Monuments, power and contested space— the iconography of Sackville Street (O'Connell Street) before Independence (1922)

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the iconography of Dublin's central thoroughfare, O'Connell Street, formerly Sackville Street, as it evolved in the decades before Independence. Theoretically informed by recent developments in the fields of cultural and historical geography, it makes use of metaphors such as the city as text and the iconography of landscape. The paper focuses in particular on the role of public statuary in articulating issues of cultural and political identity in a city of contested space. The monuments erected on this street during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries capture in microcosm broader trends in public statuary whereby monuments were erected to express loyalty to Empire on the one hand and opposition to such imperial rule on the other. It is argued that these public statues provide the geographer with an important lens through which to explore the processes at work in shaping the city and which give tangible expression to often competing ideologies. A following paper will chart the iconography of O'Connell Street in the decades after 1922.

Key index words: iconography, public statues, Sackville Street.

Introduction

Geographers have long been concerned with the study of landscape in all of its various forms, from the cultural to the physical, the rural to the urban. Within the sub-field of cultural geography it is possible to trace a path from the descriptive analysis of material cultural artefacts of the Berkeley School (Sauer, 1925) in the inter-war period, through to studies of cities in their cultural context of the late 1980s and 1990s. Traditionally, cultural geography maintained an interest in the material artifacts evident in the landscape and took the end-point of its inquiries to lie in accounts of the obvious, tangible, countable and mappable phenomena present to the senses of the geographical researcher. This resulted in "endless studies of house-types, field patterns, log-cabin construction methods, and place-imagery in music", which were "antiquarian, particularistic and socially irrelevant" (Mitchell, 2000: xiv). In the 1980s however the traditional concepts of culture and landscape came in for sustained criticism and out of the intellectual ferment which followed emerged a 'new cultural geography'.

Drawing on both literary theory and cultural studies, many contemporary cultural and historical geographers have begun to examine the meanings assigned *to* the urban landscape. Out of the critique of Sauer's superorganic conception of culture has emerged a more sociological definition which takes as its focus the social, political and economic relationships that govern our lives. Culture has come to be understood as "a way of life— encompassing ideas, attitudes, languages, practices, institutions and structures of power— and a whole range of cultural practices: artistic forms, texts, canons, architecture, mass-produced commodities and so forth" (Nelson *et al.*, 1992: 5). While the continued evolution of cultural geography has placed the sub-field at the centre of theoretical developments in the discipline, it has also had

other implications, most especially in terms of lessening the distinction between historical and cultural geography. Contemporary historical geography also reflects the theoretical shifts that have taken place in the humanities and social sciences. Much recent work reveals a preoccupation with questions of power and meaning, while acknowledging the situated nature of research and the political nature of interpretation (see Graham and Nash, 2000).

Ultimately, a more interpretative approach to the study of the urban cultural landscape has emerged and cities have come to be approached through the guise of a range of metaphors such as landscape as text (Duncan and Duncan, 1988; Duncan, 1990; Natter and Jones, 1993) and the iconography of landscape (Daniels and Cosgrove, 1988; Daniels, 1993). These post-structuralist approaches have ensured that the cultural landscape is now read as "a complex social construction contested along the multiple and overlapping axes of social differentiation" (Graham, 1997: 3). However, it is important to note that the development of a so-called "new cultural geography" has also have also created tensions in highlighting a division between 'old' and 'new' (see Price and Lewis, 1993; Cosgrove, 1993; Duncan, 1993 and 1994; Jackson, 1989; 1993).

While the urban landscape can be read as a complex, contested and symbolic power system (Cosgrove, 1989), it is important to recognise that some urban landscapes are more overtly symbolic than others, depending on the context in which they are shaped. The city that forms the focus of this paper is the product of a turbulent political situation which pivots around the transition from the colonial to the post-colonial. Its iconography bespeaks a legacy of colonial rule and of efforts to rewrite and challenge that heritage. It highlights the fact that landscapes are not created in a void. Rather their form and symbolism is often heavily influenced by the circumstances in which they are shaped. This finds expression in the plan around which the city is structured, the names that are given to the streets, the buildings which have not just been erected for functional purposes, but have an inherent symbolic element and finally in the monuments that line the public thoroughfares. It is with the last of these that this paper is chiefly concerned.

Informed by these developments in contemporary cultural and historical geography which have emphasised questions of power and meaning, this paper argues that public statues provide the geographer with an important lens through which to explore the processes at work in shaping the city and which give tangible expression to often competing ideologies.

More specifically it is suggested that the evolving iconography of Sackville Street in the decades before Independence captures in microcosm broader trends in public statuary in the city whereby 'nationalist monuments' were erected in prominent public locations and in opposition to those which had been unveiled in less conspicuous locations dedicated to figures associated with British rule. This in turn points on the one hand to the power of Dublin Corporation, which, since 1840 had become overwhelmingly nationalist in complexion, and on the other to the apparent impotence of the Dublin Castle administration in attempting to alter this course. It is contended that the Corporation, together with various *ad hoc* committees, effectively created a nationalist monumental landscape in the heart of late-nineteenth century Dublin, which stood in an uneasy juxtaposition with the earlier unveiled monuments of empire.

Public statues and the iconography of the city

Significant aspects of the iconography of any city are the monuments which line its streets and dot its squares. Like street names, city plans, urban design initiatives and public

buildings, public statues are an important source "for unraveling the geographies of political and cultural identity especially as they relate to conceptions of national identity," imposing as they do the ideals and aspirations that they represent on the public consciousness in a way that other cultural signifiers cannot (Johnson, 1995: 52). This was particularly true of mid-nineteenth century Europe when public statues took on special significance as a means of celebrating a nation's past. Until the outbreak of World War I, statues served as a symbolic device of enormous popularity. Europe's imperial powers were gripped by a frenzy of monument building or 'statumania'. In London, Paris and across Germany the capacity of the seemingly innocuous public statue to engage with popular public opinion, to shape ideals and political values and to contribute to the nation-building process, was made patently clear. So too, however, was their role in the expression of dissent and contrary ideals to established regimes which often led to the creation of urban landscapes of contested space. Just as monuments were used to garner popular support they also acted as focal points for expressions of dissent. Lerner captures their symbolic essence when he observes that, "Embedded within the monument is a particular way of staging politics that is centred on the spectacle or visual display. With its emphasis on representing human forms, the monument reveals two important terrains upon which political power and the form of the nation rest: the spectacle of politics and the public display of the body" (Lerner, 1993: 178).

With the upsurge of interest in the production of the symbolic landscape it is not surprising that statues should come under the geographical microscope. Pioneering papers by Johnson, (1994 and 1995), Heffernan, (1995), Withers (1996), Peet, (1996), Osborne (1998) and Cosgrove and Atkinson, (1998) have illustrated that monuments are bound up with the politics of power, memory and cultural identity. The work of these geographers has built on a tradition established by historians, ethnographers and anthropologists and has contributed directly to a rejuvenated cultural geography. Within this context, the geography and iconography of public statues, the individual or event that they commemorate and the choreography of events surrounding their erection and unveiling, as well as their subsequent life, have merited exploration. Figure 1 below illustrates the 'life cycle' of a public monument and provides a useful framework around which to base an interpretation of its meaning.

