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Tears and Blood: Lady Wilde and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism

Marjorie Howes

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The mid-nineteenth-century movement known as Young Ireland marked the emergence of an Irish nationalism that was more ethnic and cultural than civic and constitutional. Although the movement fizzled in the abortive rising of 1848, its cultural and political legacies were extensive. The poetry of Young Ireland was arguably the most popular body of literature in Ireland for the rest of the century (Morash, ed. 30), and Young Ireland's nationalism played a key role in structuring later movements. Critics such as David Lloyd and Sear Ryder have sketched out its major related features: Young Ireland was overwhelmingly bourgeois, organized around the production of identity, and heavily gendered, equating true nationalist subjectivity with masculinity.¹ These general features, far from rendering Young Ireland ideologically simple or monologic, determined the shape of its complexities and contradictions. The purpose of this essay is to examine one particular writer's engagement with them and in so doing to illuminate some aspects of Young Ireland's cultural nationalism that have been previously neglected by critics.

Young Ireland was associated with a group of figures that included Thomas Davis, Thomas Dillon, Charles Gavan Duffy, William Smith O'Brien, James Clarence Mangan, Lady Wilde and several other women poets. It originated in and emerged out of Daniel O'Connell's Repeal Association. Deliverer of Catholic Emancipation and campaigner for repeal of the Union between Great Britain and Ireland, O'Connell dominated, and indeed could be said to

have invented, popular nationalist politics during the 1820s, 30s and early 40s in Ireland. His primary method was a peaceful, pragmatic constitutionalism. When *The Nation* began publication in 1842, its leading minds were part of O'Connell's movement. Various disagreements developed, mainly over the question of violence and the issue of the nondenominational colleges the British government proposed to set up in Ireland. Young Ireland was more idealistic, more influenced by German romanticism, less shaped by Irish Catholicism, and tended to conceptualize the Irish nation in cultural rather than constitutional terms. Its members were more willing to advocate physical force openly and more hospitable to the "godless colleges" than O'Connell. In 1846 these tensions led to a split between Old and Young Ireland.²

Wilde was born Jane Elgee in 1821, to a conservative, middle-class, Protestant family in Wexford. She married William Wilde in 1851 and became Lady Wilde when he was knighted in 1864. As a young woman, she was part of the second generation of nationalist poets that rose to prominence in the late 1840s, after Thomas Davis's death in 1845. She published poetry and prose in *The Nation* under the pen name Speranza and was noted among her contemporaries as one of Young Ireland's most violent, emotional and inflammatory writers.³ She published *Poems by Speranza* in 1864 and wrote a number of other essays and books during her life.⁴ After the failure of the 1848 revolution, both she and William became disillusioned with Irish nationalism; later she concentrated increasingly on other literary projects and on her aspirations to run a literary salon. In the late nineteenth century, she was generally acknowledged as an important, if eccentric, figure in the Dublin literary and social scene. When her son, Oscar Wilde, toured the United States in 1882, headlines in New York's *Irish Nation* lamented, "Speranza's Son . . . Phrasing about Beauty while a Hideous Tyranny Overshadows His Native Land" (Ellmann 195). Ten years later, when W. B. Yeats wanted to praise the fiery eloquence of Maud Gonne's political speeches, he dubbed her "the new Speranza" (61).

Like many nineteenth-century women writers of sentimental fiction or parlor poetry, Wilde was considerably more visible to her contemporaries than she was to later cultural critics. Although her contributions to *The Nation* were nearly as popular as those of Davis, its most charismatic writer (Davis 85), she has been largely neglected by studies of Irish cultural nationalism as well. To the extent that she has entered literary history, Wilde has done so primarily as a figure defined by her gendered "excesses" — emotional, political, and stylistic.⁵ These excesses are usually characterized as a surfeit of sentimentalizing emotion and an extravagant interest in violence, bloodshed and death: a constant sense that the history of Ireland was, as she wrote in a pamphlet on "The American Irish," "an endless martyrology written in tears and blood" (1). This essay will argue that Wilde's preoccupation with the dramatic shedding of these fluids reveals her particular engagements with the major structures and contradictions that distinguished Young Ireland from Old. In a letter to his constituents, O'Connell wrote: "My plan is peaceable, legal, constitutional; it is part of that general scheme by which I incessantly contemplate the regeneration of Ireland, and her restoration to national dignity from her present provincial degradation, without a crime, without an offense, without a tear, and, above

all, without the possibility of shedding one drop of human blood" (Cusack 2: 414-5). In Wilde's works, Young Ireland's tenuous relation to the Irish masses, whom the movement both idealized and distrusted, its interest in and anxieties about subject constitution, and the masculinity of its ostensibly transcendent nationalist subject, are negotiated and structured through representations of tears and blood.

Tears

Wilde's nationalist poems are awash with tears — the tears of men, women and children; the tears of poets, patriots and peasants; the tears of sufferers, spectators and gods. These tears structure an important aspect of Young Ireland's construction of its project as subject constitution. David Lloyd's *Nationalism and Minor Literature* offers the most ground-breaking and insightful examination of this project. While Lloyd's work focuses mainly on issues of identity and unity in the work of James Clarence Mangan — unity as homogeneity between the individual and the nation, identity as the consistency of the subject over time — another way to think about subject constitution is as the production and organization of affect. Of course, most nationalisms are primarily "about" feeling; the question for the critic is how particular nationalisms conceptualize and organize "feeling." In most accounts of nationalism, its engagement with the question of feeling takes the form of an erotics.⁶ This assumption tends to produce two related narratives of the relationship between gender and nationalism, both focusing on the nationalist practice of representing the nation as a woman. In the first, the nation-as-woman is an eroticized lover, and her patriots worship her with an ecstatic heterosexual devotion. In the second, the nation is figured as an idealized mother whose purity secures her sons' faithfulness and mediates their potentially dangerous homosocial attachments to each other (Innes; Cullingford; Valente; Ryder). The distinction between these narratives is one of degree and emphasis rather than kind; both involve suppressing homosexual desire between men and presenting heterosexual love as the appropriate model of national affect. Such narratives do form an important part of Young Ireland's cultural production, but they do not exhaust the functions of gender in nationalist writing, nor do they encompass all the ways in which cultural nationalism engaged with the question of national feeling. In addition, women writers often have an especially problematic relationship to such iconography.⁷ While these representational patterns are not wholly absent from Wilde's work, they do not structure it in a significant way. Young Ireland also employed a different set of tropes for conceptualizing and organizing national feeling, one that was arguably more congenial to women writers. Through representations of tears, her poetry illustrates this alternative conception of cultural nationalism as subject constitution and that project's relation to gender and class boundaries.

