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## Thomas Carlyle and the Politics of Race in John Mitchel's *Jail Journal*

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**Abstract.** This article deals with John Mitchel's engagement with questions around race as articulated in his 1854 *Jail Journal*. Mitchel has been oft noted and condemned for his support of the Confederacy during the US Civil War, in which he lost two of his sons. His racism as it was articulated in the *Southern Citizen* during that period and his defence of slavery as an institution has led to numerous and open disavowals of his legacy. This article seeks to trace the development of Mitchel's attitude towards race through a close reading of his *Jail Journal* in conjunction with a contemporaneous racist tract by Thomas Carlyle. This double reading will expose some of the ambiguities and ambivalences in Mitchel's thinking in contrast to the strident pro-slavery position that he later embraced, whilst also allowing for an uncovering of his *modus cogitandi* that may help to explain apparent contradictions within his thought.

**Key Words.** Ireland, race, nineteenth century, Carlyle, nationalism.

**Resumen.** Este artículo aborda el compromiso de John Mitchel con las cuestiones relacionadas con la raza, tal y como se articula en su *Jail Journal* de 1854. Mitchel ha sido señalado y condenado a menudo por su apoyo a la Confederación durante la Guerra Civil estadounidense, en la que perdió a dos de sus hijos. Su racismo, tal y como se articuló en el *Southern Citizen* durante ese periodo, y su defensa de la esclavitud como institución han dado lugar a numerosas y abiertas desautorizaciones de su legado. Este artículo trata de rastrear el desarrollo de la actitud de Mitchel hacia la raza a través de una lectura atenta de su *Jail Journal* junto con un tratado racista contemporáneo de Thomas Carlyle. Esta doble lectura expondrá algunas de las ambigüedades y ambivalencias del pensamiento de Mitchel en contraste con la estridente posición pro-esclavista que adoptó más tarde, al tiempo que permitirá descubrir su *modus cogitandi* que puede ayudar a explicar las aparentes contradicciones dentro de su pensamiento.

**Palabras clave.** Irlanda, raza, siglo XIX, Carlyle, nacionalismo.

## Introduction

John Mitchel was one of the most influential Irish nationalists of the nineteenth century. His virulent indictments of English rule in Ireland framed the arguments of generations of anti-colonial nationalists in favour of Irish independence.<sup>1</sup> It was his analysis of the Great Famine of 1845-52 and his subsequent exile in on various prison ships and Van Diemen's Land (latterly Tasmania) before landing in the USA that helped to solidify his position as martyr and hero of the Irish struggle. The analysis of the Famine was most forcefully and systematically laid out in his *Jail Journal*. The *Jail Journal* was itself composed mainly on prison hulks before Mitchel came to rest in Van Diemen's Land. It was first published in article form in the *New York Citizen* in 1854, before being published in book form later that year (Flanagan 1970: 1). There is however little doubt that over the past number of years his reputation has been in decline amongst both the public and historians alike. However, it is remarkable that the criticism of Mitchel has traditionally been levelled on the basis of his supposed "Anglo-phobia" rather than (as has been the case in more recent times) due to his support for the Confederacy during the American Civil War. His pronouncements on slavery have been emphasised to the extent of obscuring the influence he had over the ideological development of Irish anti-colonial thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This has been done in such a way as to suggest that all Irish nationalism is secretly (or in Mitchel's case, not so secretly) racist at its core. This approach both simplifies and denies thorough analysis of the discursive terrain on which such (anti-colonial) articulations occur. Frantz Fanon (1963) showed how the discourse of the colonizer shapes the discursive and practical modes of resistance to empire in ways that inform and challenge anti-colonial struggle. This is crucial for understanding the contradictory position that Mitchel occupies when it comes to racial hierarchies, but also in his own conception of what it meant to be Irish in the mid-nineteenth century. As Joe Cleary has perceptively pointed out with specific reference to John Mitchel,

The extent to which *some* versions of anti-colonial nationalism (throughout the world and not just in Ireland, as some Irish revisionists seem fondly to imagine) assimilate and replicate elements of the racist and imperial mentalities they set out to oppose is a well-developed theme in postcolonial studies, and Irish nationalism in this and other respects shows the conventional limits of nationalism as an oppositional discourse. (Cleary 2006: 27)

Thus, the way in which such "mentalities" are replicated and modified in the process of that assimilation has a significant bearing on postcolonial engagements with major (and problematic) figures from anti-colonial struggles. By centring Mitchel's engagement with race through a close reading, this essay allows us to produce this form of insight without abandoning the ethical imperatives that such analysis requires. It will demonstrate that the ambiguous position of Mitchel and the Irish within global racial hierarchies produced by imperialism operated in an unsettling mode that both reinscribed and refused colonial taxonomies of race. Dissecting the function of race in Mitchel's writing will enable a clearer view of the foundational operation of racism within imperialist structures. This will be done by reading Mitchel in tandem with one of the most prominent and well-known racist propagandists for empire – Thomas Carlyle.

