "apprehend the general idea of a triangle" because to do so would be to envision something without sensible qualities.<sup>139</sup> This principle can also be seen in his argument against abstracted explanations for optics, as cited earlier. That Winton-Winton tries to evidence the nature of the soul via abstractions then, seems to represent the antithesis of Berkeley, as it attempts to represent the soul as something abstracted from itself.<sup>140</sup> MacDonagh also parodies Cartesian Dualism, in a similar way to Berkeley's "Pineal Gland" articles, by having Winton-Winton see the body as only a vessel for the

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<sup>135</sup> MacDonagh, *Metempsychosis*, pp. 585, 587.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, p. 585.

<sup>137</sup> MacDonagh, *Literature in Ireland*, p. 65.

<sup>138</sup> MacDonagh, *Metempsychosis*, p. 591.

<sup>139</sup> Berkeley, *A New Theory of Vision*, CXXV. CIX.

<sup>140</sup> See Berkeley's argument against such a notion in *Hylas & Philonous* cited earlier.

soul, an attitude which would, if it wasn't for the law, make it moral to murder the stranger in order for his soul to transmigrate at peak freshness.<sup>141</sup> For Winton-Winton, because of this dualism, the body is as expendable a vessel as *The Stranger's* boat.<sup>142</sup> This moral criticism of Cartesian Dualism also recalls the arguments, cited earlier, that Berkeley makes against Locke and Shaftesbury. Ultimately then, this parody of dualism and abstraction seems to present a very Berkeleian attitude, suggesting a level of influence.

There was also a renewed interest in Berkeley that ran contemporaneously with MacDonagh's play which might support this assertion. For example, Alexander Campbell Frazer's biography of Berkeley was published in the same year as *Metempsychosis*. Furthermore, James Joyce had returned to Dublin in 1912,<sup>143</sup> which is perhaps where he encountered this biography which eventually ended up in his Trieste library. This library also contained one edition of *The Irish Review* from August 1912 which suggests he was perhaps reading the journal while back in Ireland.<sup>144</sup> While Joyce arrived in Ireland in July,<sup>145</sup> after the play had been put on in April, it is possible that he still read the play retroactively in *The Irish Review*. Anthony Roche has pointed out that he may have read reviews of *Metempsychosis* in Dublin newspapers at the time, arguing that this may have led to the discussion of the concept of Metempsychosis between Molly and Bloom, but he fails to notice the fact that it may have had a much more direct influence given the fact that Joyce might have had the opportunity to read the whole play as it was printed in the

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<sup>141</sup> MacDonagh, *Metempsychosis*, p.593.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, p. 594.

<sup>143</sup> Ellman, *James Joyce*, p. 323.

<sup>144</sup> JJON - Trieste library.

<sup>145</sup> 'Metempsychosis – Playography Ireland'.



February 1912 edition of *The Irish Review*.<sup>146</sup> It might also be argued that, given its Berkeleian themes, MacDonagh's play might have influenced Joyce's own treatment of Berkeley in *Ulysses*, which features heavily in the "Proteus" episode, and which similarly plays with the boundaries between reality and abstraction. Furthermore, Butt and Mitchel both refer to Berkeley through variations of the moniker 'the good Bishop'.<sup>147</sup> That Joyce refers to him as such in "Proteus" therefore, suggests that he is alluding not only to his metaphysics, but also to this political heritage.<sup>148</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

MacDonagh's play also likely has a political edge, which similarly revolves around the status of the ascendancy tradition as Winton-Winton de Winton is a representation of W. B. Yeats and the stranger is a stand in for himself, a point which Johann A. Norstedt makes, citing a letter of MacDonagh's to Muriel Gifford from the twelfth of November 1911.<sup>149</sup> As Norstedt argues, the play is most likely a satirical representation of MacDonagh's earlier reverential visits to Yeats in 1909. The play mocks MacDonagh's former reverence for Yeats who he had since decided had been "tainted through Lady Gregory... with that rottenest of taints in Ireland's ground, the ascendancy taint."<sup>150</sup> Given this angle, it is perhaps likely that MacDonagh was mocking Yeats's tendency to promote theosophical abstractions, which relied heavily on the sort of geometrical diagrams presented in

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<sup>146</sup> Roche, "Thomas MacDonagh's 1916", p. 36.

<sup>147</sup> Butt, *Protection to Home Industry*, p.64, & Mitchel, *Irish Political Economy*, p. 27 of

<sup>148</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 38.

<sup>149</sup> Norstedt, *Thomas MacDonagh: A Critical Biography*, p. 87.

<sup>150</sup> MacDonagh to Gifford, quoted in Norstedt, *Thomas MacDonagh: A Critical Biography*, p. 85.

*Metempsychosis*,<sup>151</sup> while simultaneously promoting the ascendancy tradition of Berkeley which heavily contradicted this mode of thought. The fact that Yeats promoted the tradition while simultaneously contradicting it is perhaps suggestive of this dilettanteish ascendancy snobbery which caused MacDonagh to sour against him and create such a satire. Again, this plays into the idea that MacDonagh and Pearse were keen to dissimulate any ascendancy influence because they felt that Yeats, Gregory and co. would jump on this influence for political reasons whether or not they agreed with, or understood, this influence. And so, while, as Norstedt points out, there are other precedents for MacDonagh's satire on transmigration in Horace and Mangan,<sup>152</sup> there are also perhaps similar dissimulated precedents set in the ascendancy tradition through Berkeley's idealism, and through his satires such as the "The Pineal Gland" articles, and Swift's Laputan episode. Ultimately then, *Metempsychosis* perhaps best encapsulates the dynamics at play in this essay, which hopes to have shown that, while concealed, the trace of Anglo-Irish influence, especially through Berkeley, can be felt in the Irish Republican tradition that Deane suggests denies it. This influence may have arrived through Mitchel due to his importance within the Republican tradition which may also have led to the dissimulation of this influence because of his problematic nature. While his *Irish Political Economy* only references his political works, this seems a likely avenue via which those in that tradition, such as MacDonagh, may have gone on to explore Berkeley's metaphysics. It was known, as William Dillon's 1888 biography shows, that Mitchel was also engaged with his metaphysics and so there was a potential route for this further interest. Ultimately then, while the influence of Anglo-Ireland on the Separatist

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<sup>151</sup> See for example, Antonielli, "The Theosophical Symbolism in Yeats's Vision", p. 15.

<sup>152</sup> Norstedt, *Thomas MacDonagh: A Critical Biography*, p. 88.

Republican tradition may have been concealed for political reasons, its influence, especially through Berkeley, was pervasive.

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