Dublin's monumental landscape

Public monuments have been erected in Dublin since 1701 when a bronze equestrian statue in honour of King William III was unveiled on College Green. This was the first of a number of statues dedicated to members of the British monarchy, among them Kings George I and II, as well as leading members of the British military establishment, such as the Duke of Wellington and Admiral Nelson (see Whelan, forthcoming). By the mid-nineteenth century however it was clear that the monumental landscape was one-sided one, from which figures of Irish politics and culture were excluded (see Murphy, 1994). As was noted in the *Dublin University Magazine*—

> *"Dublin is connected with Irish patriotism only by the scaffold and the gallows. Statue and column do indeed rise there, but not to honour the sons of the soil. The public idols are foreign potentates and foreign heroes... No monument exists to which the gaze of the young Irish children can be directed, while their fathers tell them, 'This was to the glory of your countrymen'"*
>
> (*Dublin University Magazine*, March 1856:321).

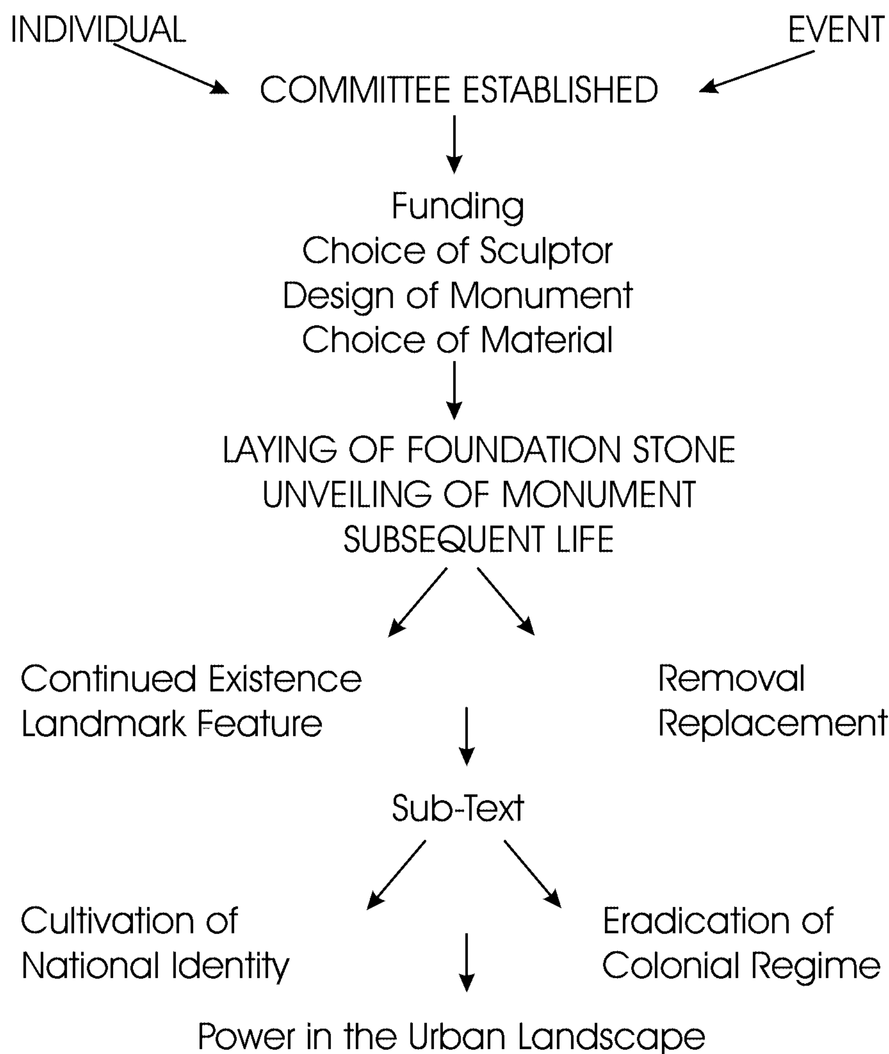

Figure 1: The lifecycle of a monument.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, a significant shift began to occur which would redress this imbalance when statues were erected to Edmund Burke and Oliver Goldsmith at the entrance to Trinity College and to Thomas Moore at College Green. As the decades passed, however, statues were unveiled in commemoration of individuals who had played leading roles in the various and oftentimes contentious strands of Irish nationalist politics. Hence, the erection of monuments dedicated to Daniel O'Connell and Charles Stewart Parnell, both of whom had been to the fore of constitutional politics during the nineteenth century. Equally, men who had led sections of the population in violent revolt and sought the creation of an independent Irish republic were honoured, among them William Smith O'Brien.

By 1922 the contested nature of Dublin's urban landscape stemmed from both a broad-based 'British-Irish' opposition, as well as from the various internal discourses of Irish

nationalism. This was demonstrated most especially at the close of the century in the fractious debate surrounding the erection of a monument to Parnell in 1899, before the monument dedicated to Wolfe Tone, for which the foundation stone had been laid in 1898, had been completed. Statues dedicated to a number of philanthropic and apolitical figures were also erected on the streets of the city in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. These statues commemorated 'neutral' figures who were honoured not for any overt political reasons but as a testament to their benevolence or particular achievements. Hence, the commemoration of Lord Ardilaun in St Stephen's Green for his role in laying out the green as a public park in 1880, or Benjamin Lee Guinness at St Patrick's Cathedral for his work in facilitating the nineteenth century restoration of that building.

Sackville Street and the politics of public statuary

In exploring the symbolic geography of Dublin before Independence and the role of public monuments in shaping the urban cultural landscape, the iconography of one street in particular, O'Connell Street, formerly Sackville Street, merits close examination. First laid out as Drogheda Street after Henry Moore, Earl of Drogheda, it was redeveloped in the 1740s by Luke Gardiner, a member of one of the most important land-owning families north of the river Liffey. One of his greatest achievements was the creation of Gardiner's Mall, a tree-planted walk 48 feet wide which occupied the centre of Sackville Street and which set the scale for what is now central Dublin (Craig, 1980: 104). The street, which was named after Lionel Cranfield Sackville, Duke of Dorset and Lord Lieutenant in Ireland from 1731-37 and again from 1751-55, soon became a fashionable location where the Lords and Gentry of Ireland who sat in one or other of the Houses of Parliament had their city mansions. The street was later extended by the Wide Streets Commissioners in the 1780s when Lower Sackville Street was created and Carlisle Bridge (later O'Connell Bridge) was constructed. These developments facilitated ease of access from the north side of the city to the House of Parliament and Trinity College on the south side.

Over the following decades, the iconography of Sackville Street continued to evolve in tandem with the political and cultural context of the nineteenth century city. The erection of a pillar dedicated to Lord Nelson in 1809 served as a striking symbol of Ireland's links with the British Empire. In the latter half of the century however, monuments were erected to commemorate Daniel O'Connell, Sir John Gray and Father Theobald Mathew, while a monument dedicated to William Smith O'Brien was unveiled nearby at the apex of D'Olier Street (see Figure 2). This echoed a broader trend in the city whereby figures of Irish nationalism came to occupy dominant positions on the cultural landscape at the expense of their British counterparts who were accordingly afforded more isolated locations on the outskirts of the city, for example in the Phoenix Park.