The reputation of Mitchel stands in stark contrast to that of his rival and leader of the Repeal Association Daniel O'Connell, whose trenchant opposition to the institution of slavery has had the

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<sup>1</sup> See *inter alia*, Owen McGee (2005: 21–2), Kelly (2006: 70), Bew (2016: 92), Maume (1999: 161).

effect of placing him on the right side of history. However, the contemporary opposition between these two ideologues of Irish independence was rooted not only in the contest over the (un)justifiability of slavery, but in a conflict between a brand of universalistic liberalism on the one hand and a nationalist particularism on the other. Indeed, leading historian of whiteness Theodore Allen has claimed that the Young Irelanders (and especially Mitchel) “were extremely white supremacist in their policies” ([1994] 2012: 324 fn. 10). Anti-racist scholar Noel Ignatiev has claimed that “Young Ireland adopted an ultra-American stance”, singling out Mitchel for openly advocating slavery ([1995] 2009: 38). Thus, for Ignatiev at least, the challenge to O’Connell by Young Ireland led to a situation in which “instead of the Irish love of liberty warming America, the winds of republican slavery blew back to Ireland” ([1995] 2009: 38).

However, in a reading more sensitive to the underlying, as opposed to symptomatic, cause of the Young Ireland / O’Connell breach, Oliver MacDonagh has pointed out that,

The great bifurcation [in O’Connell’s day] was between the universal, rational and atomistic strain which he represented, and the strain which emphasised the race rather than the person, the group rather than the individual, and instinct and emotion against reason... It is an oversimplification perhaps, but basically correct, to see the conflict between O’Connell and the more ardent element of Young Ireland as a conflict between these two forms of radicalism. (1992: 166)

Thus, in regard to the split between Young and Old Ireland (O’Connell’s faction), the issue becomes the nature of the underlying world-view that sustained and reinscribed these ideological conflicts onto the terrain of race, and how the mutability or otherwise of such a positioning can and should be read into contemporary discursive modes.

Consequently, this article will draw on the persistent interaction between history and race in the discursive practice of the Young Ireland movement in which Mitchel was a leading actor. Mitchel’s own prefacing of his personal story at the beginning of the *Jail Journal* by the history of the Irish nation embeds the articulation of subjectivity in historicity (Ryder 2007, 14-31). But that historical being of the nation is implicated in a racial characterisation of the constitution of the nation (Molloy 2022). The contradiction between the nation’s racial constitution and its putative realisation in the *telos* of the state plays out in a violent stasis that renders both subjective and national self-actualisation impossible. Implicated in Mitchel’s articulation of the nation are various themes that will be explored in this article. In parallel with Carlyle, Mitchel engages with the issue of race in articulating his vision of nationality. Bound up with this is a critique of political economy (the “cant” of the nineteenth century) and a hierarchisation of servitude. In Mitchel’s attempt to map slavery, he exposes his own interstitial position with relation to racialized power relations.

### **Carlyle and Young Ireland**

The importance of Carlyle for the Young Ireland movement can be seen in the prolonged relationship between leading figures of the Young Ireland movement (including *Nation* proprietor Charles Gavan Duffy) from their first meeting at Carlyle’s home in London in 1845.<sup>2</sup> In a passage that hints at a certain continuity as well as practical rupture between Young Ireland and Carlyle, Duffy was to say that,

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<sup>2</sup> For a perspective on the convergence of their views, see Morrow (2008).

