Region vs. Nation: Nineteenth-Century 'Germany' as a Mirror for Irish Regional/National Politics

EVA MARIA STÖTER

The term 'regionalism' brings to mind much discussed concepts of the 'Europe of Regions', 'Unity in Diversity' and the 'Fifth Province'. At the 'Cultures of Ireland' Conference in 1991 Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh added an historical perspective to this discussion by elaborating on the construct of 'Irish-Irishness' which emerged during the Irish Literary Revival at the end of the last century. He observed that

> One particular and enduring aspect of the Irish-Ireland project, which has been widely misunderstood, was the desire to relate Ireland's cultural predicament to the experience of other European peoples outside the British sphere, indeed outside the English-speaking world. Apart from stressing the historic, especially the pre-conquest, links between Ireland and the European mainland, the purpose of European focus of the Irish-Ireland propaganda seems to have been the determination to provide a setting for a discussion of cultural relativism more affirmative of Irish self-esteem than the British setting, in which, as a function of political and economic power-structures, Irish ethnicity possessed an inferior status compared to English ethnicity.[1]

This essay is an attempt to add to this historical perspective and to analyze the manner in which German regions featured in the *Dublin University Magazine*[2] and in the *Nation* in the early 1840s. It will be shown how two distinctly different images of 'Germany'[3] were constructed, serving the papers' respective politics. Charles Lever, for example, presented to his readers the portrait of a progressive Prussia as the epitome of Germany, whereas Thomas Davis acknowl-

1 Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, 'The Irish-Ireland Idea: Rationale and Relevance' in Edna Longley (ed.), *Culture in Ireland – Division or Diversity? Proceedings of the Cultures of Ireland Group Conference, 27-8 September 1991* (Belfast, 1991), p. 58. 2 Hereafter '*DUM*'. 3 Until 1803 'Germany', then called 'the Holy Roman Empire', was split into 234 states. The 'German Confederation' which emerged in 1814-15, after the Napoleonic Wars, still consisted of 38 different states (34 monarchies and four free cities). It was only with Bismark, in the second half of the nineteenth century, that a unification of the different kingdoms took place.

edged the existence of large number of German states, though emphasizing their urge for unification. It was the Young Irelanders' hope that Germany might prove an important ally in Ireland's struggle for independence.

In 'A letter from Germany' published in the *DUM* in September 1843, one of the magazine's correspondents, Francis Dwyer, writing under the pseudonym 'Klingensporren', quotes from a newly published book entitled *The True History of Germany* which narrates German history in a parodically mythological way. The following passage describes the birth of 'Michel' – the German equivalent to John Bull:

> There was in the olden time a certain Miss Teutonia, who seems to have been but indifferently brought up, as she passed most of her time in wandering through the forest which abounded in her country. During one of these rambles she formed a rather too intimate acquaintance with a vagabond heathen god, whose morality was not of the purest kind, as he deserted Teutonia, at a moment when her condition became peculiarly interesting. In due course of time a fine, strong, healthy boy came into the world; and immediately after his birth, a spectre came forth out of the thicket, poured a can of beer over the boy's head, and pronounced in a solemn tone, the following words – 'Thou art born to endure and to suffer, to hope and to struggle; thou wilt become strong and nevertheless be for many years the derision of mankind, *until thy time shall have arrived*'.[4]

So much for the origins of the German citizen. Soon afterwards, however, Teutonia consoles herself with a *Kaiser* [Emperor] with whom she begets her first offspring – Germania. Successively, many more daughters are produced with many more partners, all of whom are given names that end with the letters 'ia', such as Bohemia, Westphalia and Bavaria – which gives a whole new meaning to the expression 'a family of states'. A significant aspect of this story is the close connection it draws between fate, state, and morality.

Prussia, one of the biggest daughters of Germania, embodied these three issues in a way which made her particularly attractive to the writers of the *DUM*. Charles Lever, for example, wrote two lengthy articles on the Prussian state, praising Prussia for her early support of Luther and the Reformation, her role in the Thirty Years' War and her efforts 'in the cause of German enlightenment, religion and national industry'. In this – almost Weberian – way it is suggested that Protestantism, enlightenment and progress condition one another. Historical events, such as the Thirty Years War, are presented as having paved the way for Prussia to become one of the main representatives of German Protestantism, a position which she still occupied in 1843 and in a manner which Lever holds

4 Francis Dwyer, 'A Letter from Germany' in *DUM*, September 1843, pp 336-7.

to be 'most creditable to her government, and most beneficial to the progress of enlightenment in the whole of that very interesting country.'[5] In this way, Prussia is set up as the ideal model of a regional state that finds its legitimacy in history. It is interesting that similar romantic images of Germany had been established in Britain at the beginning of the nineteenth century, predominantly by the Calvinist Madame de Staël (1766–1817). Her book *De l'Allemagne* (1810) functioned largely as anti-Napoleonic propaganda, and gave a rather biased view of German affairs. As J.C. Isbell points out,