Commemorating a military hero: Nelson's Pillar

A monument to a hero of the Empire of which Dublin was the second city, Nelson's Pillar was erected in 1809 in the aftermath of the admiral's victory at the Battle of Trafalgar on 21st October 1805 (Henchy, 1948; Bolger and Share, 1966). This news had been greeted with much rejoicing when it eventually reached Dublin on 8th November. Although Nelson (1758-1805) lost his life in the battle, his victory at Trafalgar, which saw the crushing of the French and Spanish fleets, ensured that Napoleon's blockade came to an end and that trade between

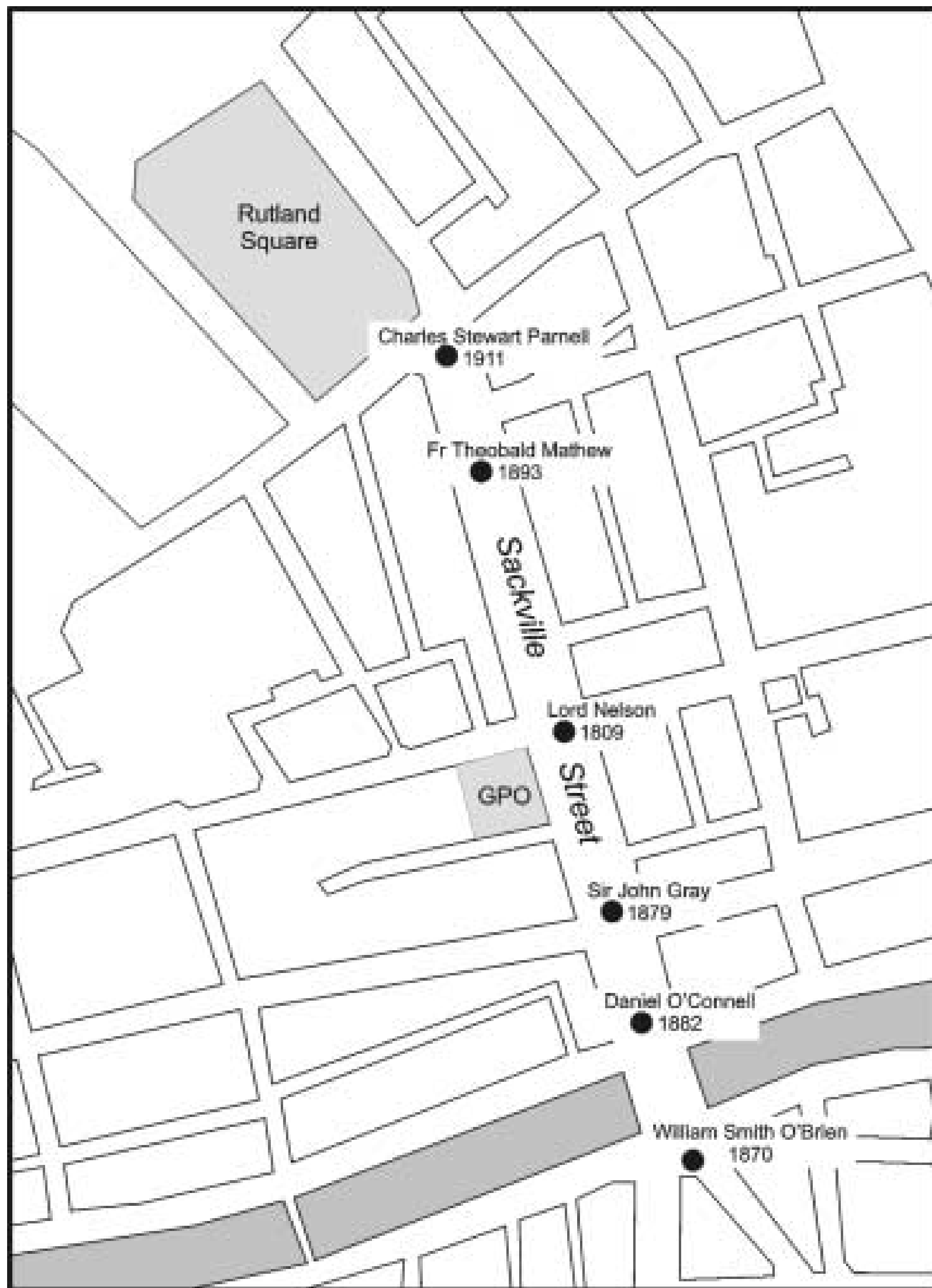

Figure 2: Public monuments on Sackville Street in 1922.

the British Isles and the Continent could resume. With the news of Nelson's victory arose the issue of commemorating him in the city. A committee was appointed on 28th November, 1805 and its members immediately set about gathering funds to pay for the monument and choosing an appropriate site. Some favoured a maritime location either at the Liffey side or at Howth Head, where it could stand by the sea as a landmark for sailors. Others argued in favour of a site in the centre of the city on Sackville Street where it would be high enough to ensure that the figure of Nelson could look out onto the sea from his lofty perch (Henchy, 1948: 55) The Sackville Street location eventually won out and the foundation stone was laid on 15th February 1808, an appropriate date which marked the anniversary of the Battle of Cape Vincent in 1797, another of Nelson's battle victories. *The Freeman's Journal* offers an account of the proceedings, which began by congratulating—

> *"Our country, but more particularly the metropolis on the arrival of a period, which, while it commemorates the achievements of a great naval commander, fully evinces that the Irish people entertain as lively a sense as their fellow subjects, of the gratitude they owe to the memory of Lord Nelson"*
>
> (*The Freeman's Journal,* 16th February 1808).

On the day that the foundation stone was laid the streets of the city were lined with troops from Dublin Castle to Sackville Street and the grand procession started at the Royal Exchange—

> *"The streets were lined with military all the way up to the Rotunda, and at half past twelve o'clock, horse yeomanry, foot soldiers, sailors with flags, the Marine boys, the Hibernian School boys, the Sea Fencibles, and a host of officers of the navy and Army in uniform, formed into line, and together with the subscribers to the memorial, and a long string of private carriages, wended their way to Sackville Street. The Lord Lieutenant and the Duchess of Richmond drove the State coach, drawn by six "of the most beautiful horses," and brought up the rear of the procession, the members of the committee being distinguished in the centre of it by having white wands in their hands"*
>
> (*The Irish Builder*, 30th June 1923: 497).

The ceremony was led by the Lord Lieutenant, the Duke of Richmond, who was dressed in the uniform of a General and accompanied by his wife. He laid the foundation stone, and inserted a brass plate in the stone with the inscription—

> *"By the Blessing of Almighty GOD, To commemorate the Transcendent Heroic Achievements of the Right Honourable HORATIO LORD VISCOUNT NELSON, Duke of Bronti, in Sicily, Vice-Admiral of the White Squadron of His Majesty's Fleet, Who fell Gloriously in the Battle off CAPE TRAFALGAR, on the 21st day of October, 1805; when he obtained for his Country A VICTORY over the COMBINED FLEET OF FRANCE AND SPAIN, unparalleled in Naval History; This first STONE of a Triumphal PILLAR was laid BY HIS GRACE, CHARLES DUKE OF RICHMOND and LENNOX, Lord Lieutenant General and General Governor of Ireland, on the 15th Day of February, in the year of our Lord, 1808, and in the 48th Year of the Reign of our most GRACIOUS SOVEREIGN, GEORGE THE THIRD, in presence of the Committee, appointed by the Subscribers for erecting this monument".*

Once the stone was laid in position three volleys were fired by the yeomanry, followed by a discharge of artillery after which all present gave three cheers while the bands played 'Rule Britannia' (*The Freeman's Journal,* 16th February 1808).

Figure 3: Nelson's Pillar, Sackville Street.