They did not accept his opinions on almost any question, but his constant advocacy of veracity, integrity, and valour touched the most generous of their sympathies, and his theory that under the divine government of the world right and might are identical, as right infallibly became right in the end, was very welcome teaching to men struggling against enormous odds for what they believed to be intrinsic justice. (Duffy 1892: 4)

Mitchel himself can be seen to have developed a considerable admiration for the “hermit of Chelsea”. Already in 1838, some seven years before his full embrace of a propagandist’s existence, Mitchel wrote to his closest friend that

I spent two hours and a half regularly every morning in the college library reading Carlyle. The two remaining volumes [of Carlyle’s *Revolution in France*] are, as I anticipated, even superior to the first. It is the profoundest book, and the most eloquent and fascinating history, that English literature ever produced. The only thing that comes near it in importance (not in philosophy, nor in wisdom, nor in fancy, nor in liberality, nor in magnificence of language – what a long parenthesis) is [Gibbon’s] “Decline and Fall.” Such men as Carlyle are the salt of the earth. (Dillon 1888: 37)

Mitchel’s recognition of his own distance from the political thought of Carlyle can be clearly discerned in a review of Carlyle’s *Oliver Cromwell’s Life and Speeches; with elucidations*, which was published in the Young Ireland house journal *Nation* on 10 January 1846. In it, Mitchel hails Carlyle as, “The greatest writer, and profoundest philosopher, now living upon English soil, with eloquence, the like of which has not uttered itself in English speech since John Milton’s time” and “our venerated and beloved preceptor – at whose feet we have long studied” (*Nation*, 10 January 1846: 202). Nevertheless, Mitchel highlights Carlyle’s self-proclaimed ignorance of Irish history (“an indeterminate blackness, which the memory cannot willingly charge itself of!”) to which he caustically replies, “Oh *noster* Thomas! -- If thou wouldst only read books” (*Nation*, 10 January 1846: 202). However, the ambivalence of Mitchel’s attitude toward Carlyle is made even more clear at the close of the article at which point he opines,

Perhaps, the most remarkable thing about Carlyle’s writings is their power of suggesting thoughts that the writer never contemplated; fructifying after a sort he never expected; so that amongst his most ardent admirers and constant students there are, probably, few who agree with his peculiar views. The seed he has sown sometimes grows up to be a very strange plant in his eyes. (*Nation*, 10 January 1846: 202)

And, in a moment of self-reflection, he continues, “The writer of these lines believes he never would have been, as he is, a determined Repealer and Irish Nationalist, but for his study of the same great writer. Yet Carlyle considers Repeal an insane dream, and Ireland (God forgive him!) a nation of very poor creatures” (*Nation*, 10 January 1846: 202). Thus, for Mitchel, it is not the content or conclusions of Carlyle’s prose that command admiration, but its contrarian rhetoric and torrid analysis. The gap between Carlyle as stylist and critic of the age and the concrete opinions he promulgated is further highlighted by Duffy in his memoir of the Young Ireland movement: “Some of us had made the personal acquaintance of Thomas Carlyle, who taught us much he never designed to teach, but little or nothing of his special opinions, and was a constant subject of affectionate interest” (Duffy 1887: 31). Nor was the affection unrequited, for, in response to the

review of *Cromwell*, Carlyle was pleased to be disabused of his assumption that it was penned by Duffy, thinking it commendable that there was somebody else in Ireland (Mitchel) as estimable as his friend (Duffy 1887: 31-2).<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, Carlyle was well disposed towards Mitchel's review in spite, or perhaps, as a consequence, of the criticism levelled at him. In their first meeting, at Carlyle's home in London in April 1846, Mitchel reported that he "scarcely agreed with him in any single thing he said the whole night and [I] told him my mind occasionally broadly enough. His views on Irish questions are strangely and wickedly unjust, and his notions of might and right generally are altogether atheistical" (Dillon 1888: 111). This trenchant ambivalence, tempered by a strong sense of mutual respect, facilitated a continued relationship between the two men. Several months later, Carlyle was to be seen dining at Mitchel's house in Newry. He reflected on how, "Mitchel's wife, especially his mother (Presbyterian parson's widow of the best type), his frugally elegant small house and table, pleased me much, as did the man himself – a fine elastic-spirited young fellow..." (Dillon 1888: 127). In a letter to Duffy, dated 1 March 1847, Carlyle further states, "Mitchel I consider to be a noble, chivalrous fellow, full of talent and manful temper of every kind. In fact, I love him very much..." (Duffy 1892: 27). However, on both occasions of such deeply felt praise, Carlyle slips into a monitory tone, being "grieved to see [him] rushing on destruction palpable by attack on windmills" and lamenting Mitchel's being "enveloped in [...] poor delusions" (Duffy 1892: 27; Dillon 1888: 127). Thus, the evident ambivalence in Young Ireland's appreciation of Carlyle's prose, if not his policy, operated conversely too, with Carlyle sensing in the increasing radicalism of Mitchel as a course that could only lead to self- (and national) destruction. This mutuality of ambivalence becomes even more marked in Carlyle's and Mitchel's discussions on race as the one strains towards violent certainty in the reinscription of racial hierarchies and the other deploys a strident rhetoric that only serves to heighten the instability of Mitchel's own undecidable status, which, as we will see, is rooted in his nomadic subjectivity.