While O'Connell wanted to achieve his political goals without shedding blood or tears, he was no less sentimental than Young Ireland; his nationalism simply imagined a different relation between nationality and feeling. O'Connell's movement relied upon a combination of feeling and reason.⁸ His nation-

alism was largely a modernizing, Enlightenment project, and several critics have argued that disciplined, mass, constitutional politics in the British isles originated with his movement (Davis 2; Eagleton, *Heathcliff* 274). He emphasized the calm rationality of his own political arguments — “I am cool, and quiet, and deliberate; no bursts of passion sway my soul” (Cusack 2: 373) — and exhorted his followers to legal, orderly agitation. On the other hand, O’Connell also employed, and was shaped by, the nineteenth-century discourses of sentimentalism and melodrama. His speeches, especially at the “monster meetings” of the 1840s, were often calculated to arouse the passions of his audiences, and did so quite effectively. Even his written effusions, in a letter to his followers, on the death of Thomas Davis aspired to the status of a spontaneous, unmediated outpouring of feeling: “I can write no more — my tears blind me.”⁹ The main difference between O’Connell and Young Ireland, then, was that for O’Connell, although nationalism involved feeling, feeling was not the quintessential mark of national subjectivity. This was because O’Connell had little investment in Irish culture or identity as bases for political action or arrangements; his Irish nationalism was not primarily a project of subject constitution. He viewed the decline of the Irish language with equanimity, and, as Oliver MacDonagh observes, he would have found such concepts as “anglicization” or “mental colonialism” incomprehensible (*Emancipist* 137). For O’Connell, nationality was a matter of location rather than feeling. “The Irish people” simply meant all the inhabitants of Ireland, and the power and legitimacy of his movement rested on its mass character, rather than on its “Irish” character. He liked to intone, “I speak the voice of seven millions” (Cusack 1: 517).

For Young Ireland, speaking the voice of the Irish was more complicated. Many critics have remarked on the doubleness that characterizes discourses of the nation; these discourses assert that the nation already exists, and at the same time they seek to create it.¹⁰ This doubleness assumed a particularly virulent form for Young Ireland. On one hand, an anticolonial nationalism has to work harder to illustrate the preexistence of the nation than a statist nationalism, and in the case of Ireland, sectarian division provided glaring evidence that a unified nation did not already exist. On the other hand, Young Ireland arose under circumstances that made the task of a didactic, transformative nationalist project particularly difficult, so the possibilities for creating the nation appeared slim as well.¹¹ For Young Ireland, “the Irish people” was a problematic, paradoxical entity, made up of subjects who were already, ineradicably constituted as national yet who, at the same time, stood in dire need of such constitution.

Wilde’s representations of tears encapsulate this ambiguity. In some instances, tears are the mark of a suffering and passive populace that lacks national consciousness or feeling (these two being virtually equivalent for romantic nationalism). Such tears indicate the masses’ inadequate response to their own conditions of oppression, conditions that cry out for political action. One poem asks, “But can we only weep, when above us lour / The death-bearing wings of the angels of power” (*Poems* 18). Another criticizes the “abject tears, and prayers submissive” (34) of the people who refuse to rise. In “Who Will Show Us Any Good?” tears literally blind the masses to their true identity and interests: “Suffering Ireland! Martyr-Nation! / Blind with tears thick as

mountain mist; / Can none amidst all the new generation / Change them to glory[?]" (59). Tears as the sign of colonial abjection are often gendered feminine; the same poem describes a passive Ireland as the "Saddest of mothers" (60). Such representations fit smoothly into the main stream of literature produced by other Young Irelanders such as Davis or Mangan. Another *Nation* poet put it this way: "Serf! With thy fetters o'erladen, / Why crouch you in dastardly woe? / Why weep o'er thy chains like a maiden, / Nor strike for thy manhood a blow?" (*Spirit* 17). Like Wilde, "Mary" (Ellen Downing) and "Eva" (Mary Eva Kelly) of *The Nation* also exhorted their men to nationalist fortitude by denigrating a weak and tearful femininity as the alternative; as Ryder has observed, their poetry "differs little from that of their male colleagues in its reproduction of bourgeois nationalist gender relations — the difference being that it often articulates such relations from a woman's point-of-view" (219).

Not all Irish woe was dastardly; Young Ireland's writers frequently invoked the tears of the suffering to describe the brutalities of English rule and the horrors of the Great Famine of the 1840s. Mary Eva Kelly's "A Scene for Ireland" describes a starving mother's inability to feed her baby: "She has no food to give it now / Save those hot tears outgushing" (Morash, ed. 61). But such a literature of Irish misery still equated weeping with helplessness, and thus lent itself to appropriation by a version of imperial sentimentality, exemplified by writers such as Ernest Renan and Matthew Arnold, that constructed the Irish as sensitive, romantic, and politically inept. Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies* illustrates the potential ease of such appropriations. Moore's work expressed enough nationalist sentiment to get him condemned by the conservative English press and quoted religiously by O'Connell. But Moore was a liberal unionist, and his poems were immensely popular in the drawing rooms of England several decades before they became household words in Ireland. Although he sometimes took up a nationalist call to armed resistance, at other times Moore portrayed the Irish as the nation of the smile and the tear. In this formulation, the purpose of Irish cultural production was to express the suffering of the Irish with such lyrical poignancy that "Thy masters themselves, as they rivet thy chains, / Shall pause at the song of their captive, and weep" (*Poetical Works* 237). This image perfectly captures the classic mode and dynamics of imperial sentimentality, in which the empire nostalgically cathects that which it is in the process of destroying.