With the foundation stone in place the business of designing the monument got underway. The commission was awarded to William Wilkins, although it is thought that Francis Johnston, the architect of the General Post Office, also had a role in designing the pillar (see *The Irish Builder*, 7th June 1930: 308 and 28th December 1946: 856). It took the form of a Doric column 134 ft high (40.8 metres) upon which was placed a 13 foot (4 metre) statue of Nelson by Thomas Kirk, sculpted in Portland stone (figure 3). The names and dates of Nelson's great victories were inscribed on the four sides of the pillar, while a stone sarcophagus was placed on the southern side of the pedestal, over the Trafalgar panel. The entrance was positioned to the west side of the monument, approached by a flight of steps which brought the visitor beneath the street level under the pillar to where the spiral stairs of 168 steps commenced. The monument was eventually unveiled a year later on 21st October 1809, the anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar.

Once erected on the city's central thoroughfare, the Nelson monument evoked much comment. A number of contemporary commentators rejected the monument on political grounds, as evident in a paragraph published in *The Irish Magazine* of September 1809—

> *"English domination and trade may be extended, and English glory perpetuated, but an Irish mind has no substantial reasons for thinking from the history of our connexion that our prosperity or our independence will be more attended to, by our masters than if we were actually impeding the victories, which our valour have personally effected... We have changed our gentry for soldiers, and our independence has been wrested from us, not by the arms of France, but by the gold of England. The statue of Nelson records the glory of a mistress and the transformation of our senate into a discount office".*

Others pointed to the aesthetic shortcomings of the pillar, arguing that—

> *"Its vast unsightly pedestal is nothing better than a quarry of cut stone, and the clumsy shaft is divested of either base, or what could properly be called a capital... it not only obtrudes its blemishes on every passenger, but actually spoils and blocks up our finest street, and literally darkens the two other streets opposite to it"*
>
> (Warburton, Whitelaw and Walsh, 1818: 1100).

In the second half of the nineteenth century calls mounted for the removal of the monument on the grounds that it constituted a traffic obstruction as reflected in 'A Bright idea' published in *The Irish Builder* in 1876—

Not in the centre of our city, Where the lines of traffic meet-
In the very path of commerce, Blocking up a noble street,-
As a figure in a picture Disproportionately tall,
Seems to make its right surroundings Quite ridiculously small.
Place it where the roaring billows Dash upon the rocky shore,
Near where the ill-fated 'Vanguard' Shall be lifted 'never more!'
And perchance the British navy, Gazing on their mighty chief,
May, when overcome with - sorrow, In the ocean find relief!
Then once more I do entreat you- Leave the mighty passage free!
Take away the huge obstruction! Place the lighthouse near the sea!

(*The Irish Builder,* 15th June 1876: 179).

In 1876 Dublin Corporation considered the question of removal and it was suggested that the pillar be re-erected in one of the city's squares (*The Irish Builder*, 15th May 1876: 149), but the fact remained that the authority had no legal entitlement to remove the pillar as this power rested with the trustees. Shortly after, the issue re-emerged for consideration in the British House of Commons in 1891 when the Nelson's Pillar (Dublin) Bill was introduced by Thomas Sexton MP, a member of Dublin Corporation and Lord Mayor in 1888-9. The subject was hotly debated and although those in favour of the motion argued that the monument constituted a traffic obstruction, the political dimension of the issue was never far from the surface as became clear in the contentious debate that followed. The Attorney General for Ireland and the Unionist members for Ulster declared their opposition to the removal of the pillar. Macartney, a Unionist MP for South Antrim stated that—

"It is a monument to Lord Nelson which was erected by subscription to commemorate the valour of one of our distinguished sailors. It has been erected in one of the best thoroughfares of the City. Every Irishman ought to take an interest in its preservation and is entitled to intervene in any action that is calculated to injure it… I think that nothing more foolish or more futile has ever been proposed in any Private Bill brought before this House"

(House of Commons, Nelson's Pillar (Dublin) Bill, 13th February 1891).

He went on to declare that he had never felt any great personal respect for Dublin Corporation in a statement which suggested the proposal to remove the pillar may have been motivated by political bias and a reflection of the overwhelmingly nationalist composition of the municipal authority.

In response, Thomas Sexton, the MP for West Belfast, observed that—

"It is somewhat singular that a Bill which is promoted by the burgesses of the City of Dublin, in order to remove an obstruction, should find in its most active opponents two Members who represent the North of Ireland - South Antrim and South Belfast. Those who desire to remove the obstruction are those who see this pillar every day, while those who oppose the removal are gentlemen who are seldom in Dublin at all"

(House of Commons, Nelson's Pillar (Dublin) Bill, 13th February 1891).

Sexton was supported in the House by both T.D. Sullivan, the Dublin MP for College

Green and T.M. Healy the MP for North Longford. The former suggested that—

> *"The House cannot have failed to perceive the curious circumstance that the opposition to the proposal to improve the City of Dublin comes from a little knot of Northern Representatives. It is not a new thing to me to notice that a certain number of persons in the North of Ireland whose spokesmen are in this house, lose no opportunity of supporting everything that would tend to disfigure the City of Dublin, and of opposing everything that would beautify and improve it. No doubt it is a miserable and narrow-minded feeling, but I have seen it manifested over and over again".*

Healy meanwhile stated that—

> *"Although I am in favour of the Bill I sincerely hope that the House will reject it, for if an argument in favour of Home Rule is wanted it would be found in the refusal of the House to allow this matter to be inquired into by one of its own Committees".*

His views were supported by Webb, the MP for West Waterford who argued—

> *"It would be better if the Bill were thrown out, because it would at once show the people of Ireland that even in such a purely domestic question as this the wishes of the citizens of Dublin are not to be consulted... More time has been devoted to the consideration of such a paltry question than is sometimes devoted to questions upon which the happiness and fortunes of our fellow-subjects depend".*

Although the Bill was eventually passed by a majority of fourteen the trustees once again declared their unwillingness to see the monument disturbed and Nelson's Pillar remained in place and the issue then dropped from the political agenda until after the birth of the Irish Free State in 1922. Nevertheless, the pre-Independence debate surrounding Nelson's Pillar reveals the potent symbolism of one particular public monument. While it was often argued that the aesthetic shortcomings of the monument necessitated its removal, if only to another location in the city, the political argument that it was inappropriate to commemorate a hero of the British military establishment in the heart of the city was often articulated. The debates which took place in the British House of Commons and the chamber of Dublin Corporation itself, point to the nationalist composition of the municipal authority, which had increased since the 1840s, and to the role of that body in attempting to somehow nationalise Dublin's monumental landscape. This was only one element of a broader process however and in the decades which followed the authority sanctioned sites on Sackville Street for a range of monuments to prominent figures of Irish nationalist politics.

Contested identity in the monumental landscape: commemorating Daniel O'Connell

> *Hence, amidst Erin's stately columns rise*
> *The Liberator's monument, reaching the skies;*
> *And if 'tis asked, why Liberator named-*
> *For what great doings was the hero famed?*
> *We humbly hope good reasons we can bring*
> *To prove him in reality an Irish king...*
> *A fitting monument to him we praise;*
> *There, by the cloven column let him stand*
> *With purse of large dimensions in his hand* (MCG, 1865: 1)

The dearth of 'Irish' figures commemorated in the deposed capital by the mid-nineteenth century was addressed in the decades following the Famine and Sackville Street became the setting for a monument dedicated to the hero of the Catholic Emancipation movement of the first half of the nineteenth century, Daniel O'Connell (1775-1847). The laying of the foundation stone of the monument to O'Connell in August of 1864 marked the first stage in what was to become an imposing monument and a dominant political statement (Figure 4). The event was a momentous occasion in Dublin when the streets became thronged with people who set out to "do justice to the memory of O'Connell. A national benefactor… to him the Irish people owe the liberties they enjoy - and to him the Irish people will pay to day a tribute of gratitude for these liberties" (*The Freeman's Journal*, 8th August 1864).

