

**‘What Can Women Give But Tears’:  
Gender, Politics and Irish National Identity  
in the 1790s**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the relationship between gender, politics and Irish national identity in the 1790s, in the context of the development of the United Irish movement, the 1798 rebellion and the Act of Union. Drawing on Jürgen Habermas' account of the evolution of the eighteenth-century public sphere, a broader definition of the 'political' is incorporated to uncover the range of ways in which Irish women engaged with radical politics and the public sphere during this period. However, the thesis also examines the gendered rhetoric and imagery that continued to structure Irish political discourse, and to limit women's political participation.

The thesis is structured in seven chapters. The first chapter examines gender construction in United Irish discourse indicating how concepts of republican masculinity, and chivalric masculinity operated to exclude women from the political sphere, but also suggesting how enlightenment narratives of progress could provide a more egalitarian vision of the relationship between women, politics and national development. Chapters two, three and four comprise an investigation of the experiences of women from each of the principal sections of eighteenth-century Irish society: elite women of the Protestant Ascendancy, the Belfast Presbyterian middle classes, and the Catholic plebeian classes. These chapters consider the class and confessional factors that shaped women's political practice and their responses to radical politics in the 1790s. Chapter five highlights Irish women's literary interventions in the public sphere, and traces the evolution of alternative 'bardic nationalist' forms of national identity in Irish women's writing. Chapter six analyses the gendered allegories and imagery that dominated the debate on the Act of Union, and explores the shift towards a more 'feminized' form of national identity in the post-Union, post-rebellion period through an examination of the 'national tales' of Maria Edgeworth and Sydney Owenson. The final chapter explores the significance of gender in the commemoration of the United Irishmen from 1798 to 1848, examining the processes which led women to be identified as the principal repositories of national grief and custodians of national memory in Irish romantic nationalist discourse.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

|        |   |
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| NLI    | National Library of Ireland.              |
| NAI    | National Archives of Ireland.             |
| PRONI  | Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. |
| PRO/HO | Public Record Office, Home Office.        |
| TCD    | Trinity College Dublin.                   |

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## Introduction

The 1790s constitute a formative period in modern Irish history, although their significance has been subject to constant debate and revision. Within the framework of Irish nationalist history, the United Irishmen have been identified as the founding fathers of physical-force republican separatism. However, they were also a product of the broader revolutionary politics of this period. The revolutionary fervour unleashed by both the American and French Revolutions has been interpreted as opening up a 'window of opportunity', in which the United Irishmen 'brilliantly' articulated a 'non-sectarian, democratic and inclusive politics, which could attract and sustain Irish people in all their inherited complexities'.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the foundation of the Orange Order in 1795 and the bloody excesses of the 1798 rebellion mark the decade as one which witnessed the injection of new levels of sectarian rancour into Irish political life. For anyone interested in the relationship between gender, politics and Irish national identity, the 1790s are an obvious starting point, yet this perspective also presents the historian with an apparent paradox. The 1790s are a period during which Irish women were drawn into the political process in unprecedented numbers, but it was also at this moment that full membership of the national and political community became equated with masculinity.

The past two decades have witnessed a resurgence of interest in, and research on, the 1790s and the United Irishmen, a development given added impetus by the bicentenary of the rebellion in 1998. Much of this new research has focused on the apparent conundrum as to why Ireland, following a relatively tranquil eighteenth century, erupted into violent insurrection in 1798. While a great deal of this literature has concentrated on the relative importance of sectarian, economic and religious factors in explaining the rising in Wexford, it is the broader accounts of the evolution of radical politics in Ireland throughout the 1790s that are of most immediate relevance to the present study. Of particular interest are those works which have resituated the United Irishmen and the 1798 rebellion within the context of the European and Atlantic 'age of democratic

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Whelan, 'Reinterpreting the 1798 Rebellion in County Wexford', in Dáire Keogh and Nicholas Furlong (eds), *The Mighty Wave: The 1798 Rebellion in Wexford* (Dublin, 1996), p. 9.

revolutions'.<sup>2</sup> Marianne Elliott's 1982 study of the negotiations between the United Irishmen and the French revolutionary government illuminated the extent to which the movement was embedded in the broader revolutionary politics of the period. As Elliott observed, the Irish political crisis in the 1790s was replicated in many other countries, where revolutionary groups looked to France for support and inspiration.<sup>3</sup> The re-evaluation of the United Irish movement from outside the narrow framework of Irish nationalism has also prompted further investigation of their relationship to British radicalism.<sup>4</sup>

The French Revolution is generally acknowledged as an important causal factor in the evolution of Irish militant-republicanism, acting as an inspiration and model for Irish radicals. However, the idea that the revolution created *ex nihilo* the political crisis in Ireland has also been challenged. As Jim Smyth notes, the impact of the French Revolution on the political situation throughout Europe was 'modulated by highly complex, dynamic and locally specific adaptations and interactions'. Refining the idea of a homogenous pan-European revolution, Smyth concludes that 'surely the differences are as important as similarities, the Irishness as relevant as the Jacobinism?'<sup>5</sup> Efforts to trace the deeper roots of Irish republicanism and the complex interaction between 'imported French ideas' and native political ideologies have formed an important strand of recent historiography. Both Elliott and Nancy Curtin have stressed the influence of the British radical Whig tradition on United Irish ideology, a combination of the

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<sup>2</sup> A term drawn from R. R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800* (New Jersey, 1959), 2 vols.

<sup>3</sup> Marianne Elliott, *Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France* (New Haven and London, 1982), p. xiv.

<sup>4</sup> The British revolutionary underground uncovered by E. P. Thompson revealed the trans-national radical network developed between the United Irishmen and English Jacobins, which included members of the London Corresponding Society, the United Scotsmen, and the auxiliary group the United Englishmen. More recently Elaine McFarland has explored the connections between Irish and Scottish radicals in the 1790s. Comparisons between Irish and British radicalism have also led to a re-evaluation of the urban-artisanal character of Irish plebeian radicals. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 111-203; Elaine W. McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution* (Edinburgh, 1994); and John Brims, 'Scottish Radicalism and the United Irishmen', in David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (eds), *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion* (Dublin, 1993), pp. 151-166. On the urban-artisanal, character of groups such as the Defenders see Jim Smyth, *The Men of No Property: Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century* (London, 1992), p. 114.

<sup>5</sup> Jim Smyth, 'The 1798 Rebellion in its Eighteenth-Century Contexts', in Jim Smyth (ed.), *Revolution, Counter-Revolution and Union: Ireland in the 1790s* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 15.

classical republicanism of the eighteenth-century 'commonwealthmen' and Lockean ideas on the nature and purpose of government.<sup>6</sup> The relationship between the Irish Patriot movement of the 1770s and 1780s and the United Irish project in the 1790s has also been noted, the Patriot parliamentarians and armed Volunteer's critique of the constitutional relationship between Britain and Ireland providing an important precedent for the United Irishmen.<sup>7</sup> Ulster Presbyterianism has been identified as another significant source of Irish radicalism. Ian McBride has traced the origins of Presbyterian radicalism to the intense theological debate that exercised the Presbyterian community throughout the eighteenth century, with Ulster's receptiveness to Scottish Enlightenment ideas, and its close links to the American colonists further facilitating the radicalization of the Northern community.<sup>8</sup> The Defender movement has also been the subject of further investigation, which has focused on the complex blend of Jacobitism, Jacobinism and a crude religious-nationalism within this largely plebeian movement.<sup>9</sup>

Revealing the processes through which French republican ideas became engrafted onto indigenous ideologies of 'dispossession and repossession' has opened up one of the most significant avenues of exploration in recent histories of the 1790s, the theme of politicization.<sup>10</sup> A focus on the extent to which radical principles were disseminated has

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<sup>6</sup> Elliott, *Partners in Revolution*, p. xiii; and Nancy Curtin, *The United Irishmen: Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791-1798* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 13-17.

<sup>7</sup> Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, p. 30-32; and A.T.Q. Stewart, *A Deeper Silence: The Hidden Origins of the United Irishmen* (Belfast, 1998). Throughout the thesis the eighteenth-century Protestant Patriot movement for legislative and economic independence will be capitalized.

<sup>8</sup> On the role of the Ulster Presbyterian community in the development of Irish radicalism see Stewart, *A Deeper Silence*, Ian McBride, *Scripture Politics: Ulster Presbyterianism and Irish Radicalism in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1998); Ian McBride, 'William Drennan and the Dissenting Tradition', in David Dickson, Kevin Whelan and Dáire Keogh (eds), *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism, and Rebellion* (Dublin, 1993), pp. 49-61; and Pieter Tesch, 'Presbyterian Radicalism', in Dickson, Whelan and Keogh (eds), *The United Irishmen*, pp. 33-48.

<sup>9</sup> See Smyth, *The Men of No Property*, pp 66-67.

<sup>10</sup> This description of the eighteenth-century Catholic political outlook as an 'ideology of dispossession and repossession' is taken from Tom Garvin, 'Nationalism and separatism in Ireland, 1760-1993': a comparative perspective', in J. Bermanendi, R. Maiz and X. Nuñez (eds), *Nationalism in Europe Past and Present* (Santiago de Compostela, 1994), p. 89. The re-examination of the political context of the Wexford rebellion by Louis Cullen and Kevin Whelan has been at the forefront of research into the question of politicization. See Louis Cullen, 'The 1798 Rebellion in Wexford: United Irish Organisation, Membership, Leadership', in Kevin Whelan and William Nolan (eds), *Wexford: History and Society. Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County* (Dublin, 1987), pp. 248-295; Kevin Whelan, 'Politicisation in County Wexford and the Origins of the 1798 Rebellion', in Hugh Gough and David Dickson (eds), *Ireland and the French Revolution* (Dublin, 1989), pp. 156-178; and Kevin Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty: Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of Irish Identity* (Cork, 1996). Other works which foreground the role of politicization during the 1790s but stress the interaction between

gradually replaced the emphasis on sectarian and socio-economic factors in explaining political mobilization during the 1790s. According to Nancy Curtin, 'propagating the cause was one of the essential and defining activities of the United Irishmen ... at a fundamental level, United Irish propaganda represented the union of republican theory and revolutionary practice.'<sup>11</sup> Kevin Whelan has similarly identified United Irishmen's sophisticated use of propaganda as a key factor in explaining the rapid radicalization that occurred in Ireland during the 1790s.<sup>12</sup> Historians have pointed to the huge amount of printed material generated by the movement, which included the mass production of political pamphlets such as Theobald Wolfe Tone's, *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland* (1791), cheap editions of radical texts including Thomas Paine's, *The Rights of Man* (1791), the widespread circulation of the United Irish newspapers, the *Northern Star* and the *Press*, and the distribution of ballads and broadsheets.<sup>13</sup>

From the perspective of women's and gender history these new developments in the historiography of the United Irishmen raise many interesting questions and possibilities. A repositioning of the 1798 rebellion within the context of the Atlantic 'age of democratic revolutions' suggests the potential for a gendered reading of this period that draws on the substantial body of literature exploring the interaction between gender and politics during the American and French Revolutions.<sup>14</sup> Recognition of the close links

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radical ideology and sectarian impulses and traditional grievances include Curtin, *The United Irishmen*; Smyth, *The Men of No Property*; and Tom Dunne, 'Popular Ballads, Revolutionary Rhetoric and Politicisation', in Gough and Dickson (eds), *Ireland and the French Revolution*, pp. 139-155. Several historians, including Dunne, have challenged the over-emphasis on politicization, and the 'de-sectarianized' interpretation of the 1798 rebellion associated in particular with Kevin Whelan and the official bi-centennial commemoration of the rebellion in the Irish Republic. See Tom Dunne, *Rebellions: Memoir, Memory and 1798* (Dublin, 2004), pp. 130-148; James S. Donnelly Jr, 'Sectarianism in 1798 and in Catholic Nationalist Memory', in Laurence M. Geary (ed.), *Rebellion and Remembrance in Modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 15-37; and Roy Foster, 'Remembering 1798', in Roy Foster, *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making it up in Ireland* (London, 2001), pp. 211-234.

<sup>11</sup> Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty*, pp. 62-85.

<sup>13</sup> Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, pp. 228-253.

<sup>14</sup> This is a rapidly expanding field. Some of the key pioneering works include: Harriet B. Applewhite and Darlene G. Levy (eds), *Women and Politics in the Age of the Democratic Revolution* (Ann Arbor, 1990). On America see Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, 1980); Linda Kerber, *Towards an Intellectual History of Women* (Chapel Hill, 1997); Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women 1750-1800* (Boston, Toronto, 1980). On France see Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca and London, 1988); Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (London, 1992); Olwyn Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution* (Toronto, 1992); Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the*

between Irish and British radicalism during this period similarly invites a comparison of the relationship between women and radical politics in both countries. Britain in the 1790s witnessed not only the increasing intervention of women in political debate, but also a series of challenges to the gendered assumptions that underpinned radical ideology, articulated most notably by Mary Wollstonecraft.<sup>15</sup> To what extent did Irish women's engagement with radical politics during this period reflect that of their British counterparts? At the same time, closer attention to the specificities of the Irish context, points to the possibility of a distinctively Irish perspective on the relationship between gender and late eighteenth-century revolutionary politics. Perhaps most importantly, the historiographical shift from a narrow focus on the events of 1798 towards a broader consideration of politicization throughout the decade raises multiple questions about Irish women's relationship to these processes of politicization. The United Irish leader Thomas Addis Emmet described the movement's project as one of literary enfranchisement, the object of which was to 'make every man a politician'.<sup>16</sup> But were women also the objects of United Irish propaganda? How and to what extent did radical politics permeate women's lives during the 1790s?

While recent historiography has opened up the possibility of such lines of inquiry, studies of Ireland in the 1790s have, in the main, avoided a gendered reading of political developments during this period. Though most recent histories have briefly alluded to the probability that United Irish radicalism also mobilized women, a gender perspective has not been incorporated into any of the major monographs on the subject.<sup>17</sup> To a certain extent, the 'women of 1798' have been one of the casualties of the transition from nationalist hagiography to revisionism in Irish academic history. The first major

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*Rights of Man* (Cambridge MA, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> The most well-known critique of women's exclusion from the revolutionary discourse of universal rights is of course Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1791). However, Wollstonecraft was part of a more extensive engagement by British women writers with the political controversy unleashed by the French Revolution. See Jane Rendall, *The Making of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860* (Basingstoke, 1985), pp. 33-72; Barbara Caine, *English Feminism, 1780-1980* (Oxford, 1997); Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (2nd edn., Oxford, 1987); Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution, 1790-1827* (Oxford, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Addis Emmet quoted in Ian McBride, 'The Harp Without the Crown: Nationalism and Republicanism in the 1790s', in S. J. Connolly (ed.), *Political Ideas in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), p. 174.