Wilde's works attempt to navigate between the nationalist Scylla of tears that indicate contemptible helplessness and the imperial Charybdis of tears that indicate picturesque helplessness by transferring the imperative of nationalist subject constitution and action to the spectator or reader. Such a transfer is implicit in Young Ireland's laments for Irish suffering and in its privileging of popular forms like the ballad. It also accords with Young Ireland's project, discernible in a number of its intellectual structures, to transform the history of Irish suffering, national and individual, into a source of and blueprint for a gloriously victorious future. But Wilde theorized, more thoroughly than many of her contemporaries, the processes and mechanisms through which tears undergo this transformation. In her works tears constitute a spectacle of suffering capable of generating national feeling and spurring nationalist action; they also

signify that a viewer is reacting properly to that spectacle. As this description suggests, such representations of weeping are generically related to the late-eighteenth-century discourses of sensibility and their sentimental Victorian descendants, though they do not coincide completely with either. Terms like sensibility and sentimentality are notoriously hard to define; their political implications are even more slippery. Sensibility could be organized around individualistic, democratic, and liberal principles, or it could be mobilized in the service of “natural” social and political hierarchies (Jones; Johnson; Vincent-Buffault). The politics of sentimentality are similarly uncertain and in contention.¹² The various formulations of these discourses shared a conviction of the immediately political significance of feeling and a concomitant conception of feeling as the basis of the social bond. Thus when Edmund Burke attacked the French Revolution, the excesses of which are widely supposed to have irrevocably tainted the vocabulary of sensibility after the 1790s, he did it by claiming sensibility’s terms as his own without acknowledging them, lamenting the elimination of natural sentiments and affections as the basis for a hierarchical and harmonious social order (see Johnson, especially 1-19).

Burke, Wilde, and various Victorian sentimentalists shared a double interest in feeling as a spectacle to be observed and as the response that a particular kind of spectacle should produce in the ethically and politically enlightened observer. The tears of the suffering object and the tears of the observing subject go together; the former produce the latter. Wilde’s often millenarian vocabulary tended to interchange an earthly observer with a heavenly one. One poem urges, “Let us lift our streaming eyes / To God’s throne above the skies, / He will hear our anguish cries” (17). In “The Voice of the Poor,” the speaker claims: “If the angels ever hearken, downward bending, / They are weeping, we are sure, / At the litanies of human groans ascending / From the crushed hearts of the poor” (14). Similarly, “Ruins” predicts that the weeping of the poor will “Start the angels on their thrones” (40). If God and the angels could be trusted to respond with the appropriate sympathetic tears to the weeping of the oppressed, however, members of the Protestant Ascendancy could not. “The Faithless Shepherds” (45-7) castigates the landed aristocracy for its cruel indifference to the plight of the poor during the famine by asserting in a manner that resembles contemporary descriptions of Famine victims that the Ascendancy are the walking dead: “Dead! — Dead! Ye are dead while ye live; / Ye’ve a name that ye live — but are dead.” This ethico-political (or national) death-in-life manifests itself as an absence of feeling — “For the heart in each bosom is cold / As the ice on a frozen sea” — and of sympathetic tears: “With your cold eyes unwet by a tear, / For your Country laid low on your bier.” The absence of national feeling indicates the corruption of the current regime and presages its violent demise, just as the presence of such feeling in heaven suggests that the nationalist revolution is divinely directed or sanctioned.

“The Brothers,” subtitled, “A scene from ’98” (7-9), presents a spectacle — an execution — and revolves around its potential ability to generate national feeling, measured in tears, and the nationalist action such tears should also produce. Insofar as it is cast as an exemplary or paradigmatic spectacle, the kind

of scene supremely suited to produce the desired sentiments, we might also think of the poem as Wilde's equivalent to Burke's famous description of Marie Antoinette in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. The prisoners of Wilde's poem, "two noble youths," are "in pride of life and manhood's beauty," bearing their fate with exemplary heroism. Christlike, they are "Pale martyrs" who die for the sake of their fellow Irish. The poem emphasizes its narrative of events as a national spectacle whose significance lies primarily in its effect on its audience. Before introducing the brothers, the first stanza describes the "pale and anxious crowd" that witnesses the execution and positions the reader among its members: "You can see them through the gloom." The second stanza also insists on the importance of the crowd, for whom the emotional effect of the spectacle is measured in tears: "All eyes an earnest watch on them are keeping, / Some, sobbing, turn away, / And the strongest men can hardly see for weeping, / So noble and so loved were they." The syntax equates watching and weeping, spectatorship and sympathy: "There is silence in the midnight — eyes are keeping / Troubled watch till forth the jury come; / There is silence in the midnight — eyes are weeping— / 'Guilty!' is the fatal uttered doom." The crowd's lamentations are an index to their level of feeling, but tears alone are not enough: true national feeling must express itself in action. As in Wilde's other representations of weeping as the mark of colonial abjection, tears that do not generate politically conscious resistance are feminizing: "Oh! the rudest heart might tremble at such a sorrow, / The rudest cheek might blanch at such a scene: / Twice the judge essayed to speak the word — to-morrow— / Twice faltered, as a woman he had been." The judge is moved, but the inadequacy of his feelings, which manifests itself as feminine weakness, is structural as well as personal, springing from his position as the imperial official presiding over the brothers' conviction and execution.

Wilde's poem thus explicitly rejects, in conventionally gendered terms, the imperial sentimentality that figures captors weeping over the chains of their victims as a positive conception of national feeling or identity. The penultimate stanza juxtaposes the crowd's passive weeping with the active intervention imagined by the narrator, a more advanced nationalist who sounds oddly like Burke:

Yet none spring forth their bonds to sever
 Ah! methinks, had I been there,
 I'd have dared a thousand deaths ere ever
 The sword should touch their hair.
 It falls! — there is a shriek of lamentation
 From the weeping crowd around;
 They're stilled — the noblest hearts within the nation—
 The noblest heads lie bleeding on the ground.

The crowd's tears cannot prevent the spilling of the heroes' blood. The last stanza places the spectacle in the distant past for the first time in the poem. At the same time, it figures the execution scene as a kind of perpetual present,

embodied in the heads that refuse to decay and in the continued appeal of the spectacle to nationalist sensibilities:

Years have passed since that fatal scene of dying,
 Yet, lifelike to this day,
 In their coffins still those severed heads are lying,
 Kept by angels from decay.
 Oh! they preach to us, those still and pallid features—
 Those pale lips yet implore us, from their graves,
 To strive for our birthright as God's creatures,
 Or die, if we can but live as slaves.