The origins of this Sackville Street project date back to 1862 when the O'Connell Monument Committee was established following a public meeting in the Prince of Wales Hotel on Sackville Street. A fund had been opened prior to the meeting and was heavily backed in *The Freeman's Journal* and by members of the Catholic clergy. While subscriptions to their fund multiplied, the committee sought a site at the head of Sackville Street for the monument. This location, within view of the former Irish Parliament House, was granted. A central committee was then established which adopted the resolution that, "the monument would be to O'Connell in his whole character and career, from the cradle to the grave so as to embrace the whole nation" (*The Freeman's Journal*, 9th August 1864).

It is noteworthy that at the same time as the O'Connell project was proceeding, a competition was launched which deflected attention away from it and towards a new bridge to replace Carlisle Bridge (now O'Connell bridge). Among the design criteria for the bridge was the suggestion that it should provide "statuary to do honour to the memory of illustrious men" (*The Irish Builder*, 1st September 1862: 216-217). It is of some significance that the winning design, by the Belfast architect William Henry Lynn, had a memorial not of O'Connell but of Prince Albert as its centrepiece. The decision to widen the bridge however was postponed, and the statue of Prince Albert that was eventually erected in Dublin in a much less conspicuous location at the rear of Leinster House on Leinster Lawn in 1872 (see *The Irish Builder and Engineer*, 15th March, 1862 and 1st September 1862). With that, the proposal to erect the O'Connell monument gathered pace and the foundation stone was laid in August 1864. This occasion marked the first important stage in the erection of the monument and brought thousands on to the streets of the city.

> *"The sun shone out brilliantly and approvingly; the countless masses swayed to and fro… the roofs and windows of the public buildings and houses as far as the eye could reach, were filled with people. The ladies waved their handkerchiefs, the men cheered and waved their hats. Around the enclosure were gathered the magnificent banners of the trades, the bands playing their most stirring national airs. It was a tremendous scene"*
>
> (*The Freeman's Journal*, 9th August 1864: 7).

The crowds processed through the streets on a symbolic route-way from Merrion Square to Sackville Street, led by the committee member, Sir John Gray, and was addressed by the Lord Mayor, Peter Paul Mac Swiney. He observed that—

> *"The people of Ireland meet to-day to honour the man whose matchless genius won Emancipation, and whose fearless hand struck off the fetters whereby six millions of his countrymen were held in bondage in their own land… casting off the hopeless-*

Figure 4: The laying of the foundation stone for the O'Connell Monument.
Illustrated London News, 20th August 1864.

> *ness of despair, the Irish people to-day rise above their afflictions, and by their chosen representatives, their delegated deputies, and their myriad hosts, assemble in this metropolis, and signalise their return to the active duties of national existence, by rendering homage to the dead and by pledging themselves to the principles of him who still lives and reigns in the hearts of the emancipated people"*
>
> (*The Freeman's Journal,* 9th August 1864: 7).

With the foundation stone in place the business of commissioning a sculptor got underway. A competition was launched by Dublin Corporation which took over responsibility for the monument, and a selection committee was appointed. Prizes of £100, £60 and £40 were offered and plans were issued showing the scale of the site and descriptions of adjoining buildings. The committee, however, retained the prerogative not to award the commission if they so desired (*The Irish Builder*, 15th October 1863: 167). In December it passed a resolution that, "in as much as first class artists would not send in competing designs, the principle of competition for the design could not be advantageously adhered to" (*The Irish Builder*, 1st December 1863: 192). Gray was consequently requested to confer with the sculptor J.H. Foley on the subject. Foley's status as Irish-born but non-resident sculptor led to many debates over the course of the following year. *The Irish Builder* noted its respect for Mr Foley but went on to comment that 'we most emphatically protest against sending £10,000 out of the country for the execution of an undertaking which, above all others, should

be thoroughly national, and as the monument originated from Irish hearts, so it should be sculptured by none other than Irish hands (*The Irish Builder*, 1st July 1864: 125).

The competition went ahead, side by side with the negotiations with Foley and the closing date was set for 1st January 1865 (*The Irish Builder,* 15th January 1865: 18 and 1st February 1865: 30). By that date sixty designs had been received each of which were described in detail in *The Irish Builder* and were exhibited in the City Hall. The O'Connell monument committee met to consider the designs on 20th February, and on 21st April reached its decision that "it is… with much regret that we find ourselves unable to recommend any of them for adoption by the committee" (*The Irish Builder*, 15th May 1865: 121-122 and 129-139. *The Irish Builder* was scathing in its criticism of the decision—

> *"We think that sixty British architects would not care to be told that none of their designs are 'suitable in respect of beauty, of general outline, or proportion, or of fitness for the immediate object of the monument…' Irish art must we think, be in a very sad condition if such severe criticism be true of the production of sixty architects"*
> (*The Irish Builder,* 1st June 1865: 143).

Another competition was set in motion but the committee found that once again they were unable to recommend any of the new designs. It then contacted Foley, and made a concession to popular opinion by requesting that a resident Irish sculptor would assist him in designing subsidiary figures. Foley refused to grant that request but did agree to give an Irish architect the opportunity to furnish a design, which, if he so desired, would be incorporated into his project (*The Irish Builder*, 15th April 1866: 95). Although three proposals were submitted none were considered suitable and Foley went ahead with his own, which was to be the subject of a protracted gestation (*The Irish Builder*, 1st August 1866: 190 and 15th August 1866: 207).

By 1871 the O'Connell monument remained unfinished, leaving *The Irish Builder* to observe that, "six years is a long time to wait from order till execution; and as the case stands no guarantee is given that the six years may not grow into twelve or more" (15th August 1871: 205). This also gave many the opportunity to once again resurrect the issue of the native versus foreign sculptor.

> *"The statues of Goldsmith and Burke grace our city, and the citizens of Dublin are satisfied as to their execution, and the Smith O'Brien monument is worthy, in point of execution, of taking its place beside them or apart. These statues have not been delayed an unusual time, and on all sides satisfaction is consequently felt. Moreover we venture to suggest that when works of art are required, and when monuments are proposed to be erected in future in Ireland that the resident Irish artist will not be overlooked"*
> (*The Irish Builder*, 15th August 1871: 205).

These sentiments were echoed in even stronger terms in *The Irish Sportsman*—

> *"How is it, then, that 'no Irish need apply' to execute the statues of Irishmen, subscribed for with Irish money, and the funds administered by those who profess the extremist nationality… why is it that there is nothing visible of the O'Connell monument ordered several years ago… Irish money for Irish labour must be the cry of those who have nationality enough of a vital kind to make a steady stir in the matter"*
> (quoted in *The Irish Builder,* 15th August 1871: 216).

