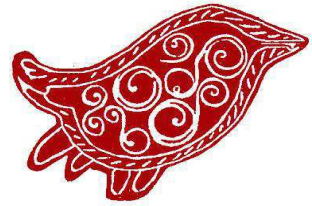


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Eugene Davis (1857–97): A Forgotten Clonakilty Poet and Writer

By OWEN MCGEE

During the Parnell era, few Irishmen contributed more verse and literary-historical articles to Irish newspapers than Eugene Davis.¹ He was born in Clonakilty, County Cork, on 23 March 1857, and came from a devoutly Catholic family that, since the eighteenth century, had produced many fine schoolteachers who taught in Clonakilty, Timoleague, Rathbarry and Barryroe.² Eugene's father, John Davis, was particularly renowned as a teacher of classics.³ He provided Eugene with a sound training in the classics as well as French, German and Anglo-Irish literature, and intended him to follow in his uncle's and stepbrother's footsteps by becoming a priest.⁴ Accordingly, in the autumn of 1878, Eugene was sent to the Irish College in Louvain before transferring to the Irish College in Paris in the autumn of 1879 where he continued his studies. As a friend of Davis's noted, however, 'those who were intimately acquainted with him were aware he had no vocation for priesthood, for long ere this he had wooed the muses'.⁵ He did not complete his ecclesiastical studies but rather, as he had done since 1876, he supported himself by writing verse and literary-historical articles for Irish newspapers. After 1880, he forwarded these for publication from his Parisian address (a hotel at 338 rue Saint-Honoré) and, together with a small number of Irish friends, enjoyed the experience of

adopting a relatively bohemian lifestyle in Montmartre.

OUTPUT AND INFLUENCES

As the *Cork Examiner* once noted, Eugene Davis was a graceful and effective writer whose depth of knowledge of Irish and European literature was reflected in his literary output from an early age.⁶ His first notable literary contribution was a series published in the *Shamrock*⁷ (June 1876-June 1877) entitled 'Hours with Irish Poets', in which he wrote biographical and critical accounts of forty different Irish poets, both well-known and obscure.⁸ The success of this series led him to write four more similar works for the *Shamrock*, including 'The Orators of Ireland' (Oct. 1877-Oct. 1878) together with serialized histories of Young Ireland (Oct. 1878-Sept. 1879) and Grattan's parliament (Oct. 1880-Oct. 1881).⁹ All these were written under his favourite pseudonym of 'Owen Roe', and the Young Ireland series, in particular, was well received by the public.¹⁰ Although the critical or historical content of these may not be of great value to scholars today, it is worth noting that there were few such studies being written in Davis's own day, a fact that Davis himself lamented greatly. In 'Hours with Irish Poets', and his book *Reliques of John K. Casey 'Leo'* (Dublin, 1878),¹¹ Davis protested bitterly at contemporary publishers' unwillingness either to republish

the work of classic Irish writers or champion new Irish writers, a development which he believed had prevented the growth of an active literary movement in Ireland. Although similar sentiments were to inspire the emergent Anglo-Irish literary movement a few years later, unlike W. B. Yeats and his confreres, Davis did not believe that the neglect of recent Irish writers by publishers was, in part, justified by the unoriginality of their literary output. Rather, according to Davis, the primary reason why 'not one volume' of poetry by Irish poets 'has been edited during the past quarter of a century' was that English literary critics, with their 'manifest prejudice' against 'our poets and poetry', had prevented publishers from recognizing their talents. He also believed that it was the ability of English critics to dominate literary discussion in Ireland that had created the 'absurd' situation whereby many literary people in Ireland were expressing doubts as to whether 'our country can produce a minstrel worthy of his vocation; or if there be even *that* in the Irish nature to form one'.¹² Davis firmly believed that only if Irish patriotism were to shape Irish literary attitudes could this demoralizing situation be reversed, a belief that clearly formed the background of his critique of the poetry of 'Leo', the popular Fenian poet. Although Davis noted that he had 'no intention of holding up "Leo" as a great poet; no, not even a great Irish poet', he believed Irishmen (despite English literary critics protestations to the contrary) should recognize the fact that Casey wrote some pieces of 'sterling merit' upon Irish themes and 'had in his nature that kind of seed which would be sure to blossom into ripe and rich fruit', had he not died in 1870 at the tender age of twenty-four as a result of an accident.¹³ Most of all, the fact that Casey was a

patriot, Davis maintained, should make his name dear to every Irishman's heart, irrespective of his failings as a poet.