> A North/South divide suits Staël's propagandist aim; it parallels her Europe-wide cultural and historical division between young and old, northern and southern races. Germany's indolent Catholic South can thus be linked with Italy, the productive Protestant North with England.[6]

Similarly, Lever uses his portrait of Prussia not only as a demonstration of Protestant efficiency, but also as a symbolic bulwark against revolution. This becomes evident in his definition of a well-functioning state. According to Lever, there are two basic means for a ruler to achieve an enlightened state of affairs: the control of religious and moral matters through the government and, most importantly, the centralization of all administration. He pictures the spirit of nationality as gaining strength by being 'centralized' and regulated, as he enthusiastically claims when he talks about 'the universal spirit of reaction and opposition' which confronted the French during the Napoleonic wars. This spirit, he suggests, was 'ably taken advantage of by the great ministers Stein and Hardenberg, for the attainment of a more effective system of national organisation, and the formation of a concentrated, genuine, and enduring spirit of nationality'.[7] In other words, Lever's ideal ruler is a monarch, who has 'ever warmly at heart the best interests of his subjects',[8] and who stands at the head of a state in which 'a genuine and informed public spirit should be gradually promoted, by a truly national and religious system of education'. Lever describes the administrative forces that are to support such plans as 'strong and enlightened', manifesting, 'order, unity, and power in all its acts'.[9]

This state-model resembles the politics of the Prussian reformers Stein and Hardenberg, who propagated a '*Revolution von oben*' (revolution from above) as the most suitable way of improving German society. Notably, neither the Prussians, nor a Tory unionist like Lever, believed that improvement of state matters could possibly be derived from the people – which is not to say, accord-

5 Charles Lever, 'Continental Countries – No. III. Prussia' in *DUM*, June 1844, pp 698, 699; hereafter 'Prussia'. **6** J.C. Isbell, *The Birth of European Romanticism: Truth and Propaganda in Staël's 'De l'Allemagne' 1810-1813* (Cambridge, 1994), p.25. I am indebted to Norman Vance, who first drew my attention to this text. **7** Lever, 'Prussia', p. 699. **8** Ibid., p. 702. **9** Ibid., p. 704.

ing to this view, that the citizens are oppressed. On the contrary, asserts Lever: the Prussians have at the present time 'a much higher degree of true and rational liberty, than has yet been attained to by almost any one of those nations which have been struggling for it ... through the medium of bloody and interminable revolution'.[10] In line with this argument, Lever claims that the German subject is not yet ready to represent itself fully in a federal government and declares therefore that all the accusations of the liberals, which mainly consist of criticizing the unrepresentative nature of governmental assemblies and the King's politics of censorship, are of no substance. Political opponents are portrayed as irrational revolutionaries. Thus Lever defines his position as a man of the state:

> We are not of that class of politicians, of which specimens are doubtless not wanting in 'Young Germany', any more than in France, and even nearer home, which, irrespective of all national peculiarities, established habits and institutions, local necessities, and the precise stage of political advancement, would force in, wedge-like, their ready-made representative systems in all quarters. The consequence of such wholesale attempts at carrying out certain theoretical principles of liberty in Portugal and Spain, in France and South America, have not been so very flattering, as to justify Prussia in rashly and prematurely embarking on the same perilous voyage of innovation.[11]

In other words, Lever believes that the new theories of revolution, by requesting local administration and representation, will effect the exact opposite of establishing a well-functioning state sporting a centralized administration. Thus it is not surprising when Lever declares that most of the people promoting these theories are organized into secret political societies that seem 'speculative, violent and impracticable'. The revolutionaries are said to obliterate all boundaries of kingdom, and try to 'forcibly establish one great Teutonic commonwealth, out of the most heterogeneous and irreconcilable elements'.[12] Unfortunately the reader is not given any more information on this possible alliance of the Teutonic daughters; instead, more 'rebels' are named. This time they are not members of a secret organization but representatives of other German states. For example, the delegates of the Rhenish provinces and Westphalia – regions that came under Prussian direction after the Congress of Vienna in compensation for Prussia's lost Polish provinces – opposed the introduction of a common legal system for the whole of Prussia, because such a change in law would entail the loss of the 'Code Napoleon'[13] which was still in existence in their provinces. In addition to this decisive defence of their law, these states, especially the Rhinelands, epitomized another menace to the Prussian government through the increasing politicization of their Catholic pop-