Having transferred the burden of reacting properly to the scene from the weeping but passive crowd to the narrator, the poem then transfers this burden to its readers. The poem itself, as well as the events it features, exists as a permanent national spectacle, waiting for the reader in whom it will inspire sentiments and actions like the narrator's. Wilde locates the power to constitute the subject of Irish nationalism simultaneously in the timeless spectacle, which should produce it automatically in anyone, and in the contingencies of the poem's particular readership.

Weeping is thus a figure for the doubleness of the nation; it can signify either the ineradicable plenitude and force of the spirit of the nation, or their devastating absence. As a way of structuring Young Ireland's anxieties about cultural nationalism as subject constitution — defined as the production and organization of feeling — this ambiguity generates a problematic that differs substantially from the problematics produced by an erotics of nationalism. The erotics of nationalism raises the threat of homosexual (as opposed to homosocial) bonds between men; the possibility that the patriot will choose his wife over her sexual rival, the nation; and the specter of the woman-as-nation whose sexual betrayal or rape is equivalent to colonial conquest. The tearful strand of nationalism exemplified in Wilde's work, however, grapples with the danger that the signs of national feeling are ambiguous, their meanings contingent on who displays them. Wilde's work manages this ambiguity by constructing taxonomies of feeling based on gender and class distinctions. Thus Young Ireland's representations of tears also occupy the intersection between the movement's drive towards a transcendent national unity and its need to maintain the divisions that unity supposedly transcended.

Men and Women; Leaders and Peoples

Wilde's work is structured by two hierarchies of tears: the tears of men over the tears of women, and the tears of patriot leaders over the tears of the masses. While O'Connell's movement was largely for and populated by men, he was well aware of the potential intersections between feminine sentimentality and political reform. He was passionately opposed to slavery and once claimed that Thomas Moore's *Captain Rock* was to the struggle for Catholic emancipation

what *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was to the abolition of slavery (MacDonagh, *Emancip-ist* 17). Maurice R. O'Connell has argued that the logic of Young Ireland's romantic cultural nationalism, which emphasized the uniqueness of peoples, militated against its sharing O'Connell's Enlightenment, universalist concern with American slavery and other instances of oppression outside Ireland ("O'Connell" 130-6). I would add that this emphasis on identity, and on a supposedly ungendered national subject that was actually a male subject, also militated against Young Ireland's embracing Stowe's "feminine" brand of reform. Like Stowe, Wilde insists that political change begins with and depends on conversion, a change of heart. Unlike Stowe, however, Wilde does not locate this change in the feminine, domestic sphere of the hearth or give women any special power to effect it. In Wilde's taxonomy of tearfulness, the most ethically and politically laudable tears are mainly the privilege of middle- and upper-class men.¹³

Wilde's acceptance of Young Ireland's equation of true nationalist subjectivity with masculinity means that while weeping as a sign of powerlessness or a lack of political consciousness is often feminized in her work, tears as evidence of positive national feeling are associated with masculinity: "Meekly bear, but nobly try / Like a man with soft tears flowing" (26). Similarly, while the tears of the populace often reveal its despair and pre-political stupor, the tears of patriot leaders embody the riches they can offer the nation:

And woe to you, ye poor—
 Want and scorn ye must endure;
 Yet before ye many noble jewels shine
 In the sand.
 Ah! they are patriots' tears — even mine—
 For Fatherland! (99)

This impulse towards hierarchy and differentiation within the boundaries of the nation was the inevitable companion to Young Ireland's drive towards various kinds of unity — political, aesthetic, and ethical. While the latter impulse has received more critical attention, the former is particularly crucial to Wilde's work. Since the nation was always in the process of being forged, the nationalization of the masses was always incomplete. This was particularly true for Young Ireland, given its relative lack of organic connections to the Irish masses. O'Connell's movement, in contrast, had been more genuinely popular, with the emergent Catholic middle classes, particularly in cities and rural towns, as its backbone of support.¹⁴ Young Ireland never achieved the popular following that O'Connell had; the enormous early success of *The Nation* depended in part upon O'Connell's Repeal Association, which distributed it. In addition, though O'Connell continued to have a popular following, the Famine destroyed his political machine (Boyce 171).

Accordingly, a number of scholars have read Young Ireland's project as an attempt to create in culture a unity that did not exist in the political sphere.¹⁵ Thus Young Ireland's founding premise of a unified spirit of the nation located in the Irish masses arose as the chances of achieving such unity and politiciz-

ing the masses were actually receding. But this compensatory response created its own contradictions; it is not often observed that nationalization had to be incomplete or it risked undoing some of cultural nationalism's other founding premises.¹⁶ Young Ireland's healthy respect for property and general economic conservatism (with a few exceptions) set limits on its unifying, assimilative ideals, and led it to privilege the leading role of the bourgeois intellectual. As Wilde wrote in an essay on an anthology of Irish songs, "The utterances of a people, though always vehement, are often incoherent; and it is then that men of education and culture are needed to interpret and formulate the vague longings and ambitions of the passionate hearts around them" (quoted in Wyndham 160). For Young Ireland, the relationship between leaders and peoples demanded both that the masses assimilate themselves to the model of the leaders and that this assimilation remain perpetually deferred.

As a result, the figure of the nationalist leader carries enormous weight for Young Ireland, embodying both an ideal of unity and the continued significance and the superiority of the bourgeois intellectual. Wilde's work is obsessed with leaders — the current dearth of effective national leaders, the qualities and techniques associated with leadership, the nature of the relationship between leaders and peoples. Her poems refer to leaders with epithets such as "poet-prophet" (53), "poet-priest" (25), "prophet-leader" (39), and "patriot leader" (28); her leaders are heroic, Christlike, or Godlike. At the same time, her works constantly return to the faults of the masses who have failed to assimilate themselves to the model offered by such leaders. "Have Ye Counted the Cost?" sneers, "Let the masses pass on scorning, / Seek not courage in their mind; / Self-devotion, patriot fervour, / Spring not from the craven kind" (34). When she became frustrated with the national movement, she blamed the populace, writing to Duffy, "I do not blame the leaders in the least. In Sicily or Belgium they would have been successful" (quoted in Wyndham 31).