Davis saw Irish literature in very 'national', partisan and political terms, primarily because he was heavily influenced by the example of the Young Ireland movement of the 1840s. During the 1870s and 1880s, he contributed dozens of original political, martial or historical ballads to the Irish press, the most popular of these being 'Orange and Green', which called simply but effectively (in the best Young Ireland tradition) for Irishmen of different religious persuasions to unite by experiencing a common feeling of brotherhood.¹⁴ As a general rule, these poems and ballads were much superior to the typical doggerel nationalist verse that appeared regularly in Irish newspapers during the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, owing to the familiarity of their style and subject-matter, they certainly do not mark Davis out as an original, or particularly inspiring, literary talent. Indeed, the most inspired of Davis's poems were generally those upon non-political and non-historical themes, such as love, death, friendship or scenes of natural beauty in Ireland or on the European continent. In most of these works, we can see the degree to which Davis was inspired by the European romantic artistic tradition of the early nineteenth century. Indeed, several of his earliest poems (published in the *Shamrock*) were translations of poems by German romantics such as Frederich Schiller (1759-1805) and Theodor Korner (1791-1813), as well as verse by early nineteenth-century French romantic poets like Pierre Jean de Beranger (1780-1857) and Alfred de Musset (1810-57).¹⁵ Davis's first attempt to describe a scene of natural beauty in verse, 'Lough Ine: a lake in the vicinity of Skibbereen' (*Shamrock*, 24 Nov. 1877),



LOUGH INE, CO. CORK (Photo: Seán Daly)

was probably one of his best efforts in this genre as this extract indicates:

And all around where turns the eye,
Mountains lift their crests on high –
Looming, threat'ning to the sky
Reigns a rugged grandeur there
And a beauty fresh and fair,
Growing – glowing everywhere . . .
Glowing on the rough defiles,
Circling round for miles on miles
Carb'ny's famed one hundred isles . . .
And when ev'ning shadows fall,
Like a dead fun'eral pall,
Spreading darkness over all,
Still the waters, ever deep,
Sleep a calm unruffled sleep –
I alone, a vigil keep . . .
Breathless, stillness – nay divine –
Where thy placid waters shine,
In the moonlight, dear Lough Ine!

Apart from the nationalist effusions in his verse, some of the most frequent romantic

references in Davis's poems were his descriptions of the tragedy of premature death¹⁶ and, most of all, the compulsory exile of someone from their 'homeland', the latter being a theme in which Davis particularly specialized with characteristically simple, yet appealing, verse.¹⁷ One of his first published poems, 'Tis the Twilight Hour' (*Shamrock*, 14 Oct. 1876), featured him imagining himself as a dying exile in America (as he ultimately turned out to be), longing once more to return to Ireland. This particular poem is interesting because it appears to be about his hometown of Clonakilty:

'Tis the twilight hour, and I long to dream
On the days long past, and the scenes of
yore,
For memory's beacons on me beam,
Lighting my path to the past's dim shore.
O, past unfold thy ponderous theme;

In thy pages let me once more see
 The friends of yore in my Irish home,
 In that little town beside the sea
 The brook that played through the good old
 town,
 I see on those pages well profiled,
 The long seacoast, where the steep cliffs
 frown
 On the childish play of the breakers mild
 The skiffs that skip on the chafing foam;
 The well-built quays – all seem to me
 Stereotyped scenes of my Irish home
 In that little town beside the sea.

As a young man intended for the priesthood, it is not surprising that explicitly Catholic sentiments are evident in some of his early *Shamrock* poems, such as an ‘Ave Maria’ (10 Nov. 1877), in which all nature is depicted as worshipping the grandeur of the Virgin, and a poem entitled ‘My One Hope’ (23 Mar. 1878), in which he described his youthful desire to be a priest as a ‘hope of Immortal Beauty’.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the most intense passions in his verse were always upon nationalist, rather than religious, themes, such as an epic poem he wrote at the age of eighteen protesting violently at Irishmen’s refusal to erect a monument to the memory of the 1848 rebel, Thomas Francis Meagher.¹⁹

In Davis’s case, such patriotic effusions appear to have been shaped not only by his Irish nationalism but also by his emotional identification with examples of patriotism or individual valour in history. In this respect, he was particularly fascinated with the history of the republics of ancient and modern times, a fascination that inspired poems such as his ‘The Roman Centurion’ (a celebration of individual patriotism in ancient Rome), ‘An Old Venetian Ballad’ (extolling the military valour of the fifteenth-century Italian city states) and his ‘Song of the Veteran Republican: an episode of the

Paris Revolution of 1830’.²⁰ In the latter, Davis demonstrated a wholehearted identification with the curious mixture of romanticism and republicanism that influenced the Parisian popular political imagination during the nineteenth century. These sentiments also formed the background to his serialized, melodramatic novel, ‘The True Love and the False’, published in the *Irishman* during 1881-82. This story is set in Wicklow, Brussels, Paris and Amsterdam around 1830, and tells the tale of Robert O’Byrne, a fictitious Irish artist in Paris, who is supposedly both irresistible to French aristocratic ladies and to the fire of Belgian revolutionary republicanism. It concludes with O’Byrne taking up arms for Belgian independence, while Dutch and French opponents of the revolution die dramatically as a result of their own ‘depravity’.