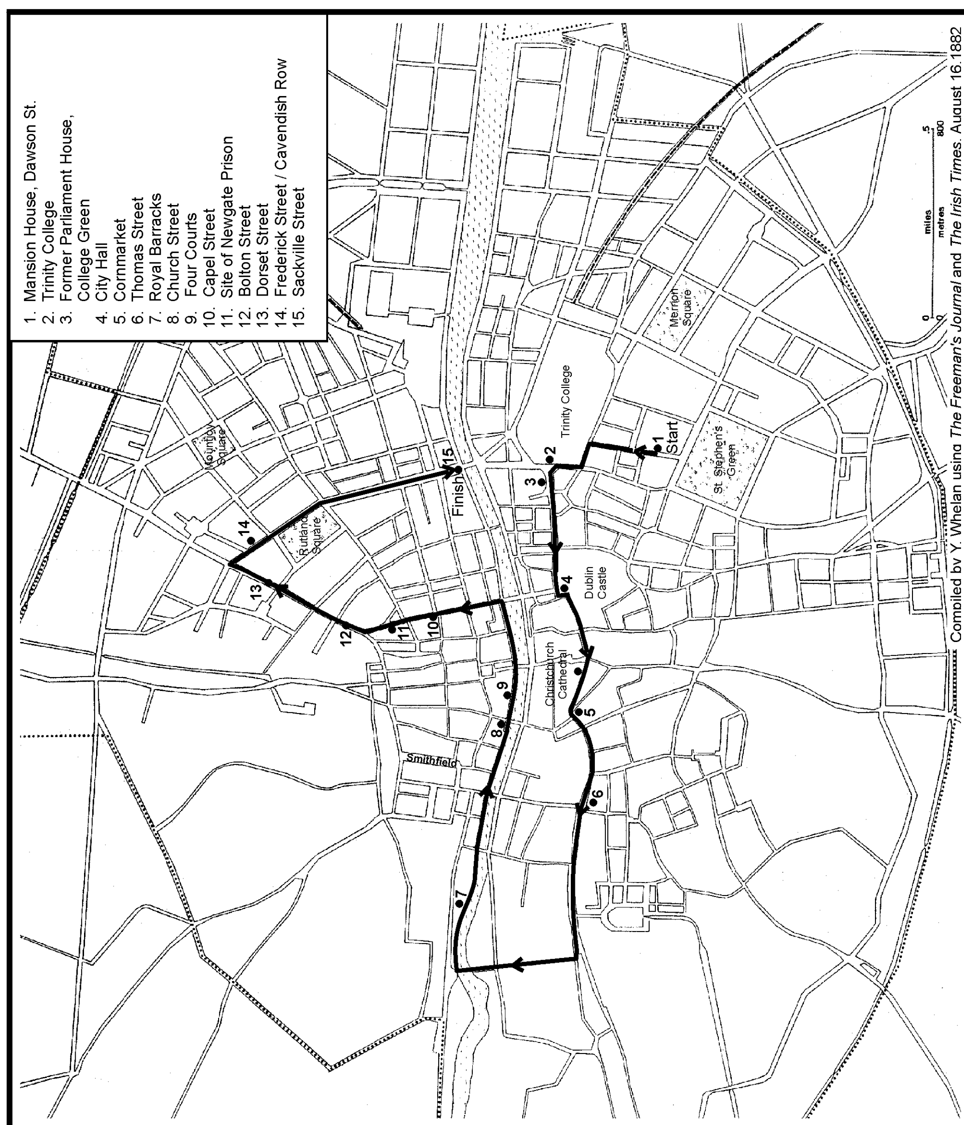

Figure 5: The processional route for the unveiling of the O'Connell Monument, August 1882.

In August 1871 Foley presented a progress report to the Corporation and explained that due to illness and pressure of work, the progress of the monument had been delayed. He did envisage though that the monument would be completed in time for the O'Connell centenary in 1875. Foley's death, however, in 1874 left the committee with a monument that would not be complete in time for the O'Connell centenary on 6th August 1875. Instead, the monument was finished by Foley's assistant, Thomas Brock, who was himself formally commissioned in June 1878. The monument was designed in three sections; at the top, a statue of O'Connell, in the middle a frieze, at the centre of which was represented the 'Maid of Erin', her right hand raised pointing to O'Connell and in her left hand the Act of Catholic Emancipation, and finally four winged victories were placed around the base, each of which represented the

virtues attributed to O'Connell, namely: patriotism, courage, eloquence and fidelity. All three sections combined to record "the gratitude of the Irish people for the blessings of civil and religious liberty obtained for their native land by the labours of the illustrious O'Connell' (*The Freeman's Journal*, 9th August 1882). The figure of O'Connell was ready for unveiling at the head of Sackville Street in August 1882.

> *"The eve of one of Ireland's greatest days has now arrived. Every element of success attended the centennial and O'Connell celebration. Numbers, strength, enthusiasm, and all the adjuncts, natural and artificial, of popular triumph wait upon tomorrow's festival... if the O'Connell bronze, whose heroic beauty will be revealed to the populace tomorrow, could speak, it might tell them, too, that many monster meetings of the past looked down upon them, Tara Hill and Mullaghmast, the meetings of the Funeral, the Foundation Stone, and the centenary stand before the people for comparisons with tomorrow's"*
>
> (*The Freeman's Journal,* 14th August 1882).

Figure 6: Daniel O'Connell Monument, Sackville Street.

On 15th August 1882, Sackville Street acted as the theatre for a 'monster meeting' of considerable proportions. The day was marked by a procession through the city (Figure 5), that took the participants past a range of buildings with which O'Connell had some form of association. The monument was eventually unveiled at one o'clock, when 'a mighty roar' went up 'from ten thousand throats when the veil fell at the Lord Mayor's signal'. The committee delivered the statue over to the care of the Corporation which the Lord Mayor accepted with a few brief remarks, and "with a quick touch withdrew the covering from the Herculean figure of O'Connell. At that instant the sun suddenly opened its beams through the drenching rain, and gloriously lighted up the Monument and the crowded platform" (*The Freeman's Journal*, 16th August 1882) (Figure 6).

Politics, religion and water supply: commemorating Smith O'Brien, Gray and Fr Mathew

While the foundation stone for the O'Connell monument was laid in 1864, the monument itself was not completed until 1882 and in the intervening period a number of other notables were commemorated on Sackville Street. Among them was the statue dedicated to William Smith O'Brien, a leader of the doomed rebellion of 1848. This was the first monument erected in Dublin to commemorate an individual who had stood for armed resistance to British rule. It was followed by a statue dedicated to Sir John Gray, another prominent nationalist, and owner of the newspaper, *The Freeman's Journal*. Finally, a statue of the Apostle of Temperance, the Capuchin Friar, Fr Theobald Mathew was unveiled in 1893.

The 26th December 1870 was the date chosen for the unveiling of a monument dedicated to William Smith O'Brien (1803-1864) a descendant of the Protestant nobility who traced his lineage back to Brian Boru. A revolutionary nationalist, the statue of Smith O'Brien broke the sculptural mould in Dublin. The occasion was a significant one for it marked—

> *"… the first time for 70 years that a monument had been erected in a public place in Dublin to honour an Irishman whose title to that honour was that he devoted his life to the Irish national cause (Cheers). In other countries it is such men only that received the honour of a public monument, but in this city there were statues to men who had served and loved England, and did not care for Ireland. As to this country, it had been held that it was treason to love her, and death to defend her. The monuments which had been erected till now have been rather monuments of this haughty mastery of the English people and our servility and helplessness. A favourable change took place recently. Ireland had ventured to erect statues to Moore, Goldsmith and Burke, whose genius was Irish, and whose sympathies also were mainly Irish. Though these men loved Ireland, and their memories were thus commemorated, none of them ever exposed themselves to the danger of imprisonment or transportation for life for Ireland. There stood the statue of a man who 22 years ago, was sentenced to be hanged, drawn, and quartered for his love of Ireland. (Cheers)"*
> (*The Irish Times,* 27th December 1870).