Along with other Young Irishmen, Wilde subscribed to Carlyle's dictum that the history of the world is a series of biographies — the biographies of great men. She wrote biographical essays about a number of figures, including Thomas Moore and Daniel O'Connell. David Lloyd has explored Young Ireland's preoccupation with biography and autobiography, arguing that for Irish cultural nationalism the hero's biography represents a repetition of the nation's history, prefigures its destiny, and asserts the seamless continuity of the individual with the nation (*Nationalism* 59-60). Wilde's essay on O'Connell exemplifies this pattern. His life, she wrote, was "one long gladiatorial wrestle against oppression and bigotry in which every step was a combat, but every combat a victory. . . . The life of O'Connell is, indeed, the history of Ireland for nearly a century. . . . He lived through all, incarnated all, and was the avenger, the apostle, and the prophet of her people" ("O'Connell" 180). This view of Irish history as a series of gladiatorial triumphs was, to say the least, counter-intuitive, and it may seem particularly perverse in the wake of the Famine. In contrast, for O'Connell, the history of Ireland was a history of Irish patience and reason in the face of British cruelty and provocation. For Wilde, O'Connell's life was part of the incomplete process of resistance as well as an image of its successful completion; it embodied a history of suffering and defeat and pro-

vided a diagram of victorious revolution. The contradictions that inhabit such a formulation are compounded by the leader's relationship to the people, whom the leader must both represent and exceed.

Wilde's works foreground the question of the leader's success or failure in transforming the masses, invariably imagining this transformation occurring when the leader breathes the spirit of the nation into the populace through his passionate oratory. Thomas Davis's essays emphasized the skill of past Irish orators and encouraged present would-be leaders to study the character of their audiences and the techniques of oratory. Wilde described O'Connell's powers as an orator using a language of the mythical and the magical: "Never, perhaps, since sirens gave up sitting and singing upon rocks, did such witch-music fall on the ear of listener. The effect was magical — it acted like some potent spell. . . . Men were charmed, subdued, enchanted — forgot everything but him, and could not choose but listen, love him, and swear to do or die for him" ("O'Connell" 188-9). Although O'Connell was famous, in Parliament and in Ireland, for his oratorical skills, he was not inclined to think of himself as a siren. He theorized his effect on his audiences and his role as a leader in very different terms. O'Connell was well aware of something Benedict Anderson would theorize later: that print capitalism and increased literacy made the rise of his modern popular nationalism possible (Boyce 160). In 1839 he threatened his colleagues in Parliament by asking whether they realized "that the Irish people almost universally were now readers? — that where newspapers formerly hardly went out of the great towns, they were now to be found in every village, and almost in every cabin?" (Cusack 1: 536). O'Connell described the mass political power of the Irish as a nation using Anderson's figure for "the secular, historically-clocked imagined community" (Anderson 39) of the nation: the daily plebiscite of the newspaper. For O'Connell, the Irish people were no less a people, and no less a political force, for being apparently isolated, each in his or her own cabin. Luke Gibbons has pointed out that Anderson's argument requires some modification in relation to Ireland and other colonized nations which had important traditions of resistance in oral culture. In addition, newspapers like *The Nation* were often passed around and read aloud to groups. So, while Irish newspapers were central to O'Connell's movement, and their effective circulation and cultural authority was far greater than sales figures suggest (MacDonagh, *Hereditary* 208), they were closely connected to oral culture. But O'Connell did not privilege speech over writing, and he explicitly theorized the importance of print culture, rather than his own siren-like powers, to his nationalist project.

Although Young Ireland consciously promoted and exploited print media, set up Repeal reading rooms, and lauded its literary projects as part of the national struggle, its rhetoric, in contrast to O'Connell's, went to some lengths to conceal its dependence on print. Cultural nationalism's representations of the nation erased the mediated national community created by print and visualized by O'Connell as each Irish citizen reading a newspaper at home, and replaced it with the physical immediacy of an orator addressing a crowd. Young Ireland's definition of the leader as orator cast him less as the people's representative than as their hypnotist, or as Wilde put it, their siren. Although the

people formed a natural and inevitable national community, they needed the leader's magical eloquence to make them aware of their nationhood and to give it political force. To imagine the orator relying on logic, persuasion or choice in mobilizing the people was tantamount to recognizing the nation as constructed and contingent, so Young Ireland described its orators using a language of mystical transformation, in which the masses simply "woke up" from the nightmare of their own ignorance and passivity. Wilde asks in one poem, "Then trumpet-tongued, to a people sleeping / Who will speak with magic command[?]" (61). Another poem calls for a leader to "Pass the word that bands together— / Word of mystic conjuration" and predicts the result: "And, as fire consumes the heather, / So the young hearts of the nation / Fierce will blaze up, quick and scathing, 'gainst the stranger and the foe" (31). The hearts of the masses respond automatically, irrationally and uncontrollably, like a field set ablaze, their reaction unmediated by distance, time, or thought.

As the repositories of the spirit of the nation and the instruments of that spirit's emergence in the people, poets and leaders were interchangeable in Wilde's work. "The Young Patriot Leader" describes the hero's eloquence as an overpowering natural (and ultimately supernatural) force, capable of achieving the transformation of the heart that sentimentalists like Stowe imagined in less violently martial terms: "As a tempest in its force, as a torrent in its course, / So his words fiercely sweep all before them, / And they smite like two-edged swords, those undaunted thunder-words, / On all hearts, as tho' angels did implore them" (29). Similarly, "A Remonstrance" asserts: "Flashes from Poet's words / Electric light, strong, swift, and sudden, like / The clash of thunder-clouds, by which men read / God's writing legibly on human hearts" (52). In Wilde's works, the words of patriot leaders and poets burn, smite, act as "thunder crashes" (24) or "God's thunder" (30); they are both physical objects with concrete effects and fetishes, magical objects with absolute power to transform listeners. The greater and more Godlike the orator's transformative powers, however, the greater his distance from the masses with whom he was eventually supposed to be merged. Young Ireland's emphasis on the unmediated character of the orator's effect on the people formed the very vehicle through which to inscribe his absolute separation from them. Conversely, it was O'Connell's faith in the mediation of print that made it possible for him to imagine himself a member of the Irish nation, similar to other members.

Most of Wilde's works emphasize that the masses have yet to be transformed by the spirit of the nation. The exhortatory language of her work casts it as an attempt to generate that spirit among her readers. The didactic impulses of Young Ireland's project are well known. But in Wilde's case, representations of gender play a particularly important role in organizing those impulses. The recalcitrance of the masses, and the necessary, continued separation of the leader from them, are expressed in the discrepancy between the women poet and the male patriot leader. "Who Will Show Us Any Good?" laments: "Alas! can I help? but a nameless singer— / Weak the words of a woman to save; / We wait the advent of some light-bringer" (61). The female poet is the pale, inadequate shadow of the true inspirer of the nation, the patriot leader. The doubleness of the nation, which exists eternally yet remains to be created, is mapped onto a gender gap between them.