<sup>17</sup> An exception is David Wilson's study of United Irish émigrés in the United States, which examines their attitudes to issues of gender, race and class. David A. Wilson, *United Irishmen, United States:*

history of the United Irishmen, R. R. Madden's monumental *The United Irishmen, Their Lives and Times*, published between 1842 and 1846, devoted significant attention to the wives and sweethearts of the United Irish leaders, including Matilda Tone, Pamela Fitzgerald and Sarah Curran.<sup>18</sup> This was clearly a product of Madden's biographical approach towards the history of the United Irishmen and identified women's importance as lying entirely in their relationships to men. However, his account, and the collection of materials on the United Irishmen which he accumulated, remain a very useful starting points for a consideration of women's activities during this period, not least because many of Madden's sources for the history were gathered from the surviving female relatives of the United Irishmen.

The framing of women's involvement with the United Irishmen in terms of their relationships to male leaders is also evident in the first work specifically to address women's role in the movement, Helena Concannon's *Women of '98* (1919). In many ways a pioneering work it was directly shaped by the nationalist climate of early twentieth-century Ireland.<sup>19</sup> Written on the eve of the War of Independence (1919-1921) Concannon stressed the parallels between the actions of the women of 1798 and the responsibilities of Irish women in the latest phase of the nationalist struggle. Following the template set down by Madden, Concannon structured her history as a series of biographies under the headings 'the mothers of '98', 'the wives of '98' and 'the sisters of '98'. She highlighted these women's loyalty and devotion to their male relatives, and implicitly endorsed the gendered division of nationalist labour, distinguishing between the blood shed by men and the tears shed by women.<sup>20</sup> Whilst Concannon stressed women's importance in 'inciting their men to patriotic action', she also noted the more direct participation of women in the rebellion, where they acted as messengers and intelligence officers, and in some cases fought alongside the male

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*Immigrant Radicals in the Early Republic* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 133-152.

<sup>18</sup> R. R. Madden, *The United Irishmen their Lives and Times* (New York, 1916 [1842-1846]), 12 vols.

<sup>19</sup> On Concannon's contribution to the writing of Irish women's history see Mary O'Dowd, 'From Morgan to MacCurtain: Women Historians in Ireland from the 1790s to the 1990s', in Maryann Gialanella Valiulis and Mary O'Dowd (eds), *Women & Irish History: Essays in Honour of Margaret MacCurtain* (Dublin, 1997), p. 42.

<sup>20</sup> 'It is not alone the blood of the men who died for Ireland that has nurtured the harvest of her freedom', wrote Concannon, 'The seed has been abundantly watered by the tears of heartbroken women: mothers, and wives, sweethearts and sisters, daughters and comrades'. Helena Concannon, *Women of '98* (Dublin, 1919), p. ix.

rebels.<sup>21</sup>

Concannon tended to present women's political interest as mediated entirely through their relationships with men, noting for example that Lady Lucy Fitzgerald, the sister of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, 'loved the cause, because he loved it, whom she loved above all things'.<sup>22</sup> To a degree a focus on women associated with high-profile leaders of the United Irishmen is difficult to avoid. In keeping with the interests of previous generations of historians, women's papers have generally been preserved only where they shed light on the activities or personalities of prominent men. A notable example is the correspondence between Mary Anne McCracken and her brother, the United Irish leader, Henry Joy McCracken<sup>23</sup>, which Mary Anne presented to Richard Madden during his research on the United Irishmen.<sup>24</sup> Originally used by Madden as a source of information on the 1798 rebellion in Ulster, these letters subsequently formed the basis for Mary McNeill's biography in of Mary Anne McCracken, first published in 1960.<sup>25</sup> Situating McCracken within the context of late eighteenth and nineteenth-century Belfast, McNeill drew attention to McCracken's sympathy with Mary Wollstonecraft's claims for female emancipation. Indeed, McCracken's advanced views on the subject of female equality have led her to be identified as a 'pioneer' of Irish feminism.<sup>26</sup> Biographical studies of individual Irish women have proved one of the most fruitful avenues for a re-examination of female political participation during this period. Janet Todd's recent biography of the daughters of Lord Kingsborough, both of whom were educated by Mary Wollstonecraft, suggests both an interesting new angle on the relationship between late eighteenth-century feminism and Ireland, and the extent of

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<sup>21</sup> Concannon, *Women of '98*, p. xii.

<sup>22</sup> Concannon, *Women of '98*, p. 249.

<sup>23</sup> Associated with the social-radical wing of the United Irishmen, Henry Joy McCracken (1767-1798) was arrested along with several other members of the Belfast United Irishmen in October 1796, and spent fifteen months in Kilmainham Jail. He assumed the leadership of the Northern rebel forces in 1798 and was executed following the rebellion. See Smyth, *The Men of No Property*, and Mary McNeill, *The Life and Times of Mary Anne McCracken, 1770-1866: A Belfast Panorama* (2nd edn., Belfast, 1988).

<sup>24</sup> TCD, Dublin, Madden Papers, 873/70-166.

<sup>25</sup> McNeill, *The Life and Times of Mary Anne McCracken*. While noting that McNeill's biography was 'a pioneering enterprise for the Ulster of the 1960s, when liberal voices, willing to look again at the United Irishmen, were almost non-existent', John Gray has argued that 'in the context of that faint-hearted era, it was much easier to see Mary Anne McCracken as at heart a doer of good works ... rather than as a wholehearted revolutionary'. John Gray, 'Mary Anne McCracken: Belfast Revolutionary and Pioneer of Feminism', in Dáire Keogh and Nicholas Furlong (eds), *The Women of 1798* (Dublin, 1998), p. 48.

<sup>26</sup> Gray, 'Mary Anne McCracken', pp. 47-63.

elite women's engagement with radical politics during the 1790s.<sup>27</sup> Stella Tillyard's collective biography of Lord Edward Fitzgerald's mother, Emily, Duchess of Leinster and her sisters, has similarly revealed the high levels of female politicization within the eighteenth-century Irish aristocracy.<sup>28</sup>

The most significant re-examination of women's role in the United Irish movement is the collection of essays edited by Dáire Keogh and Nicholas Furlong, *The Women of 1798*. A product of the bi-centennial commemoration of the 1798 rebellion, the contributors underline the previous neglect of women's role in histories of the rebellion, summarized in Thomas Bartlett's comment that 'women could be symbols or model or victim but ... the role of actor, activist or combatant – *in a political context* – was denied them'.<sup>29</sup> Broadly speaking the essays fall into two main categories, biographical studies of individual women involved directly, or indirectly, with radical politics in the 1790s, and re-examinations of sources on the United Irishmen and the 1798 rebellion from a gender perspective. The only essay to combine both a gendered analysis of United Irish ideology, with a close examination of one woman's role in the movement, is Nancy Curtin's study of Matilda Tone. Revising the received perception of Matilda Tone as the dutiful, and essentially passive, wife of the republican leader Theobald Wolfe Tone,<sup>30</sup> Curtin argues that the relationship between the Tones was an exemplar of 'republican partnership', in which Matilda's contributions in the domestic sphere enabled Wolfe Tone to participate fully in the public sphere. Curtin is one of the few historians to have contextualized the United Irishmen's gender ideology within the

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<sup>27</sup> Janet Todd, *Rebel Daughters: Ireland in Conflict 1798* (London, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> Stella Tillyard, *Aristocrats: Caroline, Emily, Louisa and Sarah Lennox, 1740-1832* (London, 1994).

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Bartlett, 'Bearing Witness: Female Evidence in Courts Martial', in Keogh and Furlong (eds), *The Women of 1798*, p. 67.

<sup>30</sup> Theobald Wolfe Tone (1763-98), trained as a barrister. His *Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland* (1791) established him as a radical advocate of Catholic emancipation and a talented propagandist. In October 1791 he was invited to Belfast to participate in the establishment of a new political society, the United Irishmen, and he was responsible for establishing a Dublin branch the following month. Following the administration's crack down on political radicals and the trial of Rev. William Jackson in 1795, Tone and his family departed for the United States. In January 1796 Tone left the United States for France to solicit French assistance for an Irish uprising, accompanying a French fleet on a failed expedition to Bantry Bay, Co. Cork in December 1796. In October 1798 Tone was arrested on board another French flotilla sent to assist the already defeated rebellion. Convicted of treason, and sentenced to death he cut his own throat, dying on 18 November 1798. See Marianne Elliott, *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence* (New Haven and London, 1989); Theobald Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone. Memoirs, Journals and Political Writings, Compiled and Arranged by William T. W. Tone*, Thomas Bartlett (ed.) (Dublin, 1998).



broader framework of the American and French Revolutions. Drawing on the work of Linda Kerber and Joan Landes, she argues that the United Irishmen's conception of gender roles subscribed to the classical republican tradition of a gendered division of labour:

For both sexes this required subordinating private to public interest. In the male case, this meant active participation in liberating an abused and feminized nation from dishonour. For women exercising citizenship involved republican motherhood – sacrificing husbands, brothers, and sons to the national struggle.<sup>31</sup>

Curtin's analyses, in both this article and in her studies of women and eighteenth-century Irish republicanism and United Irish masculinity, provide an important starting point for understanding gender construction within the United Irish programme.<sup>32</sup> Her assertion that: 'United Irish claims to full civic competence contingent on gender drew on a range of masculine ideals', most notably the model of the citizen-soldier, is an important recognition of the significance of ideology in defining both male and female political identities.<sup>33</sup> However, this dichotomy, between the masculine citizen-soldier, whose republican virtue is practised in the public sphere and the republican mother, who exercises republican virtue in the private sphere, has itself been subject to revision. Linda Kerber, who first developed the term 'republican motherhood' to describe the American republicans' efforts to reconcile republican theory and the exclusion of women from the citizenry through an ideology which underlined women's role in the reproduction of the 'virtuous republic' as mothers and educators, has recently questioned this framework. While 'republican motherhood' could be viewed positively, as a means of diminishing the distinctions between the public and private spheres through the politicization of domesticity, Kerber has suggested that 'republican motherhood' was not the most inclusive definition of female citizenship available during the revolutionary period, and has queried the assumption that it would be

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<sup>31</sup> Nancy Curtin, 'Matilda Tone and Virtuous Republican Femininity', in Keogh and Furlong (eds), *The Women of 1798*, p. 32.

<sup>32</sup> Nancy Curtin, 'Women and Eighteenth-Century Irish Republicanism', in Margaret MacCurtain and Mary O'Dowd (eds), *Women in Early Modern Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 133-144; and Nancy Curtin, "'A Nation of Abortive Men': Gendered Citizenship and Early Irish Republicanism', in Marilyn Cohen and Nancy Curtin (eds), *Reclaiming Gender: Transgressive Identities in Modern Ireland* (New York, 1992), pp. 33-52.

ahistorical to expect a more radical conceptualization of female citizenship at the time.<sup>34</sup>

This stress on the importance of republican or civic humanist ideology in determining the United Irishmen's conceptualization of gender roles and the extent of female participation in radical politics, is perhaps surprising given Curtin's own perceptive analysis of the intertwining of republicanism and an incipient commercial liberalism in United Irish discourse. As she notes, the United Irishmen were 'eclectic amateur theorists', who, 'grafted their liberalism onto the thriving plant of an ubiquitous classical republicanism which infused the rhetoric of all political formations in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland'.<sup>35</sup> Theories of commercial and social progress, drawn from the Scottish Enlightenment, provide a distinctly different model of the relationship between public and private, in which the motor for historical development is located in civil society, and the austere, muscular values of classical republicanism are softened by concepts of politeness and sympathy. As this thesis argues, this important strand within United Irish ideology could form the basis for more inclusive and egalitarian ideas respecting women's role within the nation.

Although the study of gender construction in United Irish ideology that forms the first chapter of this thesis agrees with many of Curtin's conclusions with respect to the importance of classical republicanism in determining United Irish perceptions of male and female roles, classical republicanism alone cannot fully explain the role of gender in United Irish ideology, or the nature of women's engagement with radical politics, during this period. While a militarized model of political masculinity is evident in the United Irishmen's brief organisation of Volunteer parades at the beginning of the 1790s and of course in the armed uprising of 1798, this formed only a part, albeit an important one, of the United Irish programme. Equally important, as recent historiography has demonstrated, was their dissemination of radical principles through print media, a practice which suggests a quite different model of the public sphere to that elaborated by classical republicanism, one in which the gendered boundaries between public and private spheres were less rigidly defined.

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<sup>33</sup> Curtin, 'Matilda Tone and Virtuous Republican Femininity', p. 32.

<sup>34</sup> Kerber, *Towards an Intellectual History of Women*, p. 269.

<sup>35</sup> Curtin, 'Matilda Tone and Virtuous Republican Femininity', p. 29.

## II

The distinction between male and female roles in United Irish rhetoric identified by Curtin recapitulates the idea of 'separate spheres' that has been the dominant category of analysis in women's and gender history since the 1960s. The concept of separate spheres understands women's historical experiences and social positioning to be intimately interlinked with the division of society into private and public spheres, in which the former is designated a feminine space and the latter an area of masculine activity. At its most basic, this classification identifies the private sphere as encompassing the home and family, or the domestic realm, and categorizes all activities which are situated outside this sphere - work, politics, cultural and intellectual life - as taking place within the public sphere. While this classification originally provided a persuasive explanation for women's historical exclusion from political citizenship, it has been subject to substantial revision and refinement. Historians have pointed to the historical contingency and mutability of these categories, and have asked provocative questions about the gulf between the ideology and practice of 'separate spheres', as well as interrogating the chronology of the development of public and private.<sup>36</sup>

Although not directly concerned with gender, one of the most important contributions to the debate on the relationship between the public and private spheres has been Jürgen Habermas' *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.<sup>37</sup> An exploration of the 'rise and fall' of the Enlightenment public sphere of rational debate between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, its main interest for historians of the eighteenth century lies in Habermas' model of the development of the public sphere in Europe

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<sup>36</sup> For a discussion of debates on the role of the public/private dichotomy as a category in women's and gender history see Leonore Davidoff, 'Regarding some "Old Husband's Tales": Public and Private in Women's History', in Leonore Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (New York, 1995), pp. 227-276; and Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', in Robert Shoemaker and Mary Vincent (eds), *Gender and History in Western Europe* (London, 1998), pp. 196-225; Jane Rendall, 'Women and the Public Sphere', *Gender & History*, 11 (1999), pp. 475-488; and Lawrence E. Klein, 'Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 29 (1995), pp. 97-109.