O'Brien had been sentenced to death for high treason resulting from his part in the insurrection of 1848. Soon after his death, in 1864, a committee was formed in order to gather subscriptions and organise the erection of a monument in his honour and, "to this undertaking men widely differing in their political and religious sentiments have subscribed, desiring to testify their respect for the noble and honourable character of our distinguished country man, whose unselfish devotion to, and sacrifices for, Ireland have never been questioned even by the sternest critics or severest censors" (*The Irish Builder*, 15th October 1867: 276). The committee was led by John Martin and John Blake Dillon, both of whom had been caught up in the radical politics of the mid-nineteenth century and shared O'Brien's belief in physical force. They commissioned one of the most prominent sculptors of the day, Thomas Farrell, to sculpt the figure of O'Brien (Murphy, 1993). Farrell sculpted a marble figure in "an ordinary frock coat, high buttoned waistcoat and pantaloons, all of which are treated with the most commendable taste and skill. There is not the slightest approach to stiffness in the pose which is most easy and natural" (*The Irish Builder*, 1st October 1867: 262). Smith O'Brien was positioned with arms folded as if addressing an assembly and in the stance of one commanding attention of a crowd. Farrell "selected what must be acknowledged a suitable site… the space halfway

Figure 7: The emerging landscape.

The statue to William Smith O'Brien can be seen in the foreground while that to Sir John Gray is visible between the O'Connell monument and Nelson's Pillar.

between Carlisle Bridge and D'Olier Street" (*The Irish Builder*, 1st October 1867: 262). The statue was unveiled on 26th December 1870 but moved to its current location in O'Connell Street in 1929.

The authorities, sensitive to O'Brien's politics, prohibited the processions that usually went hand in hand with the unveiling of a monument, and forbade the bands from playing music while marching (*The Irish Times*, 27th December 1870). The order did not deter the masses who assembled in huge numbers, however, as they had done for the laying of the O'Connell foundation stone. Bands took up their positions round the site of the O'Connell monument, near the O'Brien monument and in the adjoining streets where they continued playing throughout the proceedings (figure 7).

The unveiling of the Smith O'Brien monument and the displays of nationalism that went with it signalled a change in the sculptural composition of the city which was to be further reinforced with the unveiling of a monument dedicated to Henry Grattan in 1876. As was pointed out at the unveiling of the Smith O'Brien statue—

> *"Soon two more statues would stand in prominent places in the city - the sculptured effigy of Henry Grattan before what was our Parliament House as if waiting for the re-opening of its doors to a restored Irish legislature - and the monument to the liberator of his Catholic fellow-country-men, Daniel O'Connell. These statues would provide what it was that the future of Ireland was expected to be"*
>
> (*The Irish Times*, 27th December 1870).

Meanwhile the broadly nationalist character of the monuments on Sackville Street was further reinforced with the unveiling of the monument dedicated to the nationalist MP Sir John Gray in 1879. Gray had died in 1875 and little time was wasted before establishing a committee to erect a statue to the man who, as a moderate nationalist, had played a key role in the introduction of a water supply to Dublin from county Wicklow in 1868. As chairman of the Dublin Corporation waterworks committee from 1863 until his death, he sought to give the city and suburbs an efficient water supply. A site for a monument in his honour was granted by the Corporation in 1877 again on Sackville Street close to the Abbey Street offices of the newspaper *The Freeman's Journal*, of which Gray had been the proprietor.

The monument committee approached Thomas Farrell to design the monument. He represented Gray "in the guise of a Victorian gentleman, complete with open coat, confident stance and a serious yet kindly expression" (*The Freeman's Journal*, 25th June 1879). The statue was unveiled on 24th June 1879, with the inscription—

> *"Erected by public subscription to Sir John Gray Knt. M.D. J.P., Proprietor of The Freeman's Journal; MP for Kilkenny City, Chairman of the Dublin Corporation Water Works Committee 1863 to 1875 During which period pre-eminently through his exertions the Vartry water supply was introduced to city and suburbs Born July 13 1815 Died April 9 1875".*

The erection of these monuments in the 1870s and 1880s marked a significant turning point in the evolving symbolic geography of Dublin's monumental landscape, further reinforced with the erection of a monument dedicated to the 'Apostle of Temperance' Fr Theobald Mathew. Sculpted by Mary Redmond, the foundation stone for this monument was laid on 13th October 1890, the centenary of Mathew's birthday and was formally unveiled in October 1893, with a simple inscription, 'The Apostle of Temperance, Centenary Statue, 1890, 1893 unveiled'.

C.S. Parnell, Sackville Street

The monument to C.S. Parnell was one of the last sculptural initiatives of the nineteenth century in Dublin. The decision to erect a statue to one of the leaders of constitutional nationalism in nineteenth century Ireland gathered momentum in the final years of the century, spurred on by contemporaneous moves to commemorate E.W. Gladstone. The Gladstone national memorial fund had been established in 1898 when it was proposed that three monuments be erected in his memory, one each in London, Edinburgh and Dublin, three pillars of the Empire. The suggestion did not meet with much support in Dublin however, particularly given that no monument had been erected as yet in memory of Parnell. As the *Irish Independent* put it— "Is it to be tolerated that such a man should have one of the prominent public places in the capital of Ireland for a statue…a daring insult to the memory of Parnell?" (8th August, 1898). Dublin Corporation echoed these sentiments when it passed a motion that— "No statue should be erected in Dublin in honour of any Englishman until at least the Irish people have raised a fitting monument to the memory of Charles Stewart Parnell" (Minutes of the Corporation of Dublin, 1898, no. 287).

The Gladstone proposal was subsequently dropped and the statue planned for Dublin was later erected in Hawarden, Essex, in 1925. In the meantime Parnell's successor, John Redmond set about the business of erecting a memorial to his former leader with the intention of reuniting the party. The proposal was a controversial one, not least owing to the fact that

Figure 8: Charles Stuart Parnell, Sackville Street.

the Wolfe Tone monument had not been completed. Redmond's political gambit evoked much criticism and the foundation-laying ceremony was boycotted by those who viewed it as an insult to Wolfe Tone. Moreover efforts to disrupt the stone laying and embarrass the organisers were taken by the IRB, thereby exposing the tensions that existed within Irish Nationalism. When the monument was eventually unveiled in 1911 these tensions had all but evaporated.

"Dublin was yesterday the scene of one of the most remarkable episodes in its annals. The unveiling of the Parnell monument would of itself be a memorable event, certain to attract worldwide interest. All the circumstances surrounding the event have, however, tended to emphasise its interest and importance. The political outlook is eminently favourable to the Irish cause. Never in the history of the constitutional movement has the atmosphere been clearer and brighter. So much is this the case that even the inveterate enemies of the cause of Irish freedom have made up their minds that beyond playing a game of bluff during the next year or two, they can do nothing to obstruct the establishment of a sound system of national self government in Ireland… if we are on the threshold of Home Rule, no man is more accountable for that fact than Parnell (*The Freeman's Journal*, 2nd October 1911: 5).