The first poem in *Poems by Speranza*, "Dedication. To Ireland" (iii-iv), introduces the volume by emphasizing this discrepancy. The opening stanza, written entirely in the conditional mood, details how the speaker would like to inspire the nation but also implies that she cannot:

My Country, wounded to the heart,
 Could I but flash along thy soul
 Electric power to rive apart
 The thunder-clouds that round thee roll,
 And, by my burning words uplift
 Thy life from out Death's icy drift,
 Till the full splendours of our age
 Shone round thee for thy heritage—
 As Miriam's, by the Red Sea strand
 Clashing proud cymbals, so my hand
 Would strike thy harp,
 Loved Ireland!

The second stanza confesses: "I can but look in God's great face, / And pray Him for our fated race, / To come in Sinai thunders down, / And, with His mystic radiance, crown / Some Prophet-Leader . . ." The poem turns on the speaker's gender, which renders her an inferior substitute for a true poet-leader: "The woman's voice dies in the strife / Of Liberty's awakening life; / We wait the hero heart to lead, / The hero, who can guide at need." The poem's last stanza affirms the efforts made by the "woman's hand" of the speaker, while insisting on their limited efficacy. Even the reference to Miriam indicates that she will never achieve the status of a true poet-prophet. Miriam was Moses' sister, and her only prophecy was a song of praise for Moses after he parted the Red Sea. Later, she was punished by God for complaining that Moses had too much power; Wilde's speaker is unlikely to incur punishment for a similar offense.

Like the other women writers of *The Nation*, in general Wilde did not explicitly critique or resist the major structures of Young Ireland's cultural nationalism. Instead, I have been arguing that she inhabited their contradictions in a particular way. Wilde emphasized a sentimental rather than an erotic model of national feeling, but she did not make the claims to specifically feminine power that other sentimental literatures did. She used Young Ireland's gender conventions to mediate a bourgeois nationalism's necessary but problematic separation from the people, embodied in the weak feminine tears of the masses and the worthy, masculine tears of the true patriot. Similarly, rather than explicitly assert the worth of the woman writer, Wilde employed the figures of the woman poet and the male patriot to inscribe the doubleness of the nation and the ambiguous status and potential the masses had for Young Ireland. But if Wilde found a despairing, pre-national people problematic, she hardly found a mobilized, nationalist people less so, as is illustrated in her representations of blood.

Blood

O'Connell struck (or, perhaps more accurately, failed to strike) an uneasy balance between threatening revolutionary violence and condemning it. Although the British political classes viewed him as a figure who deliberately aroused the passions of the mob, O'Connell feared and distrusted the masses who supported him, he hated social unrest, and he condemned revolutions and agrarian secret societies (MacDonagh, *Emancipist* 229-31; *Hereditary* passim). His speeches and essays counseled legal agitation, orderly mass demonstrations, and nonviolence: "Let there be no riot, no outrage, no violation of the law, and above all, no despair. We are eight millions" (Cusack 2: 394). He repeatedly insisted that "the best possible political revolution is not worth one single drop of human blood" (441). Much of O'Connell's pacifist politics was based, however, on the implicit threat of a mass uprising. His speeches sometimes employed martial language, especially when he wanted to whip up popular feeling at the monster meetings of the early 1840s. The meetings themselves, which scholars have compared to people's festivals, religious revivals, and theatrical spectacles, bristled with potential mass violence and encapsulated the tensions between violence and nonviolence in the movement. They were elaborately staged, with much pomp and pageantry, and audiences responded passionately to O'Connell's famed oratorical skills. Crowds were often organized into ranks and marched in step, in a display of quasi-military discipline that suggested their potential to become a real army.¹⁷ It was this combination of O'Connell's ability to mobilize the passions of the masses and his skill in controlling them, in the manner of an inspired military leader, that many contemporary observers found particularly threatening.

In some respects, Young Ireland's warlike rhetoric simply stated plainly what O'Connell had been careful to suggest obliquely. However, the devastation of the Famine, England's largely uncaring and inept handling of the crisis, and the French Revolution of 1848 radicalized some of the remaining nationalists by the late 1840s. Wilde began contributing to *The Nation* just after the Famine began, and as the crisis worsened nationalist writers confronted the issue of how to represent death and suffering on an unprecedented, and nearly unrepresentable, scale. Blood, like tears, can illustrate the violent abjection of a colonized people, and the "excessive" carnage in Wilde's work is, in part, a response to the ethical imperative to render the excessive carnage of the Famine adequately.¹⁸ Like tears, blood has other functions in Wilde's work as well.

While Wilde's representations of tears are inflected by the dominant discourses of feeling, her representations of blood are informed by the major impulses of contemporary religious discourses, the importance of which, as Maria Luddy has shown, can hardly be overestimated as a shaping force in the lives of publicly active nineteenth-century Irish women. Her preoccupation with blood, violence and death is structured by a Protestant millenarianism in which the apocalypse signals the end of this world, judgment, and the beginning of the new millennium. Chris Morash has pointed out that Irish Protestantism was heavily indebted to millenarian thought in the nineteenth century and that interest in millennial prophecy was especially high in the late 1840s.

Morash argues that although millenarian thought among most Protestants was reactionary and anti-Irish, it also offered Young Ireland a way of narrating the Famine that exposed the massive suffering it caused while also casting it as an apocalyptic harbinger of a utopian world (*Writing* 79-127). In addition, Young Ireland's conception of the nationalization of the masses as a magical transformation, its fetishistic emphasis on the power of words, and its vagueness about how revolutionary change was actually to come about are all characteristics Eric Hobsbawm associates with millenarian movements (57-107).