<sup>37</sup> First published in German in 1961, it was not translated into English until 1989, partly explaining its delayed impact on the Anglophone academic community.

during this period. Habermas makes a clear distinction between the liberal public sphere that emerged during this period and the classical Greek dichotomy between the public and private sphere, or the *polis* and *oikos*. In the ancient model, the *oikos* encompassed the realm of economic, social and familial reproduction, and was subordinated to the *polis*, or public sphere, which was held to be the realm of freedom and permanence, a classification that mirrors the public/private distinction of republican rhetoric. However, by the early modern period, according to Habermas, such distinctions between the public and private spheres in Europe had become redundant; instead the public sphere was identified with a narrow state apparatus and courtly society, and all other aspects of social life, economic and familial, were identified as private.<sup>38</sup> During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries a public located in towns began to develop through institutions such as coffee houses in Britain and salons in France that brought together bourgeois intellectuals and the nobility in a certain 'parity of the educated'.<sup>39</sup>

According to Habermas, the ostensibly private sphere of the family developed hand in hand with what he terms 'the public sphere in the realm of letters'. It was within the conjugal family that members of the bourgeoisie first began to explore and unfold their individual subjectivity, through diaries and letter writing. These experiments in subjectivity formed the basis of the eighteenth-century 'domestic novel', the most influential example being Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740). Through novels and other literature the bourgeoisie appeared to find confirmation of a common humanity that transcended status distinctions, a common humanity that was intimately linked with the subjectivity located within the intimate sphere of the conjugal family. From these processes emerged the 'public sphere in the realm of letters': 'The privatized individuals coming together to form a public also reflected critically and in public on what they had read, thus contributing to the process of enlightenment which they together promoted'.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, 1992 [1989]), pp. 1-5, 30.

<sup>39</sup> Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 32.

<sup>40</sup> Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 51.

In Habermas' model the 'literary public sphere', comprising authors, novel readers, the press, reading societies and clubs, prompted an ever more inclusive conceptualization of the public, as it gradually superseded the earlier public located in institutions such as the coffee houses and salons. The literary public sphere was thus the precursor of the 'public sphere in the political realm'.<sup>41</sup> The idea of an abstract universal rationality which transcended status distinctions, and the practice of critical debate on literary and cultural issues that developed in the 'literary public sphere', gave rise to a critically debating public prepared to use its reason to discuss matters of public concern, 'the public sphere with political functions'. The establishment of 'public opinion' or 'the sense of the people' as the ultimate arbiter of political rectitude constituted a direct challenge to the authority of the official public sphere. It is this challenge from an oppositional public sphere, located in civil society, which, Habermas argues, formed the basis of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century democratic revolutions.

The issue of women's relationship to the public sphere is not dwelt on at length by Habermas. However, he does acknowledge that the circle of persons who comprised the 'literary public sphere' and the 'political public sphere' were not congruent:

Women and dependents were factually and legally excluded from the political public sphere ... Yet in the educated classes the one form of public sphere was considered to be identical with the other; in the self-understanding of public opinion the public sphere appeared as one and indivisible.<sup>42</sup>

Habermas' argument, that the political public sphere, while often exclusive in its application, retained the principle of universality which could enable it to expand to incorporate all of humanity, has been challenged by feminist theorists. Perhaps the most extensive challenge is Joan Landes' *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, which applies Habermas' model to the political culture of eighteenth-century France. According to Landes, 'the exclusion of women from the bourgeois public was not incidental but central to its incarnation', and she contends that

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<sup>41</sup> Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 51.

<sup>42</sup> Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 56.

'the bourgeois public is essentially, not just contingently, masculinist'.<sup>43</sup> Landes offers a persuasive argument for the inherently masculine character of the French revolutionary public sphere that is similar in several respects to Nancy Curtin's account of the gendering of citizenship in United Irish ideology. However, as suggested above, there are problems in both Curtin's and Landes' identification of the ideology of the public sphere with republican ideology. Critical responses to Landes have noted the disjunction between Landes' interpretation of the public sphere and that outlined by Habermas. Whilst Habermas clearly distinguishes between republican and liberal conceptions of the public sphere, the two appear to be conflated in Landes' account.<sup>44</sup>

Despite these qualifications feminist critics have identified further problems with Habermas' idealized version of the liberal public sphere. The dual role of head of household and property owner that forms the basis of bourgeois identity is rightly understood as resting on a fundamentally patriarchal system of familial relations. Feminist critics have also pointed to the deceptiveness of Habermas' principle of universal inclusion that is based on a disembodied, abstract rationality.<sup>45</sup> The concept of a single hegemonic bourgeois public has also been subject to revision.<sup>46</sup> Even with these revisions and refinements, Habermas' model still raises interesting questions and possibilities for a reconsideration of female participation in the public sphere. His description of the evolution of the public sphere significantly complicates the simple dichotomy between the 'female domain' of the domestic and familial and the 'masculine world'. By locating the evolution of the public sphere within the 'private'

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<sup>43</sup> Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*, p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> See Daniel Gordon, 'Philosophy, Sociology and Gender in the Enlightenment Conception of Public Opinion', *French Historical Studies*, 17 (1992), pp. 899-911; and Keith Michael Baker, 'Defining the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century France: Variations on a Theme by Habermas', in Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge MA, 1992), pp. 198-211.

<sup>45</sup> Whereas Habermas presupposes that physical difference between men and women might be set aside as easily as the economic differences between the male members of the bourgeois public sphere, it has been countered that this underestimates the extent to which the capacity for rationality was understood to inhere in the masculine body. See: Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution* (New Haven, 1989). See also Joan B. Landes, 'The Public and the Private Sphere: A Feminist Reconsideration', in Johanna Meehan (ed.), *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse* (London, 1995), pp. 102-104.

<sup>46</sup> Reflecting on the mechanisms of class as well as gender exclusion that function within the liberal public sphere, Nancy Fraser argues that there has always been a plurality of competing publics. Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', in Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, p. 116. See also, Geoff Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century', in Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the*

realm of civil society, any straightforward alignment between the private and the feminine is undermined. In addition, the concept of the public elaborated by Habermas has, as Mary P. Ryan observes, a singular advantage for feminists: 'it freed politics from the iron grasp of the state, which, by virtue of the long denial of the franchise to women and their rare status as public officials, effectively defined the public in masculine terms'.<sup>47</sup> This opens up a realm outside the state in which women could theoretically participate in critical deliberation on matters of public concern.

The structural links that Habermas identifies between practices of the intimate sphere of the conjugal family, the 'literary public sphere' and the 'political public sphere' can further expand our understanding of both the location and form of female political participation in the late eighteenth century. An example is the practice of letter writing. Whilst this is understood as central to the development of the intimacy that characterized the bourgeois family, the letter also constituted the basis of the domestic novels that were crucial to the evolution of the 'literary public sphere'. In turn, the newsletters and political pamphlets that were generated within the 'political public sphere' also drew on the epistolary form. As the female correspondence that will be considered in this thesis reveals, women's letters ranged effortlessly from discussions of family news to considerations of art and literature, as well as engaging consistently with political affairs, providing an important means through which women could engage with the rational-critical discourse of the public sphere.<sup>48</sup>

The broader definition of political and public activity suggested by Habermas' model has enabled historians of women to reinvestigate women's participation in the associational life of eighteenth-century civil society. Cultural histories of the European

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*Public Sphere*, pp. 289-339.

<sup>47</sup> Mary P. Ryan, 'Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth-Century America', in Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, p. 261. See also Margaret C. Jacob, 'The Mental Landscape of the Public Sphere: A European Perspective', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 28 (1994), pp. 95-113.

<sup>48</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between female epistolarity and the eighteenth-century public sphere see Carolyn Steedman, 'A Woman Writing a Letter', in Rebecca Earle (ed.), *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945* (Aldershot, 1999), pp. 111-133; Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, *Epistolary Bodies: Gender and Genre in the Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters* (Stanford, 1996); and Amanda Gilroy and W. M. Herhoeven (eds), *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture* (London; Charlottesville VA, 2000).

Enlightenment by Dena Goodman, Margaret Jacob and Janet Burke have highlighted women's involvement in the central institutions of the public sphere: the salon and masonic lodges.<sup>49</sup> There is no evidence that women were admitted into Irish masonic lodges as they were in France, but women were sworn into the United Irish societies. Similarly, although there was no salon culture in Ireland comparable to that in France, there were a handful of literary and political salons presided over by elite women that acted as a location for Enlightenment sociability and political opposition. The hetero-social character of these institutions therefore challenges the identification of the public sphere as an exclusively masculine space. Literary historians have also pointed to women's active intervention in the public sphere through reading, writing and publishing.<sup>50</sup> While Irishwomen in the 1790s may not have contributed to the radical press, or composed political pamphlets, they did read and reflect critically on this literature, activities which contributed to their self-understanding as members of the public sphere. Although their writing may have been confined to 'feminine' genres such as poetry or the novel, women used these genres to explore questions of political and national identity, and to intervene in contemporary political debates.

To what extent can Habermas' model of the evolution of the public sphere be applied to late eighteenth-century Ireland, and more specifically to the development of radical politics in the 1790s? Certainly the social composition of the United Irishmen reflects the predominantly bourgeois character of Habermas' public sphere. Nancy Curtin has estimated that 81.6% of the Dublin and Belfast membership were involved in commerce and industry.<sup>51</sup> The demand for the removal of English restrictions on Irish trade, which formed a key element of their political programme, conforms to Habermas' description of the public sphere's concern with regulating commercial legislation. It is also possible to trace in the careers of individual United Irishmen movement between the 'literary public sphere' and the 'political public sphere'. Wolfe Tone, for instance,

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<sup>49</sup> See Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, 1994); and Janet M. Burke and Margaret C. Jacob, 'French Freemasonry, Women and Feminist Scholarship', *The Journal of Modern History*, 68 (1996), pp. 513-549.

<sup>50</sup> Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women became Modern* (New Jersey, 2001); Anne K. Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830* (Bloomington IN, 2000); and Elizabeth Eger and others, *Women and the Public Sphere: Writing and Representation, 1600-1800* (Cambridge, 2000).

<sup>51</sup> Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, p. 292.



whilst training for the Bar in London, earned extra money by writing book reviews for the *European Magazine*, a prelude to his considerable success as a political propagandist in the 1790s.<sup>52</sup> The movement also counted numerous booksellers and printers among its members.<sup>53</sup> Above all, in their efforts to politicize popular culture through the production and distribution of large quantities of printed material, the United Irishmen appear to conform to the model of the oppositional public sphere outlined by Habermas. This similarity has been noted by Whelan, who observes that: 'In Habermas's terms, the United Irishmen were intent on creating a culturally produced social sphere, in which public opinion acted as the arbiter of political rectitude, and in which the press could plausibly pretend to represent a diversified public'.<sup>54</sup>

However, Habermas's model also requires some modification when applied to eighteenth-century Ireland. The most obvious problematizing factor is religion. In a recent examination of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Ireland Joep Leersen has argued that the Irish public sphere was an essentially confessional phenomenon. According to Leersen: 'Whatever public sphere there was, existed in Ascendancy Ireland. Parliament, the playhouses, societies learned or benevolent, and most importantly the pamphlets, papers and debates, were by and for Protestants.' In contrast, Leersen suggests that Catholic Ireland was characterized by the absence of a public sphere and was instead fragmented into 'countless pockets of "private spheres"'.<sup>55</sup> While Leersen dates the emergence of a distinctively Catholic and Gaelic public sphere to the early nineteenth century, the United Irish project in the 1790s can be understood as an attempt to expand the Protestant public sphere to encompass the Catholic community. In overcoming the hurdle of sectarian division the United Irishmen elaborated, what was in the Irish context, a radically inclusive idea of the public sphere's principle of universality.

The role of religion within Habermas's schema of socio-political relationships is not entirely clear. However, he appears to consider the church as an adjunct of the

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<sup>52</sup> Marianne Elliott, *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence* (New Haven, 1989), p. 55.

<sup>53</sup> Kevin Whelan, 'The United Irishmen, The Enlightenment and Popular Culture', in Dickson, Keogh and Whelan (eds), *The United Irishmen*, p. 276.

<sup>54</sup> Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty*, p. 62.

eighteenth century official public sphere, closely related to the state power. Consequently the liberal public sphere develops in opposition to religious authority. While this account may hold for countries in which the established church was also the religion of the majority, it requires some refinement when applied to Ireland, where the Catholic Church itself was in conflict with the confessional Protestant state. Hence, the politicization of the Catholic community was more closely intertwined with religious issues than Habermas's predominantly secular model of the liberal bourgeois sphere can account for. Similarly, the politics of the Ulster Presbyterian community must be located within the context of religious debate and division. As McBride observes in his study of the relationship between Ulster Presbyterianism and radical politics, as long as the connection between the Church of Ireland and the Irish state remained 'it was inevitable that disputes over theological matters would have important political implications'.<sup>56</sup> Irish dissenters' contribution to the oppositional public sphere can be understood not only in terms of the relationship between religious and political liberalism, but also as part of the institutional framework of the public sphere. The Presbytery, with its democratic structure and high level of political engagement, shares many features with the voluntary associations and public meeting-places that Habermas suggests constitute the public sphere.

### III

The importance of religious identity as a constitutive element of the oppositional public sphere is one aspect that is not directly addressed by Habermas. Another dimension that he does not fully explore is the relationship between the public sphere and national identity. However, there are several similarities between his account of the evolution of the public sphere, and Benedict Anderson's account of the construction of national 'imagined communities' during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>57</sup> Like

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<sup>55</sup> Joep Leersen, *Hidden Ireland, Public Sphere* (Dublin, 2002), pp. 36-37.

<sup>56</sup> McBride, *Scripture Politics*, p. 22. John Seed has identified the continued campaign for freedom of religious thought by British rational dissenters in the late eighteenth century as drawing on a broader ideal of a free public sphere beyond the control of the state, an ideal that would also presumably have appealed to Irish dissenters. John Seed, 'Rational Dissent and Political Opposition in England', in Knud Haakonsen (ed.), *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 159.

<sup>57</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, London, 1991).