### **Mitchel and the hierarchy of servitude**

Mitchel states that he had never seen a slave until stopping at the Brazilian port of Pernambuco *en route* to Cape Town, some fifteenth months after his "transportation". He immediately qualifies this statement by saying he means a "merchantable slave, a slave of real money-value", as opposed to slaves "of no value", the "surplus slaves for export" he had seen in Ireland. In contrast to the Irish peasant,

These slaves in Brazil are fat and merry, obviously not overworked nor underfed, and it is a pleasure to see the lazy rogues lolling in their boats, sucking a piece of sugar-cane, and grinning and jabbering together, not knowing that there is such an atrocity as a *Palladium*<sup>4</sup> in the whole world. (Mitchel [1854] n.d.: 150)

He then goes on to favourably compare the treatment of slaves by the Portuguese, French and Spanish to that of the "Anglo-Saxon" Americans and British, who always "add insolence" to the exercise of their power over the slaves. But fundamentally for Mitchel the issue comes back to Ireland or, put differently, to himself:

<sup>3</sup> See also Dillon (1888: 106).

<sup>4</sup> By 'Palladium', Mitchel is here referring to the suspension of *Habeas Corpus* and trial by jury, which were considered necessary to protect the British Constitution.

Is it better, then, to be the slave of a merciful master and a just man, or to be serf to an Irish land-appropriator? God knoweth. I do not pretend that I altogether like the sight of these slaves. If I were a rich man I would prefer to have my wealth in any other kind of commodity or investment – except, of course, the credit funds. (Mitchel [1854] n.d.: 150-1)

Slavery is here weighed up in its particular manifestation and compared unfavourably to two types of slavery controlled by Anglo-Saxons (that of the actually existing slavery in the USA and the wage slavery of industrial capitalism). Furthermore, in speaking of his own desire (and perhaps that of Ireland itself),<sup>5</sup> Mitchel goes on to profess his distaste at even the sight of slavery. However, “credit funds” (and, by implication, the system reliant on them) are described not simply as an evil equalling slavery but one that indeed surpasses it. Thus, the hierarchy is established with the most debased system of credit funds at bottom, followed by “Anglo-Saxon” slavery, with the relatively benign Lusitanian system appearing as a more amenable alternative to either of the above. The credit system both in its abstract and concrete modes is described repeatedly in the *Jail Journal* as “blood-sucking” and antithetical to the real (i.e. human) production of value. The slave system is more human inasmuch as real beings are producing materials with little technological mediation but, as the following example shows, the southern European model supposedly allows life for the producers themselves. This is opposed to what, in Marxian terms, can be called the apparent dominance of dead labour in industrial capitalist production.<sup>6</sup>

A further illustration of Mitchel’s belief in the superiority of southern European slave institutions is provided some three weeks later, which explains the delay in the ship casting off for southern Africa. Mitchel has the “skipper” say, ““They don’t choose to risk the loss of their slaves coming off in this weather – damn their eyes! Why, English or American boatmen would have finished the job long ago.”” To which remark Mitchel silently reflects,

Indeed, the Brazilian people who come off to the ship take the impatience of these English coolly, and as a matter of course – they expect it always, and seem to regard headlong hurry as a national disease, pitying the sufferers, but taking good care not to be affected themselves. I do respect an indolent nation, a nation that will take its time, will take its holidays, and will not risk the loss of its slaves. Your English and Yankees go *too* much ahead – hardly give themselves time to sleep and eat, let alone praying – keep the social machinery working at too high a pressure (endangering the bursting of their boilers), and for ever out of breath – Do they call this *living*?. ((Mitchel [1854] n.d.: 154)

There are several classic Mitchelite tropes at work here. First is the notion of “national disease”, which, as we have seen, Mitchel is sure has taken hold of the English genius. Indeed this is abundantly clear to all except the English themselves who are preoccupied with their own narcissistic fantasies, or, in Mitchel’s word, “omphaloblesy”, which “is diagnostic of a very fatal disease – a thorough break up... of the Constitution” (Mitchel [1854] n.d.: 122). Given the descriptions of Pernambuco as essentially agrarian and a place where production is not mechanised,<sup>7</sup> the reference to the “social machinery” is apparently somewhat misleading. But it is

<sup>5</sup> Although he does later (while in New York), wish for himself a slave plantation. See Dillon (1888).