Curiously, it was only after moving to France that Davis began to write about explicitly political subjects for the first time. For example, during 1886-87, he wrote three articles for the republican journal, *La Nouvelle Revue*, in which he appealed for French support for the cause of Irish independence in terms designed to capture the French popular imagination and to suit the journal’s pro-Russian and anti-British editorial policy.²¹ While living in France during the early 1880s, Davis also became quite fascinated with contemporary French literature. One of his poems of the mid-1880s, entitled ‘A Love Lay’, was described as ‘paraphrased from the French of Catulle Mendes’, a forgotten figure today but who from the 1860s until the 1890s was one of the best known poets, authors and patrons of young writers in Paris.²² Indeed, as Davis was fluent in French and the publisher of *La Nouvelle Revue* was none other than Juliette Adam (a patron of some of the greatest French writers of the century

such as Flaubert, Maupassant and Zola), it is quite possible that he was associated in some way with the Parisian literary circles of the time. Whatever the case, it is clear that, unlike Parisian literary icons of the 1880s such as Mendes or Maupassant, Davis generally depicted subjects of love in his poetry (or prose) in very chivalrous terms, a trait that was perhaps demonstrated best by his romantic poem, 'My Lady', published in the *Dublin University Review* in April 1886:

Men's sneers may blast my budding hopes –
 Ambition scorn to be
 The handmaid or the helping mate of dream-
 ers like to me;
 Yet – yet there is one peerless prize earth can-
 not take away –
 The soul that's wound around my own like
 tendril's 'round the spray
 Her love is as the Crown that soothes the suf-
 ferings of the Cross;
 'Tis quenchless as the liquid fire of fabled As-
 bestos;
 It heals each wound that pains the heart upon
 life's rugged pass,
 For, oh! It hath the blessed boon and balm of
 Frerebras . . .
 I need no quaint Chaldean lore to tell of fu-
 ture bliss –
 I see it in each radiant smile – I feel it in each
 kiss!
 I need no Babylonian sage to light life's
 low'ring skies,
 While Passion glows, and Love sits 'throned
 within my lady's eyes.
 So let Life's tempests rush and rave along the
 leaden sky –
 They have no terror in their wings for stoics
 such as I:
 I smile at foes who curse below – at clouds
 that frown above:
 My shield's my lady's plighted troth; my
 panoply, her love.

After he ceased contributing to the *Shamrock* and *Irishman* in 1881, Davis's name did not appear in the Irish press again

until 1885, when he suddenly achieved notoriety because of his alleged connection with Fenian revolutionaries in Paris. He undoubtedly held some republican sympathies, but his association with Fenian revolutionaries appears to have been just that: an association, not a formal political alliance, and he was probably never a member of the I.R.B. nor indeed of any revolutionary conspiracy.²³ He was first drawn into Irish radical circles when appointed editor of the underground Parisian edition of *United Ireland* (the suppressed Land League organ), which was published for six weeks in the beginning of 1882.²⁴ Not long afterwards, Davis was employed by James Stephens, the long-retired founder of the I.R.B. in exile in Paris, as his personal secretary to help him arrange and publish his memoirs in the Irish press.²⁵ His close friendship with Stephens at this time evidently filled him with a desire to acquire further insights into Irish revolutionary politics. In the spring of 1883, the Clonakilty man interviewed fleeing members of the 'Invincible' conspiracy in Paris and, for a short time, decided to take up employment as the Parisian correspondent of the *United Irishman* (New York). This was a foolish decision because, as this paper (in its other columns) openly called for terrorist attacks to be made upon Britain, Davis was now seen (mistakenly) by the British government as a supporter of terrorism and was subjected to the intrigues of various British spies who desired to secure his arrest. The most successful of these spies, Carroll Tevis, manipulated Patrick Casey (Stephens' nephew and Davis's friend) into printing sensational news about a (non-existent) Irish terrorist conspiracy in the French capital, ostensibly in an attempt to intimidate the British government into making further concessions to Irish nationalists.²⁶ Apart from completely

discrediting physical force nationalism in Ireland, however, the only direct consequence of Casey's misdirected propaganda campaign was to provide the British government with a means of persuading the French authorities to expel reputed Irish revolutionaries from Paris. As a result, in March 1885, Stephens and Davis, neither of whom was politically active, were suddenly expelled from France in a wave of publicity, and neither was allowed to return to the country until early 1887.²⁷