Habermas, Anderson stresses the importance of the spread of print capitalism in providing the basis for the construction of national communities. According to Anderson, it is through print media that individuals come to think of themselves as members of a larger national community, a process similar to Habermas's account of the development of reading publics. The similarities between the idea of the public sphere, and the modern concept of the nation, are hardly surprising given their shared origins in the age of Enlightenment and democratic revolutions.<sup>58</sup> However, whilst the public sphere's self-realization emerges through the exploration and confirmation of a shared transcendent rationality, the cement which binds together members of the national community is not a shared rationality, but rather something closer to 'irrationality', or at least emotion. In an attempt to explain why individuals are willing to sacrifice their lives for an artificially constructed community, Anderson points to the invocation of 'naturalness' in the vocabulary of nationalism, expressed through ideas of kinship 'motherland, *Vaterland*, *patria*' or home: 'In this way, nation-ness is assimilated to skin-colour, gender, parentage and birth-era, all things one cannot help.' Perfunctorily acknowledging the power structures embedded within the family itself, Anderson proceeds to observe that:

... such a conception is certainly foreign to the overwhelming bulk of mankind. Rather, the family has traditionally been conceived as the domain of disinterested love and solidarity... So too ... for most ordinary people of whatever class the whole point of the nation is that it is interestless. Just for that reason, it can ask for sacrifices.<sup>59</sup>

While Anderson does not dwell any further on how this idealization may serve to obscure or replicate relationships of power and inequality within the family, the implications of his thesis for women's relationship to the nation have been more fully explored by feminist critics. By asserting that 'nationality' conceals its invented origins by assimilating itself to natural categories, such as 'gender...or eye-colour', Anderson, appears to ignore the possibility that gender, like nationality, is also a constructed category of identity. Moreover, as the representation of gender roles in national symbolism suggests, the construction of gender identity is closely related to the

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<sup>58</sup> On the relationship between eighteenth and nineteenth-century democratic revolutions and modern nationalism see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 7; and Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 18.

<sup>59</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 144.

construction of national identity. By the nineteenth century both nationality and gender had assumed the status of 'two of the most powerful global discourses shaping contemporary notions of identity', and these discourses must be understood as deeply interactive with each other.<sup>60</sup> Not only does nationalism draw on specific notions of both manhood and womanhood, but national difference has also been imagined in gendered terms. Prevailing understandings of femininity and masculinity are used as arguments for grading nations as more or less capable of independence, masculinity generally being identified with national superiority.<sup>61</sup> Gender has also been implicated in the calibration of national civilization in other ways. Enlightenment narratives of progress often used the status of women and the relationship between the sexes as an important means of gauging levels of national development.<sup>62</sup> As will be argued in chapter one, such evolutionary narratives could have both positive and more restrictive implications for women's position in United Irish ideology.

In addition, female personifications of the nation, through which the national/female body becomes the focus of male devotion and an object of masculine protection, can be understood as enforcing a dual exclusion on women: firstly circumscribing their ability to express the 'love of nation' that is equated with heterosexual male devotion, and secondly reinforcing a view of women as essentially passive members of the nation, in need of male defence and protection.<sup>63</sup> Representations of the nation as a 'mother' similarly figure women's relationship to the nation as an essentially maternal one, in

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<sup>60</sup> Andrew Parker and others, 'Introduction', in Andrew Parker and others (eds), *Nationalism and Sexualities* (New York; London, 1992), p. 2. On the relationship between the emergence of European nationalism and 'respectable' sexuality from the late eighteenth century see George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (Wisconsin, 1985).

<sup>61</sup> Ida Blom, 'Gender and Nation in International Comparison', in Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann and Catherine Hall (eds), *Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 2000), p. 17. The grading of nations according to gender is of particular relevance to the Anglo-Irish relationship, Ireland having historically been figured as the feminized dependent of masculine Britain. See for example Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London, 1995), p. 5; and C. L. Innes, *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society, 1880-1935* (Athens GA, 1993), pp. 9-10.

<sup>62</sup> See Sylvana Tomaselli, 'The Enlightenment Debate on Women', *History Workshop Journal*, 20 (1985), pp. 101-125; and Jane Rendall, 'Clio, Mars and Minerva: The Scottish Enlightenment and the Writing of Women's History', in T.M. Devine and J.R. Young (eds), *Eighteenth-Century Scotland: New Perspectives* (East Linton, 1999), pp. 134-151.

<sup>63</sup> See Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation* (London, 1997), p. 45; Silke Wenk, 'Gendered Representations of the Nation's Past and Future', in Blom, Hagemann and Hall (eds), *Gendered Nations*, p. 68.

which they are responsible for reproducing its biological future, nurturing the next generation, and teaching the 'mother tongue'. As Geoff Eley notes, both personifications identify women as 'reproducers rather than producers, prized and revered objects of protection rather than agents in their own right'.<sup>64</sup>

While there are several similarities between the processes of nation-building outlined by Anderson, and Habermas' account of the evolution of the public sphere, to what extent can the United Irishmen be classified as nationalists? Certainly the United Irishmen's equation of the nation, the state and the people, subscribes to the modern model of nationalism as it developed from the American and French Revolutions.<sup>65</sup> However, a distinction has been drawn between the cosmopolitan, Enlightenment concept of the nation espoused by the movement, and the particularist, cultural nationalism elaborated by subsequent Irish national movements. The United Irishmen were less concerned with the natural or organic characteristics of the nation that Anderson maintains gave the 'imagined community' its affective basis.<sup>66</sup>

To a certain degree, both political nationalism and more historico-cultural forms of nationalism draw on similar assumptions about gender roles in their respective visions of the nation. The French revolutionaries imagined both the nation and abstract rights such as Liberty as female. One aspect where differences of emphases might be apparent, however, is in attitudes towards national tradition. Anne McClintock has suggested that the tension within nineteenth-century nationalist movements, between the future-oriented revolutionary principle, and the appeal to a national past, is reconciled through a gendering of the nation's past and future, whereby:

Women are represented as the atavistic and authentic body of national tradition (inert, backward-looking, and natural), embodying nationalism's conservative principle of continuity. Men, by contrast,

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<sup>64</sup> Geoff Eley, 'Culture, Nation and Gender', in Blom, Hagemann and Hall (eds), *Gendered Nations*, p. 32.

<sup>65</sup> Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 18.

<sup>66</sup> See Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, p. 35 and Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty*, p. 61. Mary Helen Thuente has argued that the United Irishmen were the originators of Irish literary nationalism, and more closely related to Romantic nationalists such as the nineteenth-century Young Ireland movement than has previously been thought. Mary Helen Thuente, *The Harp Re-Strung: The United Irishmen and the Rise of Literary Nationalism* (New York, 1994). However, I would maintain the distinction between the liberal, political nationalism of the United Irish movement, and the organic, ethnic nationalism of subsequent Irish nationalists.

represent the progressive agent of national modernity (forward-thrusting, potent, and historic) embodying nationalism's progressive, or revolutionary principle of discontinuity.<sup>67</sup>

It will be argued here that United Irish appeals to the national past did not generally involve an association between women, nostalgia and tradition, but rather they cited women's historical status in Irish society as evidence of the nation's civilized past, as part of their claim for national independence. However, the 1801 Act of Union did herald a shift in Irish political life, towards a greater emphasis on Ireland's cultural difference and a nationalism that romanticized Ireland's culture and history. The final two chapters of this thesis reflect on the transition from the United Irishmen's vision of the nation as a rational public sphere, to the idea of the nation as a familial, 'imagined community', in which women were increasingly identified as the bearers of national memory and custodians of tradition.

#### IV

As the above outline suggests, modern concepts of gender, politics and the nation must be understood as interactive and relational categories, which emerged contemporaneously with each other during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This thesis undertakes a dual approach to the examination of the relationship between gender, politics and Irish national identity during this formative period. Firstly, it is concerned with how Irish political discourse conceptualized and constructed gender identities, both masculinity and femininity, and how gendered language and imagery were used to determine access to the public sphere, and to the nation. Secondly, it is interested in the means through which women engaged with radical politics during this period, and how they negotiated the gendered boundaries of the political and national community to construct identities as political and national subjects.

This dual analysis is reflected in the sources used. In order to determine the significance of gender representations within Irish political discourse, I have undertaken a gendered reading of political material from this period, including newspapers and pamphlets, as well as the correspondence and personal writings of political figures.

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<sup>67</sup> Anne McClintock, "No Longer in a Future Heaven": Gender, Race and Nationalism', in Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat (eds) *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, & Postcolonial*

Though I have focused primarily on United Irish materials, other contemporary political sources have also been incorporated. Chapter six looks in detail at the pamphlet debate on the Act of Union and chapter seven examines representations of the United Irishmen and the 1798 rebellion in Irish nationalist literature up to 1848. The examination of women's engagement with radical and national politics draws on a combination of contemporary accounts, and female correspondence and diaries, as well as Irish women's published writing from this period, including poetry, novels and political pamphlets.

In terms of chronology, the main focus is on political events during the 1790s. However, I have also located the emergence of the United Irishmen within the context of political processes stretching back to the Irish Patriot movement of the 1770s and 1780s. Consequently, most of the chapters begin with a consideration of political and social affairs during this period. In addition, the two final chapters cover developments in Irish political culture between 1801 and 1848, encompassing the incorporation of Ireland into the British union and the shift towards romantic nationalism, two developments that have important implications for the relationship between gender, politics and Irish national identity. Roughly speaking, then, the period covered within the study is that of the 'age of democratic revolutions' from the American Revolution in 1776 to the European risings of 1848.

The thesis is structured in seven chapters. Chapter one considers gender construction within United Irish ideology. This will argue that the oppositional public sphere which the United Irishmen sought to create was, as the more optimistic interpretation of the Habermasian public sphere would suggest, not inherently masculine. However, the movement's decision to restrict the franchise to adult males formally established women's political exclusion. In order to justify this exclusion, the United Irishmen elaborated a political masculinity that was somewhat at odds with their own commercial liberalism. Their use of republican rhetoric enabled them to posit a model of the citizen soldier that transcended sectarian differences, but also limited full citizenship to men. Yet the discourses of rational and commercial progress that underpinned much of the United Irishmen's ideology also suggested an alternative vision of women's status

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*Perspectives* (Minnesota, 1997), p. 92.

within the political community. The identification of women as both the index and actuating principle of historical development in Enlightenment narratives of progress formed the basis for a more egalitarian view of gender relations. At the same time, a discourse that measured national development by the treatment accorded to women could also reinforce a model of chivalric masculinity that reduced women to passive objects of male veneration and protection.

Previous accounts of female participation in the United Irish movement, which have gathered diverse studies of individual women under the heading 'women of 1798', have generally not paid sufficient attention to the importance of religious, class and cultural factors in determining the character of women's engagement with radical politics during the 1790s.<sup>68</sup> Consequently, chapters two to four comprise an investigation of the experiences of women from each of the principal sections of eighteenth-century Irish society: elite women of the Protestant Ascendancy, middle-class women from the Ulster Presbyterian community and women from the Roman Catholic plebeian classes. I do not suggest that there is any simple alignment between membership of these religious groups and class, as there were of course working-class Protestants and middle-class Catholics in eighteenth-century Ireland. However, these categories broadly reflect the contours of socio-economic stratification during this period, and enable a comparative study of the class and religious dimensions of women's political practice.

Chapter two considers elite women of the Protestant Ascendancy and draws on the large body of recent research on elite women's political participation in eighteenth-century England, which has highlighted the high degree of female engagement in the political life of the eighteenth-century aristocracy.<sup>69</sup> As I shall argue, the political position of

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<sup>68</sup> Nearly all of the women included in this survey were politically liberal and sympathetic to the United Irish movement and I have chosen not to describe the experiences of loyalist women. This is partly due to the availability of sources, and constraints of time and space. While I believe that a study of the gender dimensions of both elite and popular loyalism during this period would be very valuable, a focus on radical women from across the religious and social spectrum enables a more direct comparison of the social and religious determinants of women's political practice.

<sup>69</sup> See for example Elaine Chalus, 'Elite Women, Social Politics and the Political World of Late Eighteenth-Century England', *Historical Journal*, 43 (2000), pp. 69-98; Elaine Chalus, 'Women, Electoral Privilege and Practice in the Eighteenth-Century', in Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson (eds), *Women in British Politics, 1760-1860: The Power of the Petticoat* (London, 2000), pp. 19-38; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London, 1996), ch. 6, Amanda Foreman, *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire*, (London, 1998); Amanda Vickery (ed), *Women, Privilege, and Power. British Politics, 1750 to the Present*, (California, 2001); and Judith Lewis, *Sacred to Female*



elite Irish women was similar in several respects to that of their English counterparts, as they exercised a degree of both formal and informal political influence. Elite women's political power was conventionally based on property, inheritance and mediated influence, so that they had perhaps the most to lose from the victory of a radical cause that excluded women from its vision of universal political rights. Yet, during the late eighteenth-century many elite women were drawn into the Irish Patriot movement, playing a particularly important role in the consumer nationalist campaign. The increasing identification with the Irish nation within elite Protestant circles placed them in a peculiarly anomalous position in relation to radical politics. A more precise examination of elite women's response to radical politics during the 1790s will be undertaken through case studies of three women: Sarah Tighe, a Methodist and owner of the Wicklow borough of Inistogue, the political hostess Elizabeth Hastings, Lady Moira, and Lady Lucy Fitzgerald, sister of the United Irish leader Lord Edward Fitzgerald. These will highlight the complex interaction of religious, class, political and familial loyalties that determined each woman's individual response to, and engagement with, the United Irish movement and the 1798 rebellion.

In many ways late eighteenth-century Belfast, with its assertive middle-class, commercial ventures, voluntary associations and civic institutions, fits most closely Habermas' description of the bourgeois public sphere. Chapter three examines the relationship between Presbyterian women in Belfast and late eighteenth-century radicalism. While Mary Anne McCracken is the most well-known Belfast female radical from this period, this chapter will focus primarily on Martha McTier, the sister of the United Irish founder William Drennan, whose extensive correspondence with her brother provides a valuable insight into Belfast politics in the 1790s. This chapter considers the religious and social elements of Belfast's political culture that promoted women's political participation, including the high levels of female literacy with Ulster Presbyterian culture, but also the confluence of political and religious debate within the Presbytery. Women's participation in the town's associational culture is examined, with particular reference to female philanthropic initiatives and the United Irishwomen societies, associations which, in different ways, acted as conduits for female radicalism.