The 1st October 1911 marked the twentieth anniversary of Parnell's death and the unveiling ceremony for the monument dedicated to him drew a large, enthusiastic crowd similar to the Wolfe Tone and O'Connell celebrations of some years earlier.

> *"There must have been many in the huge concourse who were able to recall that memorable day in August twenty-nine years ago when the O'Connell monument was unveiled. Until yesterday that demonstration was regarded as the greatest Dublin had ever seen. Yesterday's, in point of numbers and in representative character, seems to have been quite equal to anything witnessed in our city within living memory. No element was missing that could have lent interest and emphasised the national character of the demonstration. Every part of Ireland was represented"*
>
> (as reported in the*The Freeman's Journal,* 2nd October 1911: 5).

The ceremony was preceded by a procession along the route of which "the streets were lined with people and in nearly every window and balcony, and even on the house tops in

many places, interested and cheering spectators were to be seen". Redmond officiated at the ceremony and in his oration he emphasised the historical significance of the occasion, marking he said the beginning of a new era in which Parnell's long awaited goal for Ireland was on the verge of reality. He went on, "as certain as any human thing can be… there would be an Irish parliament assembled in this metropolis within four and twenty months". He then proceeded to perform "the proudest action of my life pulling the cord and unveiling this noble monument, the product of the greatest genius of the greatest sculptor of his time, himself the son of an Irish mother to the memory of the greatest son of Ireland since the days of Hugh O'Neill" (*The Freeman's Journal*, 2nd October 1911: 5).

The monument was designed by the Dublin-born American, Augustus Saint-Gaudens and took the form of a triangular shaft of Shantalla (Galway) granite against which a statue of Parnell was placed. The figure was sculpted in the guise of a statesman, clothed in a frock coat and in the act of speaking, right arm extended from his body. Parnell was positioned standing by a table over which was draped a large flag of Ireland. Both statue and table were designed to stand against the broad base of the shaft which was crowned with a bronze tripod (Figure 8). The names of the four provinces and the 32 counties of Ireland were featured, along with a number of other classical motifs including ox skulls and swags to decorate the base. A harp was also incorporated into the design along with an inscription—

> *"No man has a right to fix the boundary to the march of a nation. No man has a right to say to his country-thus far shalt thou go and no further. We have never attempted to fix the ne plus ultra to the progress of Ireland's nationhood and we never shall".*

Sackville Street on the cusp of change: concluding analysis

The erection of each of these public monuments on Sackville Street before 1922 served to create a representative landscape of some significance. With the exception of Nelson's Pillar, a dominant and much contested symbol of empire, each of the other monuments were unveiled in the latter half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century and effectively created a nationalist monumental landscape in the heart of the Dublin city. In terms of the individuals whom these monuments sought to commemorate, the geographical positions they were afforded and the choreography of the unveiling ceremonies, they are indicative of a broader change in the politics of power in late nineteenth century Dublin. Their unveiling, together with the not always successful insistence on using native, resident sculptors, can be interpreted as an attempt by various committees to challenge the ideology represented in the statues that had been erected in the eighteenth century and which had become both outdated and outmoded amid the changing political and cultural context. Moreover, these sculptural initiatives also point to the increasing power and nationalist complexion of the city's governing authority, Dublin Corporation, consideration of which is essential in any assessment of the symbolic geography of Dublin before independence.

In the mid-nineteenth century Dublin underwent a revolution in municipal government which paved the way for a new and reformed Corporation. Prior to the passing of the Municipal Corporations Ireland Act in 1840 and the Dublin Improvement Act in 1849, the city's municipal authority was "orange-dominated… the voice of Ascendancy and bigotry, operating under the principle of self-election and absolute control of admission to the franchise" (O'Brien, 1982: 35). The municipal reforms paved the way for the subsequent domination of the council chamber by nationalist minded Roman Catholics at the expense of conservative, Unionist members. Throughout the remainder of the century many issues of

little municipal significance but of great political and religious controversy were debated in its chamber (Daly, 1984: 208). The political composition of the Corporation also served to alienate the Dublin Castle administration and from 1880 members of the authority boycotted official functions, although relations temporarily thawed with the arrival of the pro-Home Rule Viceroy, Lord Aberdeen. The nationalist agenda of Dublin Corporation ensured that it became firmly established "as a body with wider political interests, a type of substitute for the lost Parliament of College Green" (Daly, 1984: 208).

This 'substitute Parliament' played a key role in granting permission for statues to be located on particular sites. Its willingness to sanction the erection of nationalist monuments in prominent locations was matched only its reluctance to afford similar locations for statues that had a more loyalist bent. Much less conspicuous locations were granted to statues of, for example, the Earl of Carlisle, Lord Gough, Prince Albert and the Duke of Eglinton and Winton. This trend continued into the early decades of the twentieth century, most explicitly demonstrated when a monument to Queen Victoria was unveiled in the relative seclusion of Leinster House while a monument to Charles Stewart Parnell was unveiled at the head of Sackville Street.

The erection of the Sackville Street monuments in the latter half of the nineteenth century signalled the onset of a new era in the symbolic geography of Dublin. These statues stood alongside the pillar dedicated to Lord Nelson in an uneasy juxtaposition and served as a challenge in stone to the prevailing Castle administration and to the monumental landscape of imperial power that had been constructed centuries earlier. It is striking that these figures, drawn almost exclusively from Irish political, cultural and religious circles, should be unveiled in the heart of a city that remained a part of the British Empire. Afterall, the Head of State was the British monarch, who was represented by his Viceroy, although the real power rested with the Chief Secretary for Ireland, upon whose advice the Viceroy acted. It would seem, however, that the Castle administration was powerless in attempting to hinder the creation of nationalist monumental landscape. Instead, from his offices in Dublin Castle, the Chief Secretary supervised the administration of a country that was politically and culturally deeply divided. Ireland may have been a colony of the British Empire, but its status as a colony was deeply ambivalent.

It is significant, however, that Dublin Corporation was not always successful in its efforts to 'nationalise' the urban landscape. Plans to rename many of the city's streets in the decades before 1922 met with limited success. This is exemplified in the case of Sackville Street itself. Although a Dublin Corporation Act of 1890 provided clear authority to alter the names of streets in Dublin, it was not until after the achievement of political independence that the authority would formally effect the name change (see Osborough, 1996; Whelan, 1997).

By 1922 the symbolic fabric of the capital had come to embody and reflect the struggle for superiority, victory and ultimately power, that persisted between Britain and one of its kingdoms, Ireland. This struggle was played out through the medium of the public statuary and left turn-of-the-century Dublin in something of a schizophrenic position. On the one hand it was a city of the British Empire and capital of the Kingdom of Ireland within the confines of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and the canvas upon which the British administration set out to paint a picture of union and loyalty. On the other it was a city under the local governance of the strongly nationalist Dublin Corporation which attempted to assert a tangible sense of Irish national identity upon the urban landscape in the years before 1922. With the Home Rule movement reaching a crescendo however and political independence in

the offing, Sackville Street stood on the cusp of monumental change. In the decades which followed the 1916 Rising and the establishment of the Irish Free State, the demands placed upon the symbolic landscape altered accordingly. As the theatre of the rebellion, Sackville Street, which officially became O'Connell Street in 1924, was to take on special significance as part of the nation-building agenda of the independent administration.

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