<sup>6</sup> See Marx ([1864] 1954), especially chapter ten.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Mitchel [1854] n.d.: 157.

clear that Mitchel is here making such an analogy with regard to the British and American systems of social organisation and production. The absence from the lives of those who exist in such societies of such basic necessities as eating and sleeping, as well as a fundamental expression of human spirituality (prayer), makes these societies an object of scorn. Indeed, Mitchel goes on to question whether such mechanised lives could be called lives at all. This of course is representative of Mitchel's distain for English ideas of superiority, either over nations or other eras, and there is a hint of contrariness when he declares his "respect" for "an indolent nation". To understand this more clearly it is necessary to look at the work of the man who greatly influenced the entire Young Ireland movement in spite of some radical divergence in their views.

### Carlyle's "Occasional Discourse"

Thomas Carlyle's infamous "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question" was first published in *Frazer's Magazine for Town and Country* in 1849. It was subsequently re-published in 1853 with the more provocative title "Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question." Although it is unclear, even highly improbable, that John Mitchel had access to this text, it is worth noting the similar rhetoric and style of argumentation. The "Occasional Discourse" begins, unlike Mitchel's *Jail Journal*, with an assertion of unsure providence, imputing the possible authorship of the article to one Dr. Phelim M'Quirk, who has now "absconded". It was written "seemingly above a year back" and was submitted to the magazine by M'Quirk's landlady "at a cheap market rate" (Carlyle 1849: 670), who apparently wished to recoup some of her losses following the disappearance of her former tenant. The doctrines therein espoused are suspected by the editors as being "in a minority of one" and argued "by logic and by grapeshot" (Carlyle 1849: 670).<sup>8</sup> The article itself takes the form of an address to those who propose an "Association of Associations, the UNIVERSAL ABOLITION-OF-PAIN-ASSOCIATION", which seems to be a reference to the utilitarian impulse that was gaining currency at the time. This may also refer to Daniel O'Connell's attempt to link repeal of the Union to the emancipation of slaves in the USA. On the treatment of the slaves, indeed their happiness, Carlyle states that, "the negroes are all very happy and doing well...[s]itting yonder, with their beautiful muzzles up to the ears in pumpkins, imbibing sweet pulps and juices..." (Carlyle 1849: 670-671). This passage can be seen to partake in the same process of racial objectification that Mitchel employs in the passage above (Mitchel [1854] n.d.: 150). Their views begin to diverge however when it comes to the question of labour. Carlyle deplors the (supposed) fact that "a black man, by working half an hour a day (such is the calculation), can supply himself, by aid of sun and soil, with as much pumpkin as will suffice..." (Carlyle 1849: 672). Whereas for Mitchel,

Long life, then, to the subjects of the emperor [of Brazil], – seeing they insist upon living all their lives: long and easy: *long may they reap without need of sowing*: - may the forest yield them store of plantain and spontaneous cassava-bread – may their sugar canes drop abundant sweetness, and boundless prairies rear them countless herds! – So shall holidays abound, and the Virgin and all saints be duly honoured. (Mitchel [1854] n.d.: 154)

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, Carlyle also accuses Mitchel's opinions in 1847 of 'leading direct to revolt and grapeshot' and Mitchel did indeed 'disappear' more than a year previously (Duffy 1892: 27). In addition to this Mitchel's brother had written to Carlyle seeking his aid in both pecuniary terms and influence.

In spite of Mitchel's not infrequent praise of "honest labour",<sup>9</sup> his attitude clearly differs from that of Carlyle in relation to the desirable mode of existence in the western hemisphere. This is coupled with a reference to Catholicity of the inhabitants, which indicates a great rift between them and the Protestant Anglo-Saxons. There is, however, a common thread that links the two, *viz.* a critique of the "cash nexus" theorised by the "dismal science" of political economy (Carlyle 1849: 672).<sup>10</sup>