An analysis of Martha McTier's letters suggests how her epistolary relationships enabled her to engage in the oppositional discourse of the public sphere. Highly political in content, McTier's letters not only earned her a public reputation, but also became subject to government surveillance during the 1790s, underlining the unstable boundaries between the public and private spheres.

The fourth chapter considers the relationship between Irish Catholic women and plebeian radicalism in the late eighteenth-century. While the United Irishmen sought to draw Catholics into the oppositional public sphere through intensive dissemination of print media, the more radicalized Catholic political constituency of the 1790s retained significant structural and ideological links with the underground protest culture of native Ireland. Consequently this chapter begins with an overview of Irish popular protest from the 1760s, examining sexual symbolism in Irish agrarian agitation and considering the signification of female figuration and sexual inversion in the imagery and ritual of rural protest groups. Although Leersen's suggestion that Catholic and Gaelic Ireland was characterized by the absence of a public sphere is a useful starting point for thinking about the nature of Catholic popular politics, it may be more helpful to think in terms of a competing subaltern public, with different modes of political expression. Whilst elite and middle-class women's political engagement was often mediated through the reading and writing public, such forms of political expression were largely unavailable to plebeian women. Hence their political involvement took a more oral and physical form, as they hurled insults and rocks in the political crowd, loudly lamented their dead relatives, and boldly appropriated the apparel of their Protestant mistresses during the upheaval of the 1798 rebellion.

One of the most obvious forms of female intervention in the public sphere is as published writers. In chapter five the political aspect of Irish women's writing published between the 1780s and 1790s is examined. Through works such as the female authored patriot novel *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion* (1781), and the political poetry of Mary O'Brien and the United Irish propagandist Henrietta Battier, Irish women writers adopted the language of patriotism and the rational public sphere and asserted their identity as political subjects. However, during this period Irish women writers were also engaged in formulating alternative models of both female

patriotism and Irish national identity. As this chapter contends, it was partly in response to women's exclusion from full membership of the Irish political nation that they began to focus on the historical and cultural aspects of the Irish identity, adapting the work of Anglo-Irish antiquarians for a popular audience. Whereas the United Irishmen subordinated culture to politics, writers such as the translator and poet, Charlotte Brooke, the historical novelist Anna Millikin and the Gothic novelist, Regina Maria Roche, developed a strand of bardic nationalism that privileged culture over politics and foregrounded women's role within the nation as educators, conciliators and custodians of tradition.

The most well-known political works by Irish women writers, the 'national tales' of Maria Edgeworth and Sydney Owenson, emerged from the debate on the Act of Union. In chapter six, the context of this engagement will be established through an examination of the gendered language which pervaded the debates on the proposed Anglo-Irish union. The pamphlet war on the union was dominated by sexual allegories, opponents representing the measure as either a forced marriage or a rape of the feminized national body. Gender also pervaded the union debates in other ways, the imminent loss of Irish political independence making explicit many of the implicit assumptions about the relationship between gender, politics and national identity that structured the Irish political imagination, as the loss of the Irish parliament was equated with the emasculation of the Irish manhood. At the same time, the proposed Anglo-Irish union also prompted a vigorous response from women, generating the only female-authored political pamphlets from this period. The concluding section of the chapter compares representations of gender and national identity in Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) and Edgeworth's *Ennui* (1809). This suggests how both authors drew on the incipient strand of 'bardic' nationalism to construct a more 'feminized' form of national identity in response to the collapse of both the 'official' and 'oppositional' Irish public spheres in the post-rebellion, post-Union period. Owenson's work in particular, it is argued, was instrumental in facilitating the shift from the rational discourse of the eighteenth-century public sphere to the affective discourse of the 'imagined community', a transition that had ambivalent implications for women's relationship to the nation.

The final chapter traces the re-appropriation of bardic or romantic nationalist discourse by male writers in the nineteenth century. The female personification of Ireland, which Owenson and Edgeworth had imbued with a degree of political agency, would again become the passive object of masculine desire, or a grief-stricken emblem of national suffering. This argument is part of a broader examination of the role of gender in the commemoration of the United Irishmen between 1798 and 1848, which begins with a comparison of representations of women in loyalist and nationalist accounts of the 1798 rebellion. While the thesis does not focus on the experiences of those women who were most closely identified with the United Irishmen in nationalist historiography: Matilda Tone, Sarah Curran and Pamela Fitzgerald, this chapter attempts to explain how and why these women assumed such a prominent role in the construction of their husbands' and sweethearts' heroic identity. It considers the shift from neo-classical forms of remembrancing, which privileged masculine stoicism over female grief, towards a more demonstrative form of commemoration that foregrounded the grieving woman. The representation of Matilda Tone, Sarah Curran and Pamela Fitzgerald in Irish nationalist discourse is examined, indicating how their positioning as symbolic characters within the Irish 'national drama' entailed both their de-politicization and sentimentalization.

One of the objects of this thesis is to deconstruct the image of the devoted and self-sacrificing woman associated with the United Irish movement that was constructed during the nineteenth century. However, this is not intended to be an overtly celebratory history of the 'women of 1798' that merely replaces the passive figures of nationalist historiography with a pantheon of dynamic heroines more palatable to the feminist sensibilities of the early twenty-first century. The chapters that focus on women's experiences and political practices during the 1790s can be understood as contributing to the 'recovery project' of Irish women's history, readjusting the historical lens to bring these women into sharper focus, but it also argued that women's experiences cannot be detached from the broader political culture of the period, and the shifting constructions of male and female political and national identities.<sup>70</sup> An

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<sup>70</sup> This is in keeping with the approach to Irish women's and gender history outlined by Marilyn Cohen and Nancy Curtin. Responding to the agenda for Irish women's history proposed by Margaret MacCurtain, Mary O'Dowd and Maria Luddy in 1992, which argued that an empirical reconstruction of Irish women's lives must precede the integration of a gender analysis into Irish history, Cohen and Curtin caution against a 'one-sided concern with women' or a 'one-dimensional hegemonic construct of

examination of women's activities within the public sphere implicitly rejects any simple division of men and women's history into separate historiographical spheres. Although this study supports an 'optimistic' reading of the eighteenth-century liberal public sphere, arguing that as an ideal and a practice it could be expanded to incorporate women, it also examines the gendered rhetoric that continued to identify political citizenship with masculinity, and attempts to trace the boundaries that structured and limited women's political participation across the religious and social spectrum. As the concluding chapters suggest, it was partly because of women's tenuous position within the late eighteenth-century Irish public sphere that they were able to elaborate new literary and cultural forms of national identity in the wake of the Act of Union.

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masculinity'. Margaret MacCurtain, Mary O'Dowd and Maria Luddy, 'An Agenda for Women's History in Ireland, 1500-1900', *Irish Historical Studies*, 28 (1992), pp. 1-37; and Marilyn Cohen and Nancy Curtin, 'Introduction: Reclaiming Gender: An Agenda for Irish Studies', in Cohen and Curtin (eds), *Reclaiming Gender*, pp. 1-9. For a critical analysis of the relationship between women's history and gender history see Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (2nd edn, New York, 1999), pp. 1-50.

## Chapter One: 'Let them be citizens, let them be men': Gender Construction in United Irish Ideology

Alas! How sad by Shannon's flood,  
The blush of the morning sun appears!  
To men who gave for us their blood,  
Ah! What can women give but tears!

William Drennan, 'The Wail of the Women after the Battle' <sup>1</sup>

These verses, by the United Irishman William Drennan, appear to encapsulate the movement's gendered division of political labour: men gave 'their blood' in acts of martial republican virtue, whilst women's role was one of passive republican sacrifice. The deeply gendered character of classical republican discourse has been identified as one of the key reasons for women's exclusion from the public sphere during the 'age of democratic revolutions', an analysis that has been extended to the United Irish movement.<sup>2</sup> Given the United Irishmen's evolution into a revolutionary, paramilitary organisation such a model of gender construction seems particularly persuasive, but it may obscure other less overtly militaristic aspects of the United Irishmen's social and political thought. As this chapter will argue, classical republicanism did provide the United Irishmen with an important conceptual framework for configuring the relationship between gender and politics. However, while the language of classical republicanism, or civic humanism, continued to exert a powerful hold on the eighteenth-century political imagination, it also evolved and changed during this period. As contemporary thinkers sought to reconcile the virtues of the classical era with the realities of modern commercial society, they added new concepts of politeness, sympathy and civility to the more austere rhetoric of civic humanism. This was combined with a nascent liberal discourse that stressed individual, universal rights and social and political progress. Destabilizing the gendered binaries that structured republican thought, these developments presented new and different ways of thinking

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<sup>1</sup> William Drennan, 'The Wail of the Women after the Battle', reproduced in R.R. Madden, *Literary Remains of the United Irishmen of 1798* (Dublin, 1887), p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> On classical republicanism and gender construction in United Irish Ideology see Nancy Curtin, 'Matilda Tone and Virtuous Republican Femininity', in Dáire Keogh and Nicholas Furlong (eds), *The Women of 1798* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 26-46; Nancy Curtin, 'Women and Eighteenth-Century Irish Republicanism', in Margaret MacCurtain and Mary O'Dowd (eds), *Women in Early Modern Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 133-144; and Nancy Curtin, "'A Nation of Abortive Men": Gendered Citizenship and Early Irish Republicanism', in Marilyn Cohen and Nancy Curtin (eds), *Reclaiming Gender: Transgressive Identities in Modern Ireland* (New York, 1999), pp. 33-52.

about women's relationship to the public sphere.

Political pragmatists rather than sophisticated theorists, the United Irishmen drew on an eclectic range of intellectual sources, including British Whiggism and the philosophy of the Scottish and European Enlightenments.<sup>3</sup> Within the Irish context the United Irishmen were heirs to the political legacy of Anglo-Irish patriotism, a mixture of British and European political discourses, albeit with a distinctively Irish inflection. The first two sections of this chapter will explore the main strands of eighteenth-century patriot thought and its influence on United Irish ideology, before considering the United Irish programme and its development during the 1790s. This will suggest the diffuse and sometimes contradictory character of much of the movement's thinking, which can explain degrees of divergence in the United Irishmen's model of gender construction.

Recognizing the tension within United Irish ideology between republican rhetoric and a liberal discourse of universal rights, the following section argues that the United Irishmen drew on a model of republican masculinity that transcended sectarian and class differences, but also legitimated the exclusion of women from full political citizenship. However, this does not necessarily mean that they elaborated a parallel model of republican femininity, or that they sought to restrict female influence to the domestic sphere. Rather it will be suggested that the United Irishmen espoused a more positive view of women's role within the oppositional public sphere. Drawing on Enlightenment narratives of civilization, certain United Irishmen maintained that women could act as both the index and actuating principle of national development, and be equal participants in Ireland's social and political progress. At the same time, the equation between the status of women and claims to national modernity could also be reconfigured as a vindication of Irish masculinity, whereby women were relegated to a passive role as objects of sentimental, masculine devotion.

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<sup>3</sup> On the eclectic and derivative nature of United Irish ideology see Nancy Curtin, *The United Irishmen: Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791-1798* (Oxford, 1994) ch. 1, pp. 13-37; Ian McBride, 'The Harp without the Crown: Nationalism and Republicanism in the 1790s', in S.J. Connolly (ed.), *Political Ideas in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), p. 161.

## I

In a recent study of late eighteenth-century Irish political thought Stephen Small has argued that Irish patriotism and radicalism were largely constructed out of five key 'political languages': Protestant superiority, ancient constitutionalism, commercial grievance, classical republicanism and natural rights. These languages, which were combined in the late 1770s to construct the classic expression of eighteenth-century Irish Patriotism, would, over the next two decades, be stretched and transformed as the Irish Patriot consensus became increasingly fragmented.<sup>4</sup> Though the 1790s presented a radically different political climate to that in which the main strands of Irish political thought had been formulated, the political discourses of eighteenth-century Irish patriotism provided an important intellectual heritage for the United Irishmen. At the same time, certain elements of this intellectual heritage would prove to be more inimical to their objectives than others.

The discourse of 'Protestant superiority' drew on the legacy of the Glorious Revolution that had confirmed the Protestant state in both Britain and Ireland. Ireland had played a key role in the Williamite victory of 1688-1689 and a shared Protestant identity constituted an important binding factor between the two kingdoms. However it was not long before the Anglo-Irish relationship showed signs of strain. Between 1698 and 1699 bills enacted by Westminster placing restrictions on Irish woollen manufactures provoked the first attack from the Protestant Ascendancy against British policy, William Molyneux's *The Case of Ireland's Being Bound by Acts of Parliament in England, Stated* (1698). Positing the existence of an original compact between the Irish people and the English king, dating from the time of Henry II, Molyneux's text forms the classic expression of the appeal to the Irish ancient constitution. Whilst asserting Ireland's legislative independence as a separate kingdom, Molyneux argued that this independence was based on Anglo-Irish enjoyment of their liberties as freeborn British subjects.<sup>5</sup> The premise of this argument - that English settlers should not lose their

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen Small, *Political Thought in Ireland, 1776-1798: Republicanism, Patriotism, and Radicalism* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 1- 2. The concept of 'political languages' is drawn from the work of J. G. A. Pocock, in *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975) and *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth-Century* (Cambridge, 1985).

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the importance of Molyneux's *Case of Ireland* in the evolution of Irish political



rights as freeborn Englishmen simply by crossing the Irish sea - clearly complicated the case for Irish independence, though Theobald Wolfe Tone would later suggest that the policy of Irish separatism had originated with Swift and Molyneux.<sup>6</sup> More problematically the language of Protestant superiority, which reflected the dominant position of the established church within the eighteenth-century Irish political nation, closely equated Protestantism with political liberty and was deeply suspicious of what was perceived as Catholicism's authoritarian and absolutist tendencies.