10 Ibid., p. 701. **11** Ibid. **12** Ibid., p. 702. **13** Ibid., p. 706.

ulations. According to Lever, the Bull *de salute animarum* was enacted in 1821, stating that all communications between the government and the Prussian Catholic Church had to go through the government, so that 'the ecclesiastical affairs of the Roman Catholic Church are managed not without a certain degree of healthy influence and supervision on the part of the government'. Yet the reader is warned that there are certain inconsistencies between theory and reality. 'In theory', Lever states, 'all this looks very well ... and Prussia has accordingly been often, but rather prematurely, held up as a model by which England might beneficially regulate her conduct towards her Roman Catholic subjects in Ireland'.[14] However, the Catholic hierarchy simply cannot act fairly towards the 'Protestant portion of mixed population' and, if not for the Prussian government, certain Catholic activities would have led to consequences 'of a scarce lamentable nature than those existing in our own priest-ridden and anarchical Ireland'.[15] Lever alludes here to the issue of mixed marriages between Protestants and Catholics, which was hotly debated in Prussian territories. Prussian law stated that the children were to be educated in the religion of the father; this statute was opposed by some bishops who demanded that children be brought up Catholic as long as one of the parents was of that faith. Needless to say, Lever is strongly opposed to these Catholic ideas, enticing him once more to defend the Prussian state, its king and its resistance to reform.

'Klingensporren', Francis Dwyer, also deals with the topic of religious and political power. In his second 'Letter from Germany' published in December 1843, he reports on a staging of Frederick Rueckert's new play *Saul and David* and quotes a passage of the *Augsburger Gazette* which summarizes the play as follows: 'The well-being of the community is to be sought in the harmonious co-operation of the spiritual and secular authorities. An undue preponderance of either is a fruitful source of evil'.[16] The cast consists of Samuel, 'the very personification of independent spiritual authority'; Saul the king, 'who has been raised to the throne by Samuel's agency'; and David, 'who unites in his own person a certain proportion of spiritual authority with the temporal power of his kingly office'.[17] Saul, who had been too long under the spell of Samuel, perishes along with his son when he attempts to shake off Samuel's influence. In the end David, who combines religious with stately authority, gains power and glory, conveying the moral message to the audience and to the readers of the *DUM* that modesty, faith and a belief in the state are the best means to achieve personal and public well-being.

Like the *DUM*, the *Nation* turned to Germany for an understanding of how an Irish state (whether independent or part of a larger polity) might best be run.[18] A passage in Thomas Davis's article 'Foreign Policy and Foreign Information', which appeared in the *Nation* in April 1843, describes these aims:

14 Charles Lever, 'Continental Countries – No. III. Prussia. Second article' in *DUM*, July 1844, p. 98. **15** Ibid., pp 99, 100. **16** Francis Dwyer, 'Letters from Germany – No. II' in *DUM*, December 1843, p. 745. **17** Ibid., pp 745-6. **18** All identifications of writers in the

> It is peculiarly needful for *Ireland* to have a Foreign Policy. Intimacy with the great powers will guard us from English interference. Many of the minor German states were too deficient in numbers, boundaries, and wealth, to have outstood the despotic ages of Europe but for those foreign alliances, which, whether resting on friendship, or a desire to preserve the balance of power, secured them against their rapacious neighbours. And now time has given its sanction to their continuance, and the progress of localisation guarantees their future safety. When Ireland is a nation, she will not, with her vast population, and her military character, require such alliances as a *security* against an English re-conquest; but they will be useful in banishing any *dreams of invasion* which might *otherwise* haunt the brain of our old enemy.[19]

In other words, the *Nation* deemed it necessary to establish contacts with other countries in order to secure Ireland's future sovereignty and independence against foreign – mainly English – invasions of its territories. For this reason it became necessary to establish Ireland as a nation among nations, to convey a certain positive image of the Irish, and to monitor foreign press releases on Ireland and England. It was hoped that newspapers in various countries could replace English sources, thereby presenting an alternative, and more positive, interpretation of Irish politics. This new material could then bring the Irish out of the dungeon of non-information, where England, according to Davis, 'shuts us (the Irish) up, like another *Caspar Hauser* ... and tells us what she likes of herself and of the rest of the world ... this renders foreign information most desirable for us'. 'With increasing knowledge', Davis writes enthusiastically, 'the Catholic will see the Protestant states of Prussia, Holland, Saxony, and America; and the Protestant will see the Catholic states of Belgium, Bavaria, and France, all granting full liberty of conscience – leaving every creed to settle its tenets with its conscience, and dealing, *as states*, only with citizens, not sects'. Just a short time later the author reiterates that there is 'a mixture of languages, creeds, and races' in many countries; therefore Ireland, with its peculiar state of language and culture, does not need to feel estranged. Moreover, it is pointed out that 'Germany, France, and America, teach us that English economics are not fit for a nation beginning to establish a trade, though they may be for an old and plethoric trader; and, therefore, that English and Irish trading interests are directly opposed. Nor can our foreign trade but be served by foreign connexions'.[20] Considering the *Nation*'s politics, it is not surprising that many German states, including Prussia, are featured, given that the majority of articles describe Germany as if it were one united nation.