This critique can be seen to play out in the ambiguities and ambivalences that characterise their respective opinions on the relationship of the condition of the Irish peasant to that of the African slave. For Mitchel (as we have seen (Mitchel [1854] n.d.: 150)) there exists an uncertainty as to whether it would be better to live the life of an Irish peasant or a Brazilian slave. Carlyle, on the other hand, takes this comparison even further by suggesting that were emancipation to be completed it would lead to "a black Ireland – "free," indeed, but an Ireland, and black! The world may yet see prodigies, and reality be stranger than a nightmare dream" (Carlyle 1849: 672). In short, Ireland was the example to be avoided. The black population had to be compelled to work, lest they would become reliant on a single crop (such as the potato) and reach the level of destitution to which the Irish had fallen once that crop was wiped out. This meant regulation of the population as well as the economy (Carlyle 1849: 672). Carlyle's critique is essentially levelled at the untrammelled domination by the laws of supply and demand, promulgated by those same abolitionists who campaigned against slavery.<sup>11</sup> Mitchel too is dismissive of the so-called philanthropy of British industrialists, arguing that the illegalisation of the slave trade had merely served as an excuse to cut off supply of labour to non-British colonies whilst at the same time allowing the British to search any vessel they wished under the excuse of uncovering illicit slave trading:

They have just two motives in it: one is to cut off the supply of labour from the sugar-growers of Brazil and Cuba, or make it so dear to them that they cannot compete with the planters of Jamaica and Barbadoes [sic]; and the other is to maintain British "naval supremacy" and the piratical claim of a right to search ships, and accustom the eyes of all who sail the seas to the sight of the English flag domineering over everything it meets, like a bully, as it is. (Mitchel, n.d. [1854]: 155)

## Nomadism and Empire

The rise of the contract, as opposed to the organic ties to regulate relations between rulers and ruled, are played out by Carlyle through a rehearsal of (contractarian) Lockean and (organicist) Burkean conceptions of sociality and economy.

You are not "slaves" now; nor do I wish if it can be avoided, to see you slaves again; but decidedly you will have to be servants to those that are born *wiser* than you, that are born lords of you – servants to the whites, if they *are* (as what mortal can doubt they are?) born wiser than you. That you may depend on it, my obscure black friends, is and always was the law of the world, for you and all men [...] Heaven's laws are not repealable by earth, however earth may try and it has been trying hard, in some directions of late! [...] And if "slave" mean essentially "servant hired for life," or by a contract of long continuance, and

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<sup>9</sup> E.g. JJ: 79.

<sup>10</sup> See also Lloyd (2011: 19-48).

<sup>11</sup> For more on the influence of Carlyle's critique of *laissez-faire* capitalism on Mitchel, see Huggins (2012).

not easily dissoluble – I ask, Whether in all human beings, the “contract of long continuance” is not precisely the contract to be desired, were the right terms once found for it? Servant hired for life, were the right terms once found, which I do not pretend they are, seems to me much preferable to servants hired for the month, or by contract dissoluble in a day. An ill-situated servant, that; – servant grown to be *nomadic*; between whom and his master a good relation *cannot* easily spring up. (Carlyle 1849: 676-7)

Here Carlyle is expounding on some typical racist themes concerning the supposed “naturalness” of slavery due to characteristics derived from epidermal schemata and the divine providence of such hierarchies. The bourgeois contract that was supposed to be the liberal basis for society is here rejected in favour of an openly hierarchical relationship based on rootedness and affective ties. The nomadism which uproots and destabilises societal bonds is epitomised not only by the African slave in the West Indies but also the Irish immigrant in Britain. Both have the capacity to disturb the illusion of homogeneity and social harmony so craved in a time of flux and rapid social change. This production of nomads is also however a direct result of the dismal science itself and the universalisation of the market system that Carlyle so much abhors. This same nomadism is explored further in Carlyle’s work on Chartism in which he devotes a chapter to “The Finest Peasantry in the World” (Carlyle 1840). There, the immigrant Irish are made to be literally infective of the English social body: “We have quarantines against pestilence; but there is no pestilence like that; and against it what quarantine is possible” (Carlyle 1840: 29).<sup>12</sup>