In addition to arguing for Irish independence on the basis of historical precedent, Molyneux's *Case* also exhibited the influence of his friend and correspondent John Locke. Locke's theories on natural rights and the social contract were common currency in eighteenth-century Ireland, forming the basis of a powerful Patriot critique of English control in Ireland. However, as Small observes, this Lockean framework was usually applied to the rights of nations, rather than individuals.<sup>7</sup> It was not until the late eighteenth century that natural rights discourse began to be used as an argument for the expansion of the franchise. Lockean liberalism, and the idea that true liberty resided in the submission to laws of one's own making, would exert an important influence on United Irish discourse, as it was combined with Thomas Paine's more radical conceptualisation of natural rights in the 1790s.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps the most influential element of eighteenth-century Irish Patriot discourse, and the one most closely associated with the hey-day of Protestant Patriotism in the 1770s and 1780s, is classical republicanism, or civic humanism. This discourse provided a rich vocabulary for structuring and imagining political conflict. The language of virtue,

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thought see Small, *Political Thought in Ireland*, pp. 38-43; and Thomas McLoughlin, *Contesting Ireland: Irish Voices against England in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin, 1999), pp. 41-64. This would be a recurring argument in eighteenth-century Patriot discourse, articulated most memorably by Jonathan Swift in his *Drapier's Letters* (1724). Jonathan Swift, 'Some Observations upon a Paper Call'd, the Report of the Committee of the most Honourable, the Privy-Council in England, Relating to Wood's Half-pence. By M. B. Drapier', in Herbert Davis (ed.), *The Drapier's Letters and other Works, 1724-25* (Oxford, 1959), p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Tracing the development of his political ideas in his memoirs, Tone wrote: 'I made speedily what to me was a great discovery, though I might have found it in Swift and Molyneux, that the influence of England was the radical vice of our government and consequently that Ireland would never be either free, prosperous or happy, until she was independent, and that independence was unattainable whilst the connection with England lasted'. Theobald Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone. Memoirs, Journals and Political Writings, Compiled and Arranged by William Theobald Wolfe Tone*, Thomas Bartlett (ed.) (Dublin, 1998[1826]), p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> Small, *Political Thought in Ireland*, pp. 17-18.

corruption, liberty, balanced government, citizen militias and public spirit continued to infuse Irish political rhetoric throughout the eighteenth century. Irish usage of classical republican discourse was identical in several respects to its British usage, but there was a significant difference in emphasis, with Irish Patriots frequently invoking the threat to national liberty posed by foreign, namely British, influence, as well as the need to protect internal liberty from corruption and tyranny.<sup>9</sup>

While the transmission of the republican tradition into Irish political thought can be traced from Harrington and Milton, via Sidney and Neville, to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century Irish political theorists, John Toland and Robert Molesworth, recent histories of late eighteenth-century Irish political thought have focused more intently on the role of the Ulster dissenting community as a transmitter of theological, philosophical and political radicalism.<sup>10</sup> In terms of religion, eighteenth-century Ulster was the site of heated theological disputation resulting from the controversy concerning subscription to the Westminster confessions in the early eighteenth century, that had led to the breakaway of the liberal 'new light' Presbyterians from the Ulster Synod. The ascendancy of 'new light' Presbyterianism during the eighteenth century was closely linked to its association with the Ulster gentry and the emerging commercial classes. Accommodating their preaching to the tastes of the cultivated and relatively wealthy audiences, 'new light' ministers stressed the civilizing influence of religion, and argued for the practice of social duties on rational, practical grounds.<sup>11</sup>

Ian McBride has suggested that the non-subscribers' elevation of individual conscience

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<sup>8</sup> On the influence of Lockean ideas on the United Irishmen see Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, pp. 13-17.

<sup>9</sup> On the civic humanist or classical republican tradition see Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* and Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History*; Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development, and Circumstances of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies* (Cambridge MA, 1959); and John Robertson, 'The Scottish Enlightenment at the Limits of the Civic Tradition', in Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (eds), *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 137-178.

<sup>10</sup> See Small, *Political Thought in Ireland*, p. 18; Ian McBride, *Scripture Politics: Ulster Presbyterians and Irish Radicalism in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1998); 'William Drennan and the Dissenting Tradition', in David Dickson, Dáire Keogh, and Kevin Whelan (eds), *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism, and Rebellion* (Dublin, 1993), pp. 49-61; and 'The School of Virtue: Francis Hutcheson, Irish Presbyterians and the Scottish Enlightenment', in D. George Boyce, Robert Eccleshall, and Vincent Geoghegan (eds), *Political Thought in Ireland since the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1993), pp. 73-99; and Pieter Tesch, 'Presbyterian Radicalism', in Dickson, Keogh and Whelan (eds), *The United Irishmen*, pp. 33-48.

<sup>11</sup> McBride, *Scripture Politics*, pp. 55-56.

and their growing confidence in human perfectibility laid the basis for the reception of civic humanist ideas into 'new light' circles. One of the most important figures in this process was the philosopher Francis Hutcheson. A native of Armagh, and a close friend of many of the leading non-subscribers, Hutcheson had taught at a dissenting academy in Dublin in the 1720s before taking up the chair in moral philosophy at Glasgow university in 1730, which he held until his death in 1746. Central to Hutcheson's philosophy was his belief that 'the general happiness is the supreme end of all political union', which led him to argue consistently for an oppressed people's right to rebel against an unjust sovereign. The links between the Irish dissenting community and the Scottish Enlightenment were further consolidated and sustained over the course of the eighteenth century as large numbers of Ulster Presbyterians, excluded from Trinity College on account of their religion, were educated at Glasgow and Edinburgh.<sup>12</sup>

The revolutionary implications of Hutcheson's philosophy were first felt in the United States, where his former student Francis Allison was professor of logic and moral philosophy at the College of Philadelphia. Amongst the signatories of the American Declaration of Independence were five of Allison's former students. Ulster politics was, in turn, greatly influenced by the revolutionary republicanism of the American war, as the region was drawn to the cause of the colonists by the ties of kinship that existed between the two communities; these sympathies were strengthened by the negative consequences of the 'unjust' war against the American revolutionaries on the Ulster linen trade. It was during the American war that the Irish Volunteer movement first emerged in Ulster. Although originally formed to provide national defence in the eventuality of a French invasion, the Volunteers, in alliance with Patriot politicians, performed a crucial role in the campaigns for Irish legislative independence and commercial rights. As the Volunteer regiments proliferated throughout the country, Irish political demands were reinforced by the tacit threat of military force, a threat that forced the British government, severely weakened by the reversals of the American war, to concede limited legislative independence to Ireland in 1782.<sup>13</sup>

The martial character of the Volunteer movement indicated its debt to the ideas of civic

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<sup>12</sup> McBride, *Scripture Politics*; and McBride, 'The School of Virtue'.

<sup>13</sup> On the Irish Volunteer movement see A.T.Q. Stewart, *A Deeper Silence: The Hidden Origins of the United Irishmen* (Belfast, 1993).

humanism. Such citizen militias had been advocated at the beginning of the eighteenth century in Scotland by Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun as a necessary precondition for national independence and as schools of civic virtue, and the debate on the advantages and disadvantages of a militia would feature prominently throughout the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment.<sup>14</sup> As the Volunteer movement flourished in Ulster in the 1770s and early 1780s the ideal of the citizen in arms was elaborated by three ministers, William Steele Dickson, William Crawford, and James Crombie, who had all been educated at Glasgow at the height of the militia debates.<sup>15</sup> The Scottish militia debates were part of a broader conflict within the Scottish Enlightenment over the relationship between public virtue, characteristically displayed in such civic associations as a militia, and the realities of a modern commercial society. The classical republican model of virtue emphasized the necessity of the citizen's independence from any relation which might render him corrupt, an independence traditionally based on the possession of 'real' or landed property, and seemingly incompatible with modern commercial exchange relationships. In the context of the debate over standing armies, the benefits of commercial progress were weighed against the potentially corrupting effects of specialization and the loss of individual virtue involved in the delegation of military duties to paid professionals. More broadly, the tension between classical republican values and modern commercial society was envisioned as a conflict between fundamentally opposed values: the self-interestedness and individualism of commerce set against the public spirit of civic humanism, the pursuit of wealth contending with the civic humanist suspicion of the corrosive and degenerating influence of luxury.

In his influential account of the evolution of civic humanism during the eighteenth century, Pocock has argued that the tension between virtue and commerce was increasingly reconciled through the concepts of 'manners' and 'politeness'. The austere, antique conception of virtue, which focused primarily on the political sphere, was replaced with a vision of progress and refinement driven by the engine of

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<sup>14</sup> On Scottish debates on the relative merits of a standing armies and citizen militias see John Robertson, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue* (Glasgow, 1985); and Robertson, 'The Scottish Enlightenment at the Limits of Civic Virtue'; and Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, 'Needs and Justice in the Wealth of Nations', in Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (eds), *Wealth and Virtue*, pp. 1-14.

<sup>15</sup> Stewart, *A Deeper Silence*, p. 54.

commerce.<sup>16</sup> This reconciliation between virtue and commerce had been partly prepared for through the work of Francis Hutcheson in the early stages of the Scottish Enlightenment. Hutcheson rejected Bernard Mandeville's depiction of a society in which the selfish pursuit of individual interest and 'private vices' ultimately led to public benefits, proposing instead man's natural propensity towards benevolence and the individual's innate 'moral sense', a theory that subsequently influenced Adam Smith.<sup>17</sup> According to Smith, the harsher consequences of the accumulation of wealth and division of labour described in his *Wealth of Nations* (1776) could be offset through the development of 'sympathetic exchange' between individuals that was the outcome of the increased sociability of commercial societies.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the Scottish literati's reservations about the compatibility of classical republicanism and modern commerce, the Irish Patriot and Volunteer movement appear to have happily reconciled the two; the Volunteers drew on both the rhetoric of martial virtue and the free trade arguments of Adam Smith in their campaigns for legislative and commercial freedom. While Scottish reservations about the effects of luxury were prompted by the increasing economic prosperity of Scotland during the eighteenth century, the realities of Irish poverty and its relative economic backwardness displaced any fears about the degenerative effects of luxury on the nation. At the same time, the culture of the Volunteer movement does suggest a move from the austere, antique version of public virtue, towards a more polite and sociable form of classical republicanism. As the demand for Irish free trade was one of the key planks of the Volunteers' political programme, the movement actively patronized domestic manufactures. Not only did individual members spend large sums on Irish-made uniforms, the movement also generated a wide selection of patriotic luxury items, ranging from crystal goblets to a furnishing fabric depicting a Volunteer review in Phoenix Park.<sup>19</sup> Combining military display and pleasurable recreation, the Belfast

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<sup>16</sup> Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History* and *The Machiavellian Moment*.

<sup>17</sup> See Robin Downie, 'Introduction', to Francis Hutcheson, *Philosophical Writings*, Robin Downie (ed.) (London, 1994), pp. xvii-xlv.

<sup>18</sup> On eighteenth-century concepts of sympathy and sociability see John Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1987); John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1988); and G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> Sarah Foster, 'Consumer Nationalism in Eighteenth-Century Dublin', *History Today*, June (1997), pp. 44-50.

companies patronized the local theatre, and during the summer review season would invite the local ladies to dine with the officers, a ball or assembly often following the day's parades.<sup>20</sup>

In the nineteenth century Irish nationalists would assimilate the legacy of the Volunteers and Grattan's parliament of 1782 to the nationalist tradition of heroic resistance to British rule, and in the twentieth century these political movements would be described as 'colonial-nationalist', aligning them with both the American revolutionaries and other independence movements in the Americas. However, Joep Leersen has challenged what he terms an anachronistic and insular view of Anglo-Irish Patriotism, and argues that its ideology must be situated in its proper eighteenth-century context, rather than being viewed retrospectively through the lens of Irish nationalism. According to Leersen, the Patriot movement should be understood as the forerunner of liberalism rather than nationalism, 'middle-class, enlightened, complacent in its economic security, joining the notion of individual liberty with that of social consensus and government accountability'.<sup>21</sup> In assessing the degree of continuity between eighteenth-century Patriotism and subsequent Irish nationalist movements, a key factor is the relationship to the Irish national past. As noted above, the Patriot tradition frequently rested its claims to parliamentary emancipation on a shared English constitutional heritage. Yet, as Leersen's work on the evolution of Irish national identity prior to 1800 demonstrates, there was a developing interest in the latter half of the eighteenth century in the Gaelic and Catholic national past, pioneered by individuals with Patriot sympathies. The estrangement between Britain and the Anglo-Irish community over the course of the eighteenth century encouraged an increasing identification with the Gaelic past amongst the Protestant Ascendancy. However, these

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<sup>20</sup> McBride, *Scripture Politics*, p. 125. On discourses of politeness in eighteenth-century Irish society see Toby Barnard, 'The Languages of Politeness and Sociability in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', in D. G. Boyce, Robert Eccleshall and Vincent Geoghegan (eds), *Political Discourse in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Basingstoke and New York, 2001), pp. 192-221.

<sup>21</sup> Joep TH. Leersen, 'Anglo-Irish Patriotism and its European Context: Notes Towards a Reassessment', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 3 (1988), pp. 8, 15; and *Mere Irish and Fior-Ghael: Studies in the Idea of Irish National Identity, its Development and Literary Expression prior to the Nineteenth Century* (Cork, 1996). On the adoption of the Gaelic past by the Protestant Ascendancy see also Clare O'Halloran, 'Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations: Antiquarian Debate on the Celtic past in Ireland and Scotland in the Eighteenth Century' (Ph.D thesis, University of Cambridge, 1991); John Hutchison, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London, 1987), pp. 48-75; and Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800* (Cambridge, 1999), ch. 7.

historical investigations did not inform the Patriot programme in the same way that they would influence later Irish cultural nationalism, investigations into the Gaelic tradition acting neither as a justification for Irish separatism, nor as an argument for the revival of an authentic and unique cultural heritage. While Patriot ideals could be projected back onto an idealized Irish past, the antiquarian Sylvester O'Halloran for instance discerning in the Milesian past a vision of 'polite and commercial' society, this, as Leersen suggests, involved the 'Patriotizing' of the Gaelic past, rather than the 'Gaelicizing' of the Patriot present and future.

## II

The eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish Patriot tradition has been considered at some length here, as this native political and patriotic tradition constituted an important formative influence on the United Irishmen. Not only did much of the vocabulary of Patriot discourse infuse United Irish rhetoric, but the Volunteer movement also acted as training ground for several members of the United Irishmen.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, certain continuities in membership and ideology should not obscure the very significant departure in Irish political discourse after 1789. The Volunteer movement, whilst drawing on a relatively broad social constituency, remained elitist and conservative in character, the rights and duties of landed property shaping its republicanism, and the expansion of the franchise remaining very low on its list of priorities. It was also a distinctly Protestant phenomenon. Though the movement demonstrated an increasingly tolerant attitude towards Catholicism, with Catholics being admitted to certain Volunteer companies, conflict over the issue of Catholic emancipation would ultimately divide the movement in 1783. Moreover, despite the increasingly assertive national consciousness evident in the Patriot movement in the latter half of the eighteenth century, the fundamental link between the Irish and British crowns remained unchallenged.