After a brief stay in Brussels, in the summer of 1885, Davis moved to Lausanne, Switzerland, where he wrote a series of articles for the San Francisco *Chronicle* under the pseudonym 'Viator', comparing the social habits of the Swiss with the Irish.²⁸ Thereafter, he spent the next year travelling throughout the lowlands, Germany, Italy and Spain, writing several descriptive poems about the various historical places or cities he visited, such as Bruges, Venice, Pisa and Rome. The finest of these was probably his joyful account of a 'Roman Carnival', in which the ghosts of various famous figures in Roman history are fancifully depicted as coming to life again to join in the revelry. The poem then concludes with these lines:

Here we drink Lucullus' toast
 Garbed in Pagan drapery,
 Horace, like a genial host,
 Welcomes up to Tivoli,
 While the faces
 Of the Graces
 Gleam like moonrays o'er the sea.
 So we live once more the past,
 Through these Bacchanalian hours,
 Where the hands of Vestals cast,
 Round us wreaths of purple flow'rs;
 Sweet it were for joy like this,
 Thus to cross long leagues of foam;
 Sweet it were to taste such bliss
 In the Old World's chosen home –

Smiling – smiling
 Time beguiling
 In the carnival of Rome.²⁹

Thereafter, Davis drew upon these experiences, his memories of student and social life in Louvain and Paris and his extensive knowledge of the history of the Irish in Europe to produce his book *Souvenirs of Irish Footprints Over Europe* (Dublin, 1889), which was originally published as a series of newspaper articles in the Dublin *Evening Telegraph*. Most of this lengthy work consists of detailed accounts of the history of Irish soldiers in European armies, the story of Irish monasteries on the continent and the activities of Irish academics in ecclesiastical colleges in Louvain, Paris, Rome, Lisbon and Salamanca since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, subjects upon which, he implies, he was able to do so much research during his travels by speaking with various academics and visiting college libraries. In itself, this makes the book fairly remarkable as a history, as no other study of its kind appears to have been written during Davis's lifetime. The text also deals in some detail with the elusive history of the Irish community in Paris during the nineteenth century, of which Davis himself is a part, and contains many fascinating sections on topics such as obscure nineteenth-century French republican rebels of Irish descent, his meeting with the not yet famous Cork painter, Harry Jones ('Thaddeus'), in Paris during the early 1880s, the burgeoning 'tourist trade' surrounding historical battle fields in the lowlands, descriptions of the folk customs of the peasantry in Normandy and rural Belgium, and trivialities such as how fashionable ladies dressed in cities like Brussels and Paris.

Although the book features little autobiographical information, a possible

inkling is nevertheless offered as to why Davis left the Irish College in Louvain, when he describes how a number of Irish students from Munster (quite probably including himself) were caught one night in their dormitories by the dean, drinking Jameson's whiskey and howling Irish nationalist ballads at the top of their voices.³⁰ He also recalled fondly a brilliant, but erratic, student friend of his, Mark O'Sullivan, from Kerry, with whom he 'would discuss philology and faro beer till the twilight shadows warned us off' on a regular basis on the streets of Louvain. O'Sullivan, he noted, was the only student in the college who was able to outwit a particularly quarrelsome professor of languages who, to test the knowledge and abilities of his students (and humble them at their lack of learning) used to converse in several different languages in rapid succession during his classes. 'None', Davis recalled, were ever 'found competent to discuss any subject with the learned man in more than three languages – Latin, French and Flemish – until it came to the turn of the Irishman, who, to the utter bewilderment of his colleagues, kept up a running fire with the Professor not merely in Latin, French and Flemish, but in Greek, Italian, Spanish and German as well; and eventually, when Mark put a poser to his antagonist in Irish, and the latter failed to reply, a cheer rang from the lips of the assembled students, and O'Sullivan was dubbed by universal acclaim the Irish Polyglot of Louvain.'³¹

After taking part in an abortive effort to establish an English-language, Irish nationalist newspaper in Paris,³² in the winter of 1887 Davis moved to Dublin where he secured an editorial position with the *Nation*. Subsequently, he published many poems and nationalist ballads in this paper, as well as in *United Ireland*

and the Boston *Pilot*, and these were to be collected and published in *A vision of Ireland and other poems* (Dublin, 1889), the only published anthology of Davis's poetry.³³ As it excludes all his poems published prior to 1881 under the pseudonym of 'Owen Roe', many of his best verse is not in this volume, which essentially demonstrates Davis's weaknesses as much as his strengths as a poet. As the title indicated, nationalist ballads are very numerous within its pages, but it also includes love poems, poems on European themes and a few about the muses of poetry.³⁴ Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the book is that many of its nationalist ballads feature the female representation of Ireland as 'Erin', not as the traditional figure of a weeping old woman, but as a defiant, energetic and self-confident young woman capable of overcoming great hardship and destined to triumph. In this respect, Davis's poems in this collection are probably the best verbal equivalent of the many genuinely artistic political cartoons being published at the time in Irish newspapers by contemporary Irish artists such as John Fergus O'Hea and John D. Reigh, who represented the figure of 'Erin' in very similar terms.³⁵