Like her interest in biography, Wilde's millenarianism is a way of writing the history of the nation and the individual as both a record of oppression and a blueprint for victory. The cataclysmic nature of the suffering involved becomes an index to the radical nature of the transformation it heralds. Poems such as "Foreshadowings" (17-19) graft the vocabularies and structures of millenarian thinking onto a discourse of nationalist resistance. The poem begins, "Oremus! Oremus! [Let us pray!] Look down on us, Father!" and conflates the horsemen of the apocalypse with imperial coercion and famine: "On rushes the war-steed, his lurid eyes flashing / There is blood on the track where his long mane is streaming, / . . . / There's a tramp like a knell — a cold shadow gloometh— / Woe! 'tis the black steed of Famine that cometh." "Signs of the Times" (21-3) claims, "By our prophets God is speaking, in Sinai's awful thunders, / By pestilence and famine, in fearful signs and wonders," and describes the rough beast that slouches towards Ireland as a successor to the French Revolution: "On its brow a name is written — France read it once before, / And like a demon's compact, it was written in her gore— / A fearful name — thrones tremble as the murmur passed along— / RETRIBUTION, proud oppressors, for your centuries of wrong." The signs of a better world are literally "written" — both determined and predicted — in violence, blood and gore. The Irish might be suffering horribly, but God, and the nationalists whose divine sanction was indicated by the interchangeability of the earthly and heavenly avengers that Wilde's poems constantly invoke, will judge the oppressors and avenge their crimes.

Analyses of cultural nationalism often associate its more violent-minded formulations with its nostalgic, mythologizing, backward-looking impulses (see for example Kearney). But Young Ireland's nostalgia for lost origins and pristine pre-colonial culture did not prevent it from needing, and embracing, however ambivalently, a modernizing, nineteenth-century narrative of progress. Hobsbawm points out that millenarianism is the most "modern" of "primitive" social movements, and can be fairly easily harnessed in service of modern political revolutions. Wilde's bloody millenarianism coexists with her commitment to progress, most often imagined as the "onward march of nations" (69) through history. "Who Will Show Us Any Good?" asserts, "Ireland rests mid the rush of progression, / As a frozen ship in a frozen sea," and laments, "we alone of the Christian nations / Fall to the rear in the march of Man" (61). In fact, her bloody rhetoric offers an alternative, apocalyptic narrative of progress rather than a backward-looking resistance to it. "The Year of Revolutions" asks, "Shall we, oh! my Brothers, but weep, pray, and groan, / When France reads her rights by the flames of a Throne? / Shall we fear and falter to join the grand chorus, / When Europe has trod the dark pathway before us?" (35). The apocalypse of

the Famine and the nationalist apocalypse it prefigures propel Ireland forward along the path of civilization.

Wilde imagines violence and bloodshed as both the mark of oppression and a sign that the nationalist cause is advancing. But while the tears that indicate the weakness of the masses become the enlightened tears of the patriot or reader/spectator, her representations of blood usually revolve entirely around the masses, organizing her conception of the masses' role, once mobilized, in nationalist politics. This conception is the logical complement to Young Ireland's impulses to limit (as well as to achieve) the merging of leaders and peoples. Her version of O'Connell's disciplined army, that is, of the Irish people mobilized as an effective political force, is a raging mob. She assumes that mass politics is by nature violent and irrational, so when she imagines the successful transformation of the masses, she emphasizes the unthinking and bloodthirsty propensities of the masses so transformed. Often, the mobilized populace becomes part of the landscape itself, taking the form of some blindly powerful and destructive force. "Signs of the Times" lists the "signs apocalyptic" (21) of a coming upheaval, comparing disturbances among the people to surging oceans and tempest-tossed forests: "When mighty passions, surging, heave the depth of life's great ocean— / When the people, sway, like forest trees, to and fro in wild commotion" (21). "Forward" threatens, "And the heaving myriad surges, / To and fro in tumult swaying, / Threaten death to all who vainly would oppose them in their might" (31), while "The Year of Revolutions" exhorts, "On, on in your masses dense, resolute, strong" (36). Wilde's descriptions of violent nationalist mobs as blazing fields, human oceans, wind-swept forests, thunder clouds and other powerful natural phenomena fit them into millenarian narratives of upheaval. They also embody Young Ireland's anxious conceptualization of mass politics as irrational and bloody.

Wilde's conception of mass politics as crowd violence makes a transition from tears to blood an inviting figure for the nationalization of the masses. "France in '93" (53-5) compares the French bread riots of the 1790s to the cry of the starving Irish during the Famine and describes the transformation of the abject people into a savage agent of crowd violence. The first stanza presents the lower classes as crude and lacking national consciousness: "Hark! the onward heavy tread— / Hark! the voices rude— / 'Tis the famished cry for Bread / From a wildered multitude." The "wildered multitude" signifies its helplessness and despair by weeping: "Thousands wail and weep with hunger." The second stanza traces their transformation into "an armed multitude." The armed multitude has exactly the same "heavy tread" and "voices rude" as the despairing crowd in the first stanza. The only visible mark of their transformation is that they have stopped shedding tears and have begun shedding blood: "Bloody trophy they have won, / Ghastly glares it in the sun— / Gory head on lifted pike. / Ha! they weep not now, but strike." Young Ireland's didactic impulses notwithstanding, they have not been enlightened; they have simply become enraged.

The poem gleefully addresses the guilty, aristocratic victims of the crowd's revenge, threatening and taunting them, as in "Calculating statesmen, quail; / Proud aristocrat, grow pale; / Savage sounds that deathly song," or "What! coronetted Prince of Peer, / Will not the base-born slavelings fear?" Through-

out, the poem emphasizes the violent savagery of the revolution it depicts. In contrast to O'Connell's conception of violence in politics, the crowd's power lies not in threat or disciplined action but in its blind, uncontrollable hunger for violence: "Blindly now they wreak revenge— / How rudely do a mob avenge!" The poem points to hunger as the source of the riot, repeating words like "famished" and "bread." In Wilde's apocalyptic reading of the Famine, the masses' hunger for food — which represents their colonial subjugation — and their hunger for violence — which represents their mobilization as an effective political force — become indistinguishable. The dismembered bodies of aristocrats become strange fruit, to borrow a phrase from a later description of mob violence: "Ghastly fruit their lances bear— / Noble heads with streaming hair." The speaker imagines the carnage of the riot in terms of a savage "harvest" of aristocratic blood: "Royal blood of King and Queen / Streameth from the guillotine; / Wildly on the people goeth, / Reaping what the noble soweth." Thus the lines "Hunger now, at last, is sated / In halls where once it wailed and waited" have multiple referents: food, blood, blood as food. While national feeling among the male patriot leaders manifests itself as tears, national feeling among the masses manifests itself as a blind bloodlust as deep and instinctive as the hunger for which it is a metonym.