While the Volunteer split on the issue of Catholic emancipation in the 1780s presaged

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<sup>22</sup> See Stewart, *The Hidden Origins of the United Irishmen*; Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, pp. 30-32; and James Kelly, 'Parliamentary Reform in Irish Politics: 1760-90', in Dickson, Keogh and Whelan (eds), *The United Irishmen*, pp. 74-87.

the emergence of a more radical element within Irish politics, the most immediate radicalizing factor was the French Revolution. The discourse of French republicanism imbued United Irish rhetoric with the terminology of popular citizenship, universal rights and equality, leading it away from the more modest aspirations for parliamentary reform of the Volunteer movement. The revolution itself presented proof to Irish radicals that the traditional link between Catholicism and absolutism had been broken, and that Catholics were now to be considered capable of liberty. Indeed, the emergence of the Society of United Irishmen can be understood as dating from a celebration of the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille in Belfast on 14 July 1791.<sup>23</sup> The French revolution would supplant the Glorious Revolution in United Irish rhetoric, and United Irish support for the revolution remained largely unwavering through the execution of Louis XVI, the excesses of the Terror, and the outbreak of war. This ideological affinity with the French revolutionaries was further strengthened by a military alliance between the United Irishmen and the French following official negotiations between 1795-96.<sup>24</sup>

The extreme republicanism of Thomas Paine also had a significant impact on the United Irishmen. The *Rights of Man* Part I (1791) was hugely popular in Ireland, lengthy extracts being published in three Dublin newspapers and a print run of ten thousand copies selling out shortly after its publication.<sup>25</sup> Paine's uncompromising attack on hereditary monarchy nudged the United Irishmen towards full-blown republicanism, and his arguments in favour of the rights of the industrious and labouring classes encouraged a much more expansive conceptualization of the citizenry. His espousal of popular sovereignty based on reason rather than historical precedent proved particularly attractive in the Irish context, where historically based arguments for political rights were invariably confessionally and ethnically exclusive.

While the adoption of Jacobin and Paineite revolutionary republicanism by the United Irishmen signalled a distinct shift towards political radicalism on the part of the

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<sup>23</sup> Although the first meeting of the United Irishmen did not take place until October 1791, Nancy Curtin identifies the Bastille day parade as a significant propaganda event, its success providing much of the impetus towards the formation of the society. Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, p. 229.

<sup>24</sup> On these negotiations see Marianne Elliott, *Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France* (New Haven and London, 1982).

<sup>25</sup> David Dickson, 'Paine and Ireland', in Dickson, Keogh and Whelan (eds), *The United Irishmen*, p. 137.



movement, it is more difficult to identify a similar radicalism in their socio-economic agenda. Indeed, there was significant continuity between the demands of the Patriot movement of the 1770s and 1780s for Irish freedom from English trade restrictions, and the objectives of the United Irishmen. The deleterious effects of English influence on Irish commerce remained a standard complaint in United Irish literature. Intellectually, there is clear evidence for the continued influence of Scottish Enlightenment theories of commercial progress on United Irish ideology. The Presbyterian minister and United Irishman, William Steel Dickson, had been taught by Adam Smith at the University of Glasgow and acknowledged a significant intellectual debt to him in his memoirs.<sup>26</sup> The influence of Smith was not restricted to the Ulster members. Arthur O'Connor was a self-avowed disciple of Smith and his treatise *The State of Ireland* (1798) was partly based on a Smithian interpretation of political economy.<sup>27</sup> As with the earlier Patriot movement, the potential tension between classical republican rhetoric and commercial progress did not trouble the United Irishmen. As Curtin notes, 'the United Irishmen happily reconciled virtue and commerce; indeed, they closely identified the two'.<sup>28</sup>

This core belief in the necessity of encouraging Irish industry and commerce reflected the interests of the United Irishmen's middle-class membership. However, the movement's expansion to include the plebeian classes, in particular through its alliance with the underground Catholic Defender movement, can be understood as injecting a more radical socio-economic outlook into their programme. Revising the prevailing view of the United Irishmen as political radicals but social conservatives, Jim Smyth has identified figures such as Thomas Russell, Henry Joy McCracken, James Hope, and Bernard Coile as representative of a distinct radical-populist tendency within the movement. Certainly, the United Irishmen did address socio-economic grievances within their propaganda, and committed themselves to limited and popular reforms, such as the abolition of tithes. However, the leadership never proposed the equalization of property following the rebellion and the existence of this current within United Irish thought is indicative of their pragmatic approach to social and political issues, which led them to direct their writings towards specific audiences and in response to immediate

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<sup>26</sup> William Steel Dickson, *A Narrative of the Confinement and Exile of William Steel Dickson* (Dublin, 1812), p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> James Livesey, 'Introduction' in Arthur O'Connor, *The State of Ireland*, James Livesey (ed.) (Dublin, 1998 [1798]), p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, p. 29.

events. As Smyth acknowledges, the co-existence of these more radical strands alongside moderate or socially-conservative members is symptomatic of the 'unformed and contradictory' nature of United Irish ideology with respect to social questions.<sup>29</sup>

The dual influence of the French Revolution and the Scottish Enlightenment is also evident in the United Irishmen's nationalist formulations. Their identification of the nation, the state and the people, clearly aligned them with the secular, economic and cosmopolitan nationalism of the French Revolution, as distinct from the Catholic, cultural and romantic nationalism that would develop in the nineteenth century. Accordingly, the United Irishmen have been interpreted as defining the nation solely in political and economic terms, rather than as an historical or cultural community. Tom Dunne argues that the movement was only interested in popular culture in so far as they could exploit it for the dissemination of radical ideas.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Kevin Whelan maintains that the movement subscribed completely to the French revolutionary claim to have annihilated history, this approach enabling them to ignore the potentially divisive legacy of the Irish past. Summarizing the thrusting, modernizing outlook of the movement he concludes that: 'The United Irishmen's necks were stuck in concrete, staring relentlessly forward'.<sup>31</sup>

This view of the United Irishmen as solidly anti-historical and uninterested in Irish culture has been reappraised by Mary Helen Thuente. Examining the poetry and ballads generated by the movement, Thuente argues for a much greater degree of continuity between the United Irishmen and later romantic nationalists such as the Young Ireland movement.<sup>32</sup> Several of the United Irish leaders spoke Irish, and the publication of the Irish language journal *The Gaelic Magazine* or *Bolg an tSolair* (1795) by the offices of

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<sup>29</sup> James Smyth, *The Men of No Property: Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century* (London, 1992), p. 165. The autobiography of the radical weaver, James Hope provides a working-class critique of the United Irishmen and sheds much light on the social-radical strand of the movement. James Hope, *United Irishman: The Autobiography of James Hope*, (ed.), John Newsinger (London, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> Tom Dunne, 'Popular Ballads, Revolutionary Rhetoric and Politicisation', in Hugh Gough and David Dickson (eds), *Ireland and the French Revolution* (Dublin, 1990), pp. 139-55.

<sup>31</sup> Kevin Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty: Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of Irish Identity, 1760-1830* (Cork, 1996), p. 61.

<sup>32</sup> As Thuente notes, 'what have become the stereotypical images of Irish nationalism: bards, harps, shamrocks, green flags, political martyrs, and blood sacrifice', originated with the United Irishmen. Mary Helen Thuente, *The Harp Re-Strung: The United Irishmen and the Rise of Irish Literary Nationalism* (New York, 1994), p. 97.

the *Northern Star* certainly suggests that the movement did engage with native Irish traditions and culture. The *Northern Star* warmly endorsed Edward Bunting's collection of ancient Irish music, which they declared afforded a 'new and decisive proof of a very high degree of civilization among our ancestors'.<sup>33</sup> Yet, like the patriotic antiquarians of the 1770s and 1780s, the United Irishmen were not Gaelic revivalists; they were primarily interested in vindicating Irish claims to civility and in demonstrating Ireland's capacity for independence, an aspect that will be discussed in greater detail below. Within the United Irish programme culture remained firmly subordinated to politics.

In addition to recognizing the diverse intellectual influences that acted upon the United Irishmen and the many apparent tensions within their discourse, the task of identifying a coherent and consistent United Irish ideology is further complicated by the fact that their political discourse evolved over the course of the 1790s in response to specific events. The development of the movement has generally been divided into two stages, the first comprising the period during which the United Irishmen was an open organisation campaigning for parliamentary reform, followed by a second phase of secretive underground activity culminating in the 1798 rebellion.<sup>34</sup> In terms of the evolution of United Irish ideology, organisation and tactics, the model of three overlapping stages outlined by McBride is particularly useful. According to McBride, the first phase of United Irish activity was a moral-constitutional one, formally initiated with the establishment of the first Society of United Irishmen in Belfast on October 18 1791, and during which the primary aim of the United Irishmen was the revival of the parliamentary reform movement and the conversion of Protestant radicals to Catholic emancipation. During this period, the most significant political writers were Theobald Wolfe Tone and William Drennan, who drafted most of the addresses of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen. It can be seen as culminating in the Dungannon Convention of February 1793. With the outbreak of the revolutionary wars with France

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<sup>33</sup> *Northern Star*, 23 October 1793. However, the *Northern Star* also drew a distinction between an appreciation of the refinement of ancient culture and a desire to revive those arts. A review of the Belfast Harpers Festival questioned whether there was any purpose in reviving the 'Antient Music of Ireland', as it had been superseded by 'the great variety of instruments which genius and experience have brought so near to perfection'. *Northern Star*, 18 July 1792.

<sup>34</sup> This model of United Irish development has been subject to some revision, Curtin and Smyth noting the continuities between the two phases of United Irish activity, and the possible links between the United Irish leadership, the underground Defender movement and the French revolutionary regime prior to 1795-1796. See Smyth, *The Men of No Property*, p. 79; and Nancy Curtin, 'The Transformation of the United Irishmen into a Revolutionary Mass Organization, 1794-1796', *Irish Historical Studies*, 24 (1985), pp.

in 1793 and the crackdown on radical activity in Britain and Ireland, mass public events such as Volunteer parades and conventions were no longer possible.

The second phase was characterized by radical journalism, mass politicization, and the alliance between the United Irishmen and the Defenders. The main mouthpiece of the movement was the *Northern Star*, launched in Belfast in January 1792. Samuel Neilson, the principal shareholder, was its first editor and its chief contributors included Thomas Russell, the barrister William Sampson, and three Presbyterian ministers - James Porter, Sinclair Kelburne and William Steel Dickson. During this period the movement attempted to convert a public with little experience of political debate to the radical cause, couching their arguments in terms of the tangible socio-economic benefits that would result from parliamentary reform. In the move towards the mass insurrectionary phase of the movement, the repressive government acts passed between 1793-1794, and the recall of the pro-Catholic Lord Lieutenant Fitzwilliam in March 1795, were key moments.

The failed French landing at Bantry Bay in December 1796 marked the final revolutionary stage of the movement. As the administration responded to mass mobilization with a counter-revolutionary terror, the propaganda of the United Irishmen became ever more crude and emotive. The movement's increasingly inflammatory rhetoric is evident in the Dublin-based United Irish paper the *Press*. Launched in September 1797 and sponsored by Arthur O'Connor, Thomas Addis Emmet and Edward Fitzgerald it was suppressed in March 1798 following a veiled assassination threat directed at the Lord Chancellor, Lord Clare. This phase would culminate in open rebellion, beginning on May 26 1798, and ending with the surrender of French troops led by General Humbert on September 8 1798.<sup>35</sup>

### III

In January 1793, during the first moral-constitutional phase of the United Irish movement, a committee of twenty-one members of the Dublin Society of the United Irishmen was charged with drafting a plan for parliamentary reform. The two most

contentious issues for the committee were whether voting should be viva voce or by secret ballot, and whether the franchise should be property based. Those favouring a property requirement narrowly lost by nine votes to eleven, and the United Irishmen adopted the very radical principle of universal male suffrage.<sup>36</sup> Amongst the draft plans which favoured a restricted, but not confessionally based, franchise, one offers some insight into the reasoning behind female exclusion. According to this document, the electorate should be composed, firstly, of those individuals who have 'the wisdom to judge what kind of measures conduced to the public good', secondly, those who have, 'the integrity to prefer the most wise and upright candidates', and finally, those who possess 'the ability and promptitude to support the decrees which the legislature may enact'. Under the first criteria, minors and those without sufficient education would be excluded, and under the second heading, persons convicted of fraud, adultery, or felony. However, it was on the third account that women, along with the clergy of all religions, and Quakers, were to be denied parliamentary representation.<sup>37</sup> The conjunction of these three groups under the same heading suggests that their inability to enact the decrees of parliament derived from their military incapacity. Certainly, this would apply to the pacifist Quakers. Interestingly, women are not excluded on the grounds that they are insufficiently educated, or because of their failure to meet the property requirement.

In this relatively narrow conceptualization of citizenship, one which is based on a mixture of property, education and an ability to serve the public, the elitist overtones of classical republican thought are discernible. However, with the United Irishmen's decision to extend the franchise to both Catholics and non-property holding males they had shifted towards a much more radically inclusive formulation of citizenship. By including Catholics, the movement subverted one of the key binary oppositions along which republican discourse was structured; the polarity between Protestantism and popery was closely associated in the Irish political imagination with those other key oppositions of republican thought: liberty/slavery, virtue/corruption, independence/dependence, public/private.<sup>38</sup> Implicitly they also threatened to subvert

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<sup>35</sup> McBride, 'The Harp without the Crown', pp. 163-164.

<sup>36</sup> Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, p. 24.

<sup>37</sup> R.B. McDowell, 'Select Documents: United Irish Plans for Parliamentary Reform, 1793', *Irish Historical Studies*, 3/9 (1942), p. 57.