In his *Jail Journal*, John Mitchel can be seen to figure as the Carlylean nomad *par excellence*. Driven from Ireland he is shunted around the world: unable to breathe in Bermuda, driven off course to Brazil, rejected from the Cape, on to Van Diemen’s Land, before finally arriving in America. Throughout his maritime captivity he is under constant surveillance, officers are forbidden to speak with him on pain of court martial, and he is separated from the other convicts lest mutiny arise. He is the infected body that threatens the social order, and one who refuses a life-long contract with servitude. This positioning of Mitchel is a complex one as he both consciously partakes in similar discourses of eternal laws as well as criticism of *laissez-faire* capitalism, and yet he is a product of that same system. Mitchel sees his position in the world as contiguous with the subjection of Ireland to English laws and political economy. Unlike Carlyle, Mitchel is (literally) a prisoner of the system which he attempts to overcome through political action and the literal/literary pursuit of national selfhood. Whereas Carlyle knows that the force of empire lends credence to his doctrine, Mitchel relies simply on the rhetorical force borrowed from Carlyle to create a discourse of truth that has as yet an unrealised material basis (Morash 1995: 207-18). As Charles Gavan Duffy stated upon meeting Carlyle for the first time, “his theory that under the divine government of the world right and might are identical, as right infallibly became might in the end, was very welcome teaching to men struggling against enormous odds for what they believed to be intrinsic justice” (Duffy 1892: 4). The difference being, of course, that Carlyle believed British power to be a product of its righteousness, and Young Ireland believed that the righteousness of their cause would put an end to British power. Yet the same framework is employed to reach these radically different ends.

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<sup>12</sup> See also Swift (2001); Mackenzie (1997)

## Fitness for Freedom

This can also be seen in the contrasting positions of Mitchel and Carlyle with regard to the possibility of independence for the former slaves. In spite of Carlyle's enthusiasm for the brutal suppression of the Morant Bay rebellion in Jamaica in the 1860s and his pro-imperialist position more generally, he did not nevertheless entertain illusions of the eternity of colonial rule:

Up to this time it is the Saxon British mainly; they hitherto have cultivated with some manfulness; and when a manfuller class of cultivators, stronger, worthier to have such land, abler to bring fruit from it, shall make their appearance, they, doubt it not, by fortune of war, and other confused negotiation and vicissitude, will be declared by Nature and Fact to be the worthier, and will become proprietors, perhaps, also, only for a time. That is the law, I take it, ultimate, supreme, for all lands, in all countries under this sky. (Carlyle 1849: 674)

The same sentiment is echoed by Mitchel, who, upon hearing of revolutionary uprisings in Brazil by slaves and former slaves, stated, "I see no great harm in this: the moment the black and brown people are able, they will have a clear right to exchange positions with the Portuguese race; – but perhaps, not till then" (Mitchel [1854] n.d.: 154-5). The obvious caveat in this rendering of his opinion is "*the moment*" they are able. This is important, as Carlyle clearly did not consider anybody "manfuller" than the British. Mitchel's position forces him to address the possibility, if not the necessity of this being the case, especially regarding Ireland. But there is a lingering doubt, one that seems to hinge on the "perhaps", which is also echoed in Carlyle's text. It is the deferred realisation of this potential freedom that is the issue. Deferred until it is clear they are able to govern themselves. But clear to whom? To themselves or their masters? Mitchel's ambiguity is rooted in an inability to judge precisely where Ireland is politically. He has been in exile for almost a year and a half with scant correspondence from home. His ambiguity in relation to Brazil still partakes in the "eternal law" of the rise and fall of nations, but it also shows his anxiety that the Irish might not be free until it is *clear* that they are able to rule themselves. This sentiment is further reinforced by his absolute insistence that,

[i]t is nothing but a pitiful excuse for desertion of the cause to cry out now, "These people do not wish for freedom, are not worthy of freedom; they would not rise at Ballinagarry [sic]." I affirm that my countrymen are not cowards, and do not love their chains; and, I do hope, captive and exile as I am, to see some day an opportunity given them to prove the same [...] But the history of Ireland is not over yet. (Mitchel [1854] n.d.: 144-5)

So, in a sense, the Irish still need to prove that they are able for freedom, that they do not love their chains; Mitchel's detached ambivalence with regard to Brazil vanishes when it comes to Ireland. For the Brazilians proof is necessary that they are ready for freedom, whereas for the Irish, "Defeat is not necessarily wrong" (Mitchel [1854] n.d.: 20). This can in part to be put down to the fact that Mitchel refused to ask permission to go ashore and so could not engage with any of the inhabitants there; but that refusal itself is indicative not simply of his relationship to the British authorities, but also of his interstitial position with regard to social and racial hierarchies.