During 1888 and 1889, Davis occasionally spoke before various Irish literary societies such as the Young Ireland Society in Cork, the Southwark Irish Literary Society in London and the Pan-Celtic Literary Society in Dublin.³⁶ In late 1889, the Pan-Celtic Literary Society (whose members included Douglas Hyde, Katherine Tynan and other figures of the Anglo-Irish literary movement) published a volume of poetry by its members that includes two new poems by Davis, including a fine tribute to Walt Whitman.³⁷ By that time, however, Davis's name had again become the subject of political controversy owing to claims of Richard Pigott (whom Davis

knew well since his days with the *Shamrock*) that Davis could supply information to the Special Commission to prove Parnell's complicity in the Phoenix Park murders. Davis immediately denied Pigott's claims publicly, and thereafter played a significant role in exposing Pigott by informing Michael Davitt of Pigott's underhanded doings on the continent during the mid-1880s.³⁸ This negative publicity surrounding Davis, arising from his association with Pigott, may explain why he was let go by the *Nation* in early 1890, although it is more probable that this was simply due to that paper's serious financial difficulties: it ultimately folded in July 1891 on merging with the *Irish Catholic*. After spending a short time virtually penniless in the lodgings of a friend, John Doyle, T.C. and wine merchant, at 2 Wexford Street, Dublin, Davis decided to return home to Cork where, surrounded by old friends and family, he went on a short and informal lecture tour from Cork city along the towns and villages of the south-western coast of Cork, ending in Skibbereen.³⁹ Evidently not happy with his prospects in Ireland, Davis returned to Paris in October 1890, but failed to find work and decided not long thereafter to make the dramatic step of leaving permanently for the United States.⁴⁰

Unfortunately, only very limited information is available regarding Eugene Davis's life in America. According to D. J. O'Donoghue, he settled initially in Chicago 'where his contributions to the Chicago *Citizen* and other Irish-American papers made his name very well known.'⁴¹ An obituary in the Skibbereen *Eagle* indicates that, sometime during the mid-1890s, he secured some editorial position with an Irish-American paper (possibly the Boston *Pilot*),⁴² settled in Brooklyn, New York, and was preparing to publish a novel.⁴³ He contributed poet-

ry to various American literary magazines, appears to have married into the family of the Meath-born, popular American poet, Charles Graham Halpine (1823-68),⁴⁴ and had two daughters, but then died suddenly in his Brooklyn home on 25 November 1897. His death at the age of forty came as a complete surprise to relatives and friends, as he had always been a man of a robust health and powerful build.

LEGACY

As he lived outside Ireland for most of his adult life and was remembered in Ireland primarily for his earliest work under the pseudonym of 'Owen Roe', it is not surprising that Davis's name was quickly forgotten in this country, and the Irish national press did little more than report his death.⁴⁵ In addition, despite the Boston *Pilot's* claim that he would 'long be remembered as a patriot, poet and an excellent citizen,'⁴⁶ Davis was also quickly forgotten in Irish-America. What, therefore, can be said, in conclusion, regarding the life, poetry and writings of Eugene Davis? As Desmond Ryan once noted, he was certainly 'an able, but erratic man'.⁴⁷ Considered by T. D. Sullivan as 'a poet of conspicuous merit',⁴⁸ at his best, Eugene Davis could write inspired poetry and erudite and witty prose on diverse themes relating to his life experiences, Irish and continental history, literature, poetry, politics or religion. Always as much a journalist as a poet, he could not reasonably be described as having a particularly original or brilliant poetic talent, as demonstrated by his frequent reliance upon stock romantic phrases and nationalist imagery. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, there is much that is appealing and fascinating in Davis's life story and literary output, some of which deserves to be republished or better known. He was an eclectic, romantic-republican figure with a

passionate voice, who was unlikely to achieve much recognition at a time when the Irish literary world was composed almost entirely of a small Anglo-Irish coterie in upper-middle-class Dublin, with one eye always turned towards London and generally disdainful of that Catholic middle class community of which Davis was a part, whose sensibilities he essentially shared and to which he gave a voice. Certainly, he was one of the more notable literary figures to emerge from Cork during his lifetime and, in this respect, it is not surprising that it was only in the Cork press that his death was much lamented. When he died, the Skibbereen *Eagle* declared that ‘Ireland has lost her sweetest singer’ and published a poem, ‘To the Memory of Eugene Davis’, which demonstrated the degree to which he was considered something of a local hero.⁴⁹ Indeed, in 1887, the first G.A.A. club ever established in Clonakilty was named the ‘Eugene Davis Branch’ in recognition of one of the town’s most notable sons.⁵⁰ Similarly, the *Cork Examiner* declared upon his death that he was much loved and widely read by the paper’s readers in county Cork. In addition, it argued that, had he not died prematurely, Eugene Davis would probably have eventually achieved great fame.⁵¹ Whether or not this is true, there seems to be much reason why the contribution to Irish literature of this obscure Clonakilty poet and writer does not deserve to be completely forgotten.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 From 1876–90, Davis contributed on a regular basis to Irish newspapers such as the *Shamrock*, *Irishman*, *Nation*, *United Ireland*, *Young Ireland*, *Irish Catholic* and *Cork Examiner*. Up until 1882, these invariably appeared under the pseudonym ‘Owen Roe’. Thereafter, he wrote mostly under his own name or