Nation are taken from Kevin McGrath, 'Writers in the "Nation", 1842-5' in *Irish Historical Studies*, vi (1948-49), pp 189-223. **19** Thomas Davis, 'Foreign Policy and Foreign Information' in *Nation*, 22 April 1843, p. 440. **20** Ibid.

The article 'War with Everybody', published in the *Nation* on 29 October 1842, contains a passage which characterizes the journal's descriptions of the German state:

> Germany has begun gloriously to bestir herself, despite the freezing influence of her great and little tyrants – her arbitrary, unconstitutional Governments – and her military despotism. There begins to stir in her the quickening of a National spirit – such a spirit as we labour to awaken among ourselves; and the analogy is so striking and beautiful that we should dwell on it with that pleasure with which, after a dark and dreamy night, men behold the dawning of a glorious day.
>
> Hear this, Irishmen, and profit by the hearing:–
>
> 'Every misfortune', says the organ of the great German Commercial League, 'that we have suffered for centuries past, may be traced to *one* cause; and that is, *that we have ceased to consider ourselves a united nation of brothers, whose first duty it is to exert our common efforts to oppose the common enemy.*'[21]

Despite the fact that all attempts at German unification had hitherto failed, the author of the article tries to enhance a sense of brotherhood, both between the regions forming the German 'nation', and between Germany and Ireland. The hope seems to be that once a notion of brotherhood is generally accepted, Ireland could secure the position of a nation in its own right. The *Nation* contains many more examples which dwell on the importance of solidarity between oppressed countries. On 29 April 1844, for example, the journal published a letter from Germany, addressed to the recently imprisoned Daniel O'Connell, expressing the opinion that Teutonia should praise Ireland and its popular leader:

> Nothing so much exalts and invigorates the spirit of nationality as generous sympathies. On a former occasion Germany showed herself strong and united in her national feelings. Surely such an expression of national feeling will not be wanting when we are called on to testify our interest in behalf of an eminent individual to whose enthusiasm and glowing patriotism millions are in debt for the prospect of any future amelioration of their state.[22]

Generally, support for O'Connell features strongly in the 1844 instalments of the *Nation*, giving any reader the impression that the German brothers are united

21 John Fisher Murray, 'At War with Everybody' in *Nation*, 29 October 1842, p. 40. **22** Letter published in the *Nation*, 20 April 1844, p. 435.

in their struggle for independence and are at all times available to Ireland as allies if required. However, it is important to reiterate that Germany is not so much seen as a region or a nation, but rather as the representative of an idea of a nation.

Nevertheless, even the 'bad' press concerning Ireland and the Irish was reported. One April issue of the *Nation* in 1843, for example, features an article from the government gazette of Prussia depicting Ireland as follows:

> A very extensive plot has been discovered, having for its object to compel the landlords to reduce the rents – this has taken place in Ireland, the land of conspiracies (*Bodem fur Verschowrung* [*sic*]). This conspiracy is very widely extended, and has many ramifications, as persons of every creed, and the most different political opinions, are included in it; because on this point all felt themselves equally oppressed. This may not succeed, but there is another conspiracy that may be said to be certain of success, and that is the conspiracy of the people against payment of the poor rates. The landlords seem to have participated in this last plot, because they believe that they will thus be freed from the compulsory support of the indigent. It is now, however, expected for certain, that the government will, as they have already done with the tithes, place the burthen directly on the landed proprietors. Such a plan would force the latter, for the sake of their own advantage, to look to the physical and mental improvement of the peasantry, and would certainly contribute more to the prosperity of the land, than the gallows or the transport-ship were ever able to effect.[23]

The more positive attitude towards Ireland, as evident in the latter part of this paragraph, is unusual for an official organ of the Prussian state. Prussian historians, who were formerly sole admirers of the English constitution, realized – not least because of oppression under Napoleon and Prussia's recurring internal unrest – that countries like Ireland had similar problems, and also existed as distinct entities.

Overall, Lever establishes Prussia as the representative of all German kingdoms and implies that the close study of this particular state could prevent mistakes in British politics. In this way, one particular 'region', if Prussia can be classified thus, functions as a mirror for an English and Irish state of affairs. In contrast, the *Nation*, in an attempt to constitute its own foreign politics, conveys the impression that all German states are really just the one body – that the Germans are one nation who simply do not know it yet. These contrasting views on nation and region develop and add substance to Luke Gibbons's argument that there was an 'absence of an unmediated concept of nationalism' in Ireland.[24] The enforcement of such an unmediated concept is, and was, bound to fail.

23 *Nation*, 29 April 1843, p. 454. **24** Luke Gibbons, 'Identity Without a Centre: Allegory, History and Irish Nationalism' in *Cultural Studies*, vi (1992), pp 358–75.