Turing back to the problem of the Irish situation in relation to Mitchel's hierarchy of slavery as highlighted above, we can see by reading Carlyle in parallel with Mitchel that the Irish

condition is both worse and it is better. The Irish, according to Carlyle were free but nevertheless had “sunk from decent manhood to squalid apehood” (Carlyle 1840: 28). This “apehood” of the Irish has been attained in the context of purely formal freedom, “its act-of-parliament ‘freedom’” (Carlyle 1849: 672), and brings to mind the opposition between formal and actual freedom that Marx developed in his *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* in the 1840s ([1843] 1992). Mitchel’s retreat from the O’Connellite liberalism of the early 1840s is rooted in his analysis of the economic and political governance of Ireland by the British. The clearing of the land in accordance with the doctrines of political economy (Nally 2008: 714-41), coupled with the suspension of *habeas corpus*, packed juries, etc. led him to conclude that no constitution existed in Ireland, and none would long exist in England. So, for him, there was an intrinsic link between the political and the economic; Mitchel, unlike Carlyle (or Marx), could not criticise the purely formal freedom of liberalism because, for him, such formal freedom simply did not exist in the Irish context. Two effects can be discerned in Mitchel’s thinking from this development. First, the belief that political and economic matters were inextricably bound together; and second, that notions of liberal citizenship were still to be prized. Thus, he is able to identify (often somewhat bluntly) the economic impulse behind British imperial expansion, as well as remain relatively resistant to more thoroughgoing critiques of capitalist (or mercantilist) production more generally. In spite of his (essentially liberal) sympathy with what Thomas Davis called “Conservative Republicanism”, Mitchel nevertheless remained hostile to attempts to universalise such political concepts.

## Conclusion

Mitchel’s view of the Irish situation both reinforces and undermines his hierarchy of servitude. The racial aspect is, for Mitchel, incidental to the social, economic and political structure of a certain society in a given moment. That the Irish are indeed racialized subjects is beyond doubt: both in *The Nation* newspaper and throughout the *Jail Journal*, the Irish are presented as having essential characteristics that are different from the English but partake in more generally Celtic stereotypes. The hierarchy Mitchel outlines, however, concerns not simply the existence of races and their place in a socio-economic structure but concerns more widely their relationship to freedom. Liberty and the capacity for liberty structure the discursive establishment of racial hierarchy. The position of the Irish therefore signifies both slavery as an evil perpetuated by political and economic structures but also the possibility (even necessity) of the transformation of those same structures. Thus, Ireland figures as a confirmation of the existence of racial hierarchy but also of the possibility of the overcoming of that same hierarchy and, with it, the destabilisation of racial categories themselves. This is due to the belief that a form of political or economic social organisation that rests on the racial characteristics imputed to a section (or all) of a given population determine that society’s structure. Through the partial exclusion of Ireland from the hierarchy of servitude Mitchel both confirms and denies the immutability of race. The interpellation of the Irish into a political and economic system that is economically reliant on what Mitchel saw as the worst form of servitude (the rules of political economy), coupled with the attribution of distinctive racial characteristics to them, forms the basis of Mitchel’s analysis.

If he adhered to a strictly essentialised conception of race, Mitchel could not allow for the possibility of freedom and independence for “the black and brown people” of Brazil. To be a slave implies *ipso facto* inferiority to the slave master. That the Irish are technically not slaves (due to their status as part of the United Kingdom), yet are named as such repeatedly by Mitchel, feeds

into the notion of an irremediable otherness. This is the Aristotelian logic of “reciprocal exclusivity”, as pointed out by Frantz Fanon (1963: 39). Two contrary outcomes can be traced by following this logic. The first is the realisation of a radical democratic nationalism, the “red republicanism” that Mitchel eventually (but always ambivalently) endorses. The nation plays a central role in this precise articulation as it undergirds the body politic itself and is the substratum of the very possibility of a politics of liberty. And, building on a monadology of nationhood, it creates the possibility of infinite difference within the nation; this difference can be described, following Benedict Anderson (1998), as the unbounded seriality of universality through the concept of nationality. This nationalistic underpinning however dovetails into the second possibility, the possibility that is the focus of Fanon’s critique of the emergent nation-states in the mid-twentieth century. For, according to Fanon, there is a risk that the revolutionary anti-colonial movements will accept the logic of their oppressors, viz. the Aristotelian logic of exclusivity. This can lead to the oppressed becoming the oppressor, the inversion of content at the expense of a change in form; the unfree become free, yet slavery persists. Thus, the critique of the universal rule of capital becomes a critique of universality itself, leading Mitchel to retreat into a bounded particularism; he did, after all, refuse even to leave the boat whilst docked at Pernambuco.

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