initials, but occasionally used pseudonyms such as ‘Cairn Tuathal’, ‘Carberiensis’, ‘Fontenoy’, ‘Viator’ and ‘Sivad’; see D. J. O’Donoghue’s *Poets of Ireland*, 1 (Dublin, 1912), p. 99.

2 *Eagle and Cork County Advertiser*, 11 Dec. 1897 (testimonial to Eugene Davis, schoolteacher and a relation of the subject of the present paper). This article provides a brief history of the schoolteachers in Davis’s family and notes that some of them had been tutors to the Protestant gentry’s sons.

3 Rev. W. Holland, *History of west Cork* (Skibbereen, 1949), pp. 330–1.

4 Eugene’s stepbrother, Fr. Charles Davis (1829–92), parish priest of Rath and Islands, became well known during the 1880s for his innovative work in promoting the fishing industry in Baltimore, Co. Cork; see Seamus Fitzgerald, *Mackerel and the making of Baltimore County Cork* (Maynooth, 1999). Eugene’s uncle, Fr Charles Davis (1802–69), had been a parish priest in Grenagh. Eugene’s mother, Ellen Murphy, was the second wife of John Davis (baptismal record for Eugene Davis). His first wife, Francesca, bore him four children, Charles, Angela, who married a New York banker, Frank, a schoolteacher, and Fanny, who married into the O’Shea family that owned a mill and the post-office in Skibbereen; see family tree of Fr Charles Davis, courtesy of Tim Cadogan, Cork County Library; Holland, *History of west Cork*, pp. 330–1.

5 *Eagle and Cork County Advertiser*, 1 Jan. 1898.

6 *Eagle and Cork County Advertiser*, 1 Jan. 1898 (republished extracts from *Cork Examiner*)

7 The *Shamrock: a national weekly journal of Irish history, literature and arts* was published between 1866 and 1922 and was of some note as a literary magazine during the late nineteenth century, but its significance from a literary standpoint had declined greatly by the 1900s; see Tom Clyde, *Irish literary magazines* (Dublin, 2003), pp. 131–2.

8 These were Samuel Ferguson, William Drennan, Fr Francis Mahony, J. J. Callanan, Samuel Lover, Jonathan Swift, Oliver Goldsmith, Gerald Griffin, John Keegan, Thomas Parnell, Sheridan Knowles, Thomas Davis, Thomas D'Arcy McGee, Michael Doheny, John D. Frazer, Thomas Devin Reilly, Thomas Moore, Joseph Brennan, Joseph O'Leary, James Clarence Mangan, Fr J. J. Murphy, J. K. Casey, Robert Dwyer Joyce, Edward Walsh, Richard D'Alton Williams, J. F. O'Donnell, C. G. Halpine, Charles P. O'Connor, John Savage, John Boyle O'Reilly, Charles Kickham, Mary Jane O'Donovan Rossa, Ellen Fitzsimon, Thomas Dermody, Aubrey de Vere, Michael Hogan, Francis Davis, Elizabeth W. Varian and Charles Gavan Duffy. In the final article on Duffy, Davis noted that he also intended writing about William Allingham, T. C. Irwin, William Collins, Mary Downing, 'Speranza', 'Eva' and D. F. McCarthy, among others, but unfortunately the series was being brought to a close.

9 The fourth series, entitled 'Contemporary Irish Celebrities', ran in the *Shamrock* from the winter of 1879 until the spring of 1880.

10 Obituary of Eugene Davis, *Weekly Freeman*, 1 Jan. 1898.

11 Apart from M. F. Ó Donnchú's *Leo* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1981), which was based largely upon Davis's work, this book is the only critical study of Casey's poems to date. It was completed at the request of Casey's widow, and consists of a critical biography and a large collection of Casey's poems, including very many previously unpublished ones.

12 'Owen Roe' (Eugene Davis) ed. *Reliques of John K. Casey, Leo* (Dublin, 1878), pp. 1-2, 48.

13 *ibid.*, p. 47.