Current criticism often theorizes cultural nationalism's project of subject constitution as the formation of a centered subject whose autonomy prefigures national autonomy, and whose national feelings are embodied in unmistakable signs such as love of country. Wilde's work illustrates that, at the same time, Young Ireland's bourgeois nationalism also produced a different, more unsettling version of national subject constitution, particularly in relation to the Irish masses. In this version, the signs of national feeling are ambiguous, their meanings contingent and shifting. Moreover, this national subject's bodily integrity is tenuous — defined through shedding tears, spilling blood, even ingesting blood — and its autonomy dissolves into the unreasoning mind of the crowd. These divergent conceptions of subject constitution mark Young Ireland's ambivalence about the Irish masses; subject constitution as the achievement of individual integrity, autonomy and stable signification is the province of the elite. The necessary complement to Young Ireland's drive towards unity, its dreams of assimilation, and its faith in the people as the embodiments of the spirit of the nation is its reliance on class and gender hierarchies, its will to separate bourgeois leaders and intellectuals from the populace, and its fear that the masses cannot be constituted as national subjects, or that they can only be constituted as threatening, ambiguous kinds of national subjects. As a woman writer engaging with a deeply masculinist tradition, Wilde had cause to be particularly sensitive to the latter set of impulses — those that emphasized disjunction, distrust and hierarchy. The major tropes and patterns of Wilde's work embody, rather than resist, many of Young Ireland's gender conventions. Through those conventions, however, Wilde illustrates with particular clarity the disintegrative and divisive aspects of the contradictory formulations that distinguished Young Ireland from Old.

Notes

1. For extended discussions of these features, see Lloyd, *Nationalism and Anomalous States*, and Ryder.

2. On Young Ireland's origins, development, and intellectual structures, see Davis; Boyce 154-91; Cairns and Richards 22-41; Deane, "Poetry and Song" and "Famine."

3. The authorities considered her anonymous 1848 essay, entitled "Jacta Alea Est" ("The Die is Cast"), seditious enough to warrant prosecution, and tried Duffy for writing it, even though he was already in prison when it appeared. When Wilde disrupted his trial by standing up in the gallery and claiming authorship, the government declined to prosecute her, and four different juries refused to convict Duffy. For an account of the incident, see Ellmann 9.

4. She translated a novel, *Sidonia The Sorceress*, in 1849, translated Lamartine's *Pictures of the First French Revolution* and *The Wanderer and His Home* in 1850, published *The Glacier Land* in 1852 and *The First Temptation* in 1853. *Poems: Second Series; Translations* appeared in 1866. In 1880 she completed and published a book her husband had begun before his death, *Memoir of Gabriel Beranger*. *Driftwood From Scandinavia* appeared in 1884, *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms and Superstitions of Ireland* in 1887, and *Ancient Cures, Charms, and Usages of Ireland* in 1890. *Notes on Men, Women, and Books* (1891) and *Social Studies* (1893) were collections of essays, all or nearly all of which had appeared earlier in journals.

5. Thomas Flanagan's *The Irish Novelists, 1800-1850* described her as "the silliest woman who ever lived" (quoted in Ellmann 18), and Terry Eagleton's play *St. Oscar* pokes fun at her vehement and sentimentalizing nationalism. While her work is included in a number of turn-of-the-century anthologies (for a list see Morash, *Writing* 112), later in the twentieth century her work was seldom anthologized. Hoagland includes only her most famous poem, "The Famine Year," and A. A. Kelly excludes her on the grounds that her poetry "[a]ppears turgid to the modern ear" (19). She does not appear anywhere in the first three volumes of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*. However, she is included in Leighton and Reynolds.

6. Parker et al. observe, "Whenever the power of the nation is invoked — whether it be in the media, in scholarly texts, or in everyday conversation — we are more likely than not to find it couched as a *love of country*: an eroticized nationalism" (1), and influential books such as Mosse's *Nationalism and Sexuality* and Theweleit's *Male Fantasies* take as their starting points the assumption that the feelings associated with nationalism are best conceptualized in erotic terms.

7. For a discussion of the Irish case, see Boland.

8. As a young man, the two books he was most influenced by were Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, representing the cults of rational improvement and sensibility, respectively (MacDonagh, *Hereditary* 39).

9. Quoted in MacDonagh, *Emancipist* 272. MacDonagh also notes that for most of his life, O'Connell's favorite writer was Thomas Moore, famous for

his tearful sentimentalities on the subject of Ireland and the Irish (*Hereditary* 194).

10. See Lloyd, *Anomalous States*, especially 88-124; Eagleton, *Heathcliff*, especially 226-72; and Bhabha's influential formulation in "DissemiNation."

11. Radhakrishnan succinctly sums up this dilemma in the context of Indian nationalism: "The masses can neither be bypassed (for they are the real India) nor can they be legitimated qua people" (89).

12. For example, Douglas argues for the reactionary nature of sentimental fiction's tendency to reinforce nineteenth-century stereotypes of women, while Tompkins argues for its revolutionary potential because it locates the crucial scene of social and political transformation in the sphere traditionally associated with women: the heart and hearth. For another discussion of Victorian sentimentality, see Kaplan.

13. Similarly, Johnson argues that, rather than feminizing culture, politics, or men, the late-eighteenth-century discourses of sensibility entailed the masculinization of formerly feminine traits; those traits were legitimized only because and only insofar as they were recoded masculine (14).

14. Foster observes that O'Connell's origins, which "blended Gaelic clansmen and local Catholic gentry," allowed him to assert his organic connection to both successfully (300).

15. See for example Deane, "Poetry and Song," in which he argues that "[t]he political rhetoric could not be translated into action because it bespoke a unity of purpose that did not exist" (1).

16. The fact that this formulation echoes the ambivalence Bhabha has identified in imperialist discourses of native assimilation reminds us once again of cultural nationalism's formal similarities to imperialism. See *The Location of Culture*, especially 85-92.

17. See MacDonagh, *Emancipist* 229-31, and Davis 41. Some peasants in the south of Ireland actually interpreted an 1828 meeting and the agitation surrounding it as preparation for an uprising (Boyce 141).

18. For an insightful discussion of these issues, see Morash, *Writing*, and Morash, ed. 15-37.

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