14 This was republished in Eugene Davis, *A vision of Ireland and other poems* (Dublin, 1889), pp. 64-5, which contains sixty-six poems published between 1887-89, with many pieces in this style. Many more in the same style can be found among the scores of poems Davis' contributed to the *Shamrock*

between 1876-80 under the pseudonym 'Owen Roe' that were never collected in book form.

15 'An Easter Garland: woven by Owen Roe', *Shamrock*, 14 Apr. 1877 (features three original poems and a translation of Beranger). Davis translated four poems by Korner (*Shamrock*, 9 June and 6 July 1878), one by Schiller, 'The Chevalier of Habsburg', *Shamrock*, 11 May 1878, and at least one verse by de Musset (*Shamrock*, 6 Jan. 1877). He also translated verse by Horace (which he entitled 'To The Lyre', *Shamrock*, 16 Sept. 1876) and published two long poems, 'Ode to the Milesians' (30 Aug. 1879) and 'The Chant of Vengeance' (23 Aug. 1879), which were described as being 'from the Gaelic' but have the appearance of being simply the product of his own literary imagination. It is unknown whether Davis knew Irish. In *Souvenir of Irish footprints over Europe* (Dublin, 1889), p. 22-3, he mentions that he 'saw' Gaelic manuscripts in the Brussels Royal Library.

16 Good examples are 'Maureen Dhu O'Hay', *Shamrock*, 19 Oct. 1879, 'The Mystery of the Grave', *Shamrock*, 3 Feb. 1877 or 'An Idyll of the South', originally published in the *Nation* in 1888 and reproduced in *A vision of Ireland and other poems* (Dublin, 1889), pp. 81-4.

17 Poems of Davis's on the theme of exile can be found in the *Shamrock*, 25 Dec. 1876, 19 May 1877, 3 Nov. 1877, 17 Mar. 1879 and in *A vision of Ireland* (most notably 'The Exile's Keepsakes', pp. 122-3).

18 These sentiments inspired an obscure Irish poet, Patrick O'Connor McLaughlin, to reply in verse in the following issue of the *Shamrock* in praise of Davis's talents and religiosity: 'thy longing, O brother Poet – thy lines would not depart, but fearless and never shuddering, stay singing within my heart; for the Bard is the Priest of Nature, and Ambassador to the heart, Of man, and the words he utters, Like Our Lord's, shall ne'er depart.'

19 This was published in the *Shamrock* on 30 Dec. 1876.

20 ‘The Roman Centurion’ appeared in the *Shamrock* on 1 Mar. 1879. ‘An Old Venetian Ballad’ and ‘Song of the Veteran Republican’ can be found in *A vision of Ireland and other poems* (Dublin, 1889). Similar sensibilities are also evident in ‘The Admiral Villaret’, which is in the same volume and depicts the revolutionary, republican fervour of an Irish officer in the French army ready to set sail for Bantry Bay in 1796.

21 These were ‘L’Irlande’, *Nouvelle Revue*, 38 (Jan.-Feb. 1886), pp. 250-64; ‘La question d’Irlande’, *Nouvelle Revue*, 40 (May-June 1886), pp. 496-513; ‘Plaidoyer pour L’Irlande’, *Nouvelle Revue*, 48 (Sept.-Oct. 1887), pp. 673-87. For Davis’s association with Parisian radicals during the 1880s see Janick Julienne, ‘La question irlandaise en France de 1860 a 1890’ (Ph.D., University of Paris VII, 1997), esp. pp. 331-40, 400-3.

22 ‘A Love Lay’ was republished in *A vision of Ireland and other poems* (Dublin, 1889), pp. 29-30. On Catulle Mendès (1841-1909) see W. J. Robertson, *A century of French verse* (London, 1895), pp. 243-5 or A. E. Carter, *The idea of decadence in French literature 1830-1900* (Toronto, 1958), *passim*.

23 John Devoy, *Recollections of an Irish rebel* (New York, 1929), p. 277.

24 Mark Ryan, *Fenian memories* (Dublin, 1945), p. 92 This employment was evidently brought about through his friendship with Patrick Egan, the Land League treasurer in exile in Paris, with whom he had organized a small St Patrick’s Day celebration in Paris the previous year; *Irishman*, 26 Mar. 1881.

25 These were published in the *Irishman* from February to June 1882 and the *Weekly Freeman* from October 1883 to February 1884. According to John Devoy, as Stephens’s secretary, Davis also began publishing various articles of his own under Stephens’s name, including one that attracted much publicity in the *Contemporary Review* in May 1884 on ‘Ireland and the Franchise Bill’. See ‘Personating James Stephens’ and ‘Stephens and his “secretary”’, *Irish Nation* (New York), 17 May and 21 June 1884; Desmond Ryan, *The Fenian Chief:*

a biography of James Stephens (Dublin, 1967), pp. 308-10. Whether these claims were true is unknown, but it is very likely that Stephens did not write the *Contemporary Review* article. Michael Davitt suspected that Richard Pigott, formerly the editor of the *Irishman* and an associate of Davis’s, was the author.

26 For Tevis’s and Casey’s activities see Christy Campbell, *Fenian fire* (London, 2002) and Christy Campbell, *The Maharajah’s box* (London, 2000).

27 Julienne, ‘La question irlandaise’ pp. 331-8.

28 Ryan, *Fenian memories* p.93.

29 This poem, as well as his poems upon Pisa, Bruges and Venice, was later published in *A vision of Ireland and other poems* (Dublin, 1889).

30 Eugene Davis, *Souvenirs of Irish footprints over Europe* (Dublin, 1889), pp. 10-1.

31 *ibid.*, p. 17.

32 Julienne, ‘La question irlandaise’ pp. 339-43. This paper was the project of General James Dyer MacAdaras, a Frenchman of Irish descent who desired Davis to be its editor. MacAdaras later became a moderate republican member of the French parliament.

33 Some works of reference have mentioned another book of Davis’s poetry, entitled *The poetical works of Eugene Davis* (Dublin, 1889), but this is actually the exact same publication which was, inexplicably, issued in very few numbers under a different title.

34 Probably Davis’s most imaginative poem on the theme of the ‘muses’ was ‘The Golden Gate’, published under the pseudonym of ‘Owen Roe’ in the *Shamrock*, 16 Jan. 1879

35 For these political cartoons and their artistic merits see L. P. Curtis, *Images of Erin in the age of Parnell* (National Library of Ireland, 2000).

36 W. P. Ryan, *The Irish literary revival* (London, 1894, reprinted 1972), pp. 30, 45, 48-9.

- 37 Andrew Russell St. Ritsh (ed.) *Lays and lyrics of the Pan-Celtic Society* (Dublin, 1889), pp. 73-4, 42-4.
- 38 Ryan, *The Fenian Chief* (Dublin, 1967), p. 309.
- 39 *Eagle and Cork County Advertiser*, 1 Jan. 1898 (obituary).
- 40 According to W. Stapleton, 'Eugene Davis: the Cork poet and journalist', *Cork Examiner*, 2 Jan. 1937, the last poem of Davis's published in Ireland prior to his emigration was one written celebrating the bicentenary of the Siege of Limerick
- 41 O'Donoghue, *Poets of Ireland*, 1, p. 99.
- 42 As this paid more tributes to him after his death than any other Irish-American paper, he was quite possibly closely associated with it. On 25 Dec. 1897, the *Boston Pilot* declared that 'the group of well known Irish authors in the United States has been lessened by the death of Eugene Davis . . . [who] will long be remembered as a patriot, poet and an excellent citizen.'
- 43 *Eagle and Cork County Advertiser*, 1 Jan. 1898 (obituary).
- 44 According to an article on Davis by W. Stapleton in the *Cork Examiner*, 2 Jan. 1937 (written at the request of an Irish-American who had discovered Davis's poetry in various American literary magazines and wanted to know more about him), Davis married the widow of C. G. Halpine, by whom he had two children. This, however, is highly unlikely, as Halpine's widow, Elizabeth, would have been in her sixties by the 1890s. Quite possibly Davis married a daughter of Halpine.
- Obituaries indicate that a 'young wife' and two children survived him.
- 45 See, for example, the obituary in the *Weekly Freeman*, 1 Jan. 1898.
- 46 *Boston Pilot*, 25 Dec. 1897.
- 47 Ryan, *Fenian Chief*, p. 309.
- 48 Quotation from obituary in *Eagle and Cork County Advertiser*, 1 Jan. 1898
- 49 *Eagle and Cork County Advertiser*, 1 Jan. 1898. The poem, published anonymously, went as follows: 'Poetic soul! For ever gone; / No more we'll hear the poet's song; / No more we'll read the stirring lines; / The smoothly flowing dulcet rhymes – / The dash that ever marked your pen, / Distinguished you from other men, / On through each patriotic line, / Displaying power and thought sublime. / Full many and many a year ago, / we read your lines, poor Owen Roe! / They ever, too, right welcome came, / we knew their worth when o'er your name. / That, that alone assurance brought, / with true poetic fire they're fraught, / tho' penned within a foreign land, / they ever bore an *Irish brand*. / You loved the land that gave you birth, / tho' now you sleep in other earth, / yet freedom's banner waves on high, / beneath a blue Columbian sky, / and welcomes you as one who fought, / for Ireland's cause – her freedom sought, / who would not be proud England's slave, / befits a place in Freedom's grave.'
- 50 Tom Lyons, *The Clonakilty G.A.A. 1887-1987* (Cork, 1987), chapter 1.
- 51 *Eagle and Cork County Advertiser*, 1 Jan. 1898 (republished extract from *Cork Examiner*).