<sup>38</sup> McBride, *Scripture Politics*, p. 9; Small, *Political Thought in Ireland*, p. 14.

another binary of republican thought, the distinction between masculinity and femininity.<sup>39</sup> The potential for Catholic enfranchisement to radically destabilize the gendered boundaries of citizenship was quickly seized upon by the movement's opponents. The conservative Anglican Bishop of Ferns, Thomas Elrington asserted in his *Thoughts on the Principles of Government* (1793), that: 'were these reformers asked why they exclude women from these rights, they would probably find it difficult to give, on their own principles, an answer'.<sup>40</sup> Even figures such as the Presbyterian minister, Dr William Bruce, who had been a leading member of the Volunteer movement and a close friend of the United Irishman William Drennan, balked at the possible consequences of universal male political rights. Speaking on this issue at a Belfast town meeting in January 1792 he declared:

If we follow, without restriction, the *theory* of human rights, where will it lead us? In its principle it requires the admission of *women*, of persons under age, and of paupers, to suffrage at elections; to places of office and trust, and as members of both Houses of Parliament.<sup>41</sup>

During the eighteenth century Catholic exclusion from the political nation had been underpinned by penal legislation that prohibited Catholics from owning property, bearing arms and establishing educational institutions. These disabilities had been gradually removed by the Catholic Relief Acts of 1778, 1782, and 1792, and by the late eighteenth century many Irish Catholics were prospering as merchants and traders. However, in terms of education and property, Catholics remained a distinctly marginalized group; their historical exclusion from education and property rights replicated in many ways the marginalization of women. Indeed, in an early critique of the penal code Edmund Burke had attacked the legislation precisely on the grounds that it undermined the patriarchal authority of Catholic husbands and fathers.<sup>42</sup> In making

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<sup>39</sup> On the gendering of binary oppositions in republican thought see Joan Wallach Scott, 'French Feminists and the Rights of Man: Olympe de Gouge's Declarations', *History Workshop Journal*, 28 (1989), p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Elrington, *Thoughts on the Principles of Government, and Their Foundation in the Law of Nature*. By S. N. (Dublin, 1793), p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> [Henry Joy and William Bruce] (eds), *Belfast Politics: or, A Collection of the Debates, Resolutions, and other Proceedings of that Town, in the years 1792 and 1793* (Belfast, 1794), p. 19.

<sup>42</sup> Edmund Burke, *Tracts relative to the Laws against Popery in Ireland* (c. 1765) in Matthew Arnold (ed.), *Edmund Burke: Letters, Speeches and Tracts on Irish Affairs* (London, 1881), pp. 3-10. On the eighteenth-century penal code as an attack on patriarchy see Mary O'Dowd, 'Women and the Law in Early Modern Ireland' in Christine Meek (ed.), *Women in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe* (Dublin, 2000), pp. 105-106.

the case for the inclusion of Catholics in the political nation there was the inherent possibility that such arguments could also be applied to women. In his hugely successful *Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland* first published in September 1791, Wolfe Tone refuted the standard objections against Catholic emancipation. He began with the assertion that Catholics were not sufficiently rational or educated to be trusted with political rights, and contended that supposed Catholic ignorance was not a fact of nature, but a direct result of their oppression under the penal laws: 'We plunge them by law, and continue them by statute, in gross ignorance, and then we make the incapacity we have created an argument for their exclusion from the common rights of man!'<sup>43</sup> By the late eighteenth century writers such as Catherine Macaulay and Mary Wollstonecraft were formulating a very similar case to argue that women's supposed natural intellectual inferiority was in fact the result of inadequate education.<sup>44</sup> However, any potential slippage between these two arguments was pre-empted by Tone, who made an explicit connection between the Catholics' accession to manhood and their accession to full citizenship, declaring 'give them education... give them franchise, as you have already in a certain degree given them property; let them be citizens, let them be *men*.'<sup>45</sup>

Although the 1793 relief act admitted Catholics, with a property qualification, to the franchise, the United Irishmen's objective of universal male suffrage still required a language that could transcend sectarian and class differences, whilst also limiting the potentially unstable boundaries of the political sphere to adult males. Consequently, they continued to blend liberal rights-based discourse with the classical republican model of the arms-bearing citizen. The revival of the Volunteers was a key aim in the early phase of the movement's development, and the rapid shift towards a militant revolutionary organisation derived in large part from the United Irishmen's equation of citizenship with military service.<sup>46</sup> In an address from the Dublin Society of United Irishmen to the Volunteer of Ireland in 1792, they called on 'Citizen soldiers' to take up arms to defend the country from 'foreign enemies and foreign disturbances', adding that

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<sup>43</sup> Theobald Wolfe Tone, 'An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland', in Thomas Bartlett (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone* (Dublin, 1998), p. 288.

<sup>44</sup> Alice Browne, *The Eighteenth-Century Feminist Mind* (Brighton, 1987); Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860* (Basingstoke, 1988), pp. 60-62.

<sup>45</sup> Tone, 'An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland', p. 289.

‘every man should become a soldier in defence of his rights’.<sup>47</sup> In formulating a shared sense of masculine identity that could dissolve social and religious divisions, United Irish rhetoric frequently echoed, and drew on, the French revolutionary concept of fraternity. As Lynn Hunt has demonstrated, the language of fraternity presented a new way of conceptualising relationships between men, replacing the vertical and hierarchical associations of the monarchical system with the horizontal and familial ties of brothers.<sup>48</sup> This new concept of social relations pervaded the United Irishmen’s political vision. William Drennan originally suggested that the society be entitled the ‘Brotherhood’, and the United Irish oath committed its members to ‘forward a brotherhood of affection...among Irishmen of all religious persuasions’.<sup>49</sup>

Implicit in this definition of the rational, male citizen was the suggestion that its opposite lay in the frivolous, the irrational, and the feminine. Those who did not subscribe to the United Irishmen’s enlightened ideals were dismissed as labouring under ‘womanish fears’. In his *Argument on Behalf of the Catholics*, Tone urged those who resisted Catholic emancipation to ‘shake off the old woman, the tales of our nurses, the terrors of our grandams, from our hearts; let us put away our childish fears and look our situation in the face like men’.<sup>50</sup> The tactic of impugning the manliness of those who did not support the Irish cause became even more pronounced as government repression increased. Following the suppression of the Volunteers in 1793, a letter to the *Northern Star* by William Paulet Carey chastised the citizens of Dublin for displaying a passive acquiescence in the face of government repression:

They would fight for a frown, for a misconstruction, or for a whore, yet they behold with calmness, the rash and degrading affronts offered by a wicked and unprincipled individual equally the slave of Mammon and of vice, to that body whose services effected the salvation of their country and proved at once its brightest ornament and its strongest defence. Oh Men! or rather Oh Women of D\_b\_n, since having abandoned the conduct of men, you have proved yourselves unworthy of the name of men.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> See Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>47</sup> *The Society of the United Irishmen at Dublin, to the Volunteers of Ireland* (Dublin, 1792).

<sup>48</sup> Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (London, 1992).

<sup>49</sup> William Drennan to Samuel McTier, 1791, in Jean Agnew (ed.), *The Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 1 (Dublin, 1999), p. 357. United Irish oath reproduced in R. R. Madden, *The United Irishmen their Lives and Times* (New York, 1916 [1842-46]), vol. 2, p. 34.

<sup>50</sup> Tone, ‘An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics’, p. 286.

<sup>51</sup> *Northern Star*, 2 March 1793.



While the concept of republican masculinity, grounded in the ideal of the arms-bearing citizen, legitimized the United Irishmen's gender exclusive definition of citizenship, to what extent did United Irish constructions of femininity draw on republican discourse? Curtin argues that the movement, like the American and French revolutionaries, deployed the concept of 'republican motherhood' in their gendering of political roles, and that women were called upon to 'serve as models of domestic republican probity, consigning them to the private sphere where they would inculcate their men folk with civic virtue and prepare them for the mother nation's service'.<sup>52</sup> A survey of the two principal propaganda organs of the United Irishmen, the *Northern Star* and the *Press*, reveals relatively few representations of republican motherhood, although some are identifiable in the latter publication. In 'A poem written on presenting a female infant with a green top knot on her birthday' the author imagines the young girl growing up to be 'the mother of a hardy race/Thy sons give freedom and thy daughters grace'. The image of the patriotic Roman matriarch was a popular one amongst late eighteenth-century republicans, and the figure of Cornelia, mother to Tiberius and Caius, is described in glowing terms in 'The Jewels of Cornelia'. The piece valorizes Cornelia's willing sacrifice of her sons to the Roman republic, a story which exemplifies the subordination of personal ties and affections to the public good that formed a crucial element of classical republican notions of virtue.<sup>53</sup> However, these are isolated examples of the United Irishmen's consideration of women's maternal role and duties.

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<sup>52</sup> Curtin, 'Matilda Tone and Virtuous Republican Femininity', p. 32. Some of the material that Curtin draws on as evidence of United Irish representations of republican motherhood are in fact nineteenth-century productions. The ballad 'The Patriot Mother' that Curtin cites, in which a young man facing execution is urged by his mother to choose death rather than betray the republican cause, was in fact composed by Mary Kelly for the Young Ireland newspaper the *Nation* in the 1840s. Curtin, 'A Nation of Abortive Men', p. 38; and Mary Kelly, 'The Patriot Mother', in Angela Bourke and others (eds), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions* (Cork, 2002), vol. 5, pp. 901-902.

<sup>53</sup> *Press*, 12 October 1797, 4 January 1798. In her analysis of eighteenth-century discourses on female patriotism Harriet Guest notes a degree of ambivalence in contemporary responses to the republican matrons of Rome and Sparta, and argues that there were diverse representations of 'republican motherhood'. Although Cornelia, the mother of the Graachi, continued to feature in eighteenth-century discussions of classical antiquity, Guest also notes the growing popularity of the figure of Veturia, mother of Coriolanus. Whilst Cornelia embodied the more austere values of classical republicanism, suppressing her maternal affections to sacrifice her sons to the Roman republic, Veturia's intercession with her son on behalf of Rome presented a softer, more humanized image of maternal virtue. Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago, 2000), pp. 220-251. Although representations of 'republican motherhood' were relatively rare in United Irish propaganda it was always the figure of Cornelia that was invoked and I have been unable to find any references to Veturia. Perhaps the story of Coriolanus and the figure of Veturia had more particular resonance for a late eighteenth-century British audience because of possible parallels with the American war.

Whereas the French revolutionaries, drawing on Rousseau's strictures on breast feeding and his critique of unnatural, debauched mothers, ascribed a great deal of significance to the proper performance of motherhood within the republic, an emphasis on the political dimension of motherhood is almost entirely absent from United Irish literature.<sup>54</sup>

Certainly the United Irishmen drew on the rich stock of republican imagery equating sexual and political corruption, implicitly reinforcing a sexual double standard which understood woman's chastity as her most important virtue. In its opening editorial, the *Press* contrasted itself with those Castle publications that appear before the public, 'in all the charms of a virtuous virgin', but which soon degenerate and 'receive the private embraces of the minister behind the curtain - or act the bolder part of the public prostitute'.<sup>55</sup> For British and French radicals such equations between sexual and political corruption were often expanded into a critique of prevailing sexual norms, in which depravity and debauchery, especially female sexual depravity, were understood as symptomatic of an unreformed political system. Attitudes towards female sexuality within republican discourse drew on anxieties that women, through their sexuality, would introduce factionalism and favouritism into the masculine public sphere. In republican analyses of the decline of the Roman Empire the increased prominence and sexual laxity of Roman women in the latter stages of the empire was blamed for the enervation and effeminization of its formerly austere, masculine values.<sup>56</sup>

The kind of vituperative attacks on aristocratic female vice and immorality that were a frequent feature of British and French radical propaganda are almost entirely absent in United Irish literature. As will be discussed in chapter two, elite Irish women did exercise a high degree of formal, and informal, influence in Irish politics. However, there is only one negative reference to this aristocratic influence in the United Irish

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<sup>54</sup> On representations of motherhood by Rousseau and during the French revolution see Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*, p. 86 and Mary Jacobus, 'Incorruptible Milk: Breast-Feeding and the French Revolution', in Sara E. Melzer and Leslie W. Rabine (eds), *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution* (New York, 1992), pp. 54-71.

<sup>55</sup> *Press*, 28 September 1797.

<sup>56</sup> On the equation between female influence, sexual corruption and political corruption in French republican discourse see Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*, pp. 39-65; Dorinda Outram, 'Le Langage Mâle de la Vertu: Women and the Discourse of the French Revolution', in Peter Burke and Roy Porter (eds), *The Social History of Language* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 120-135. For Britain see Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 71-72; and Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley, 1995), pp. 155-56.

press, and the majority of references to aristocratic women were quite favourable.<sup>57</sup> In fact, during the 1790s it was conservative commentators who were more likely to point out the social ills deriving from the want of virtue amongst elite Irish women. In a sermon preached before the Association for Discountenancing Vice and Promoting the Practice of Virtue and Religion, the Rev. William Magee decried the ‘increasing dissipation, and unprincipled pursuit of pleasure, amongst the FEMALE part of the community’, which had seeped down from the upper classes to pervade all social ranks. He cautioned the congregation that:

... if ever the women of any country, shall become so far vicious, as to have thrown off all restraints of religion and decorum - and shall be able to turn the scale of fashion in their favour, so as to glory in their shame, and triumph in their dishonour - the fate of that country is decided - the descent to vice is no longer gradual - the fences of virtue are everywhere borne down by a sweeping resistless torrent and the land is deluged with abominations.<sup>58</sup>

There are several possible explanations as to why the United Irishmen did not voice the kind of suspicions about female influence and depravity traditionally associated with classical republican thought. A difference of emphasis between Irish and French views on motherhood may be attributed to the fact that the United Irishmen were not, as the French were, concerned with the consolidation of a republic, so that the concept of republican reproduction was not directly relevant, although it may well have become so had the rising been successful. Similarly the movement was not directly interested in the reform of Irish morals and manners, believing that once the Irish republic was established this purified form of government would itself ensure a social reformation. More fundamentally perhaps, United Irish attitudes towards Irish women were shaped by the specific character which classical republicanism acquired in the Irish context. Classical republican thought was often embedded in cyclical notions of political time that understood political republics, and republican masculinity, as subject to cyclical

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<sup>57</sup> *Northern Star*, 13 June 1792. The *Northern Star* praised the Marchioness of Antrim for her decision not to influence her tenants in the 1792 Antrim election and noted with approval Lady Louisa Connolly's encouragement of local female industry through a scheme for manufacturing straw bonnets. *Northern Star*, 21 January 1792; and 15 July 1796.

<sup>58</sup> Rev. William Magee, *A Sermon Preached before the Association for Discountenancing Vice and Promoting the Practice of Virtue and Religion in St. Anne's Church on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> May, 1796* by Rev. William Magee (Dublin, 1796), p. 44.

processes of decay and degeneration.<sup>59</sup> The decline of republican virtue and a slide into effeminacy were associated with the degenerative effects of luxury on the masculine public and linked to heightened female influence, a process detailed in Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1781). As Small observes, Irish patriots in the 1770s and 1780s had generally applied this cyclical framework to describe the fate of the English state. Accordingly they believed that: 'Ireland was finally ascending the wheel of fortune helped by the virtues of its Patriot citizens, while England was in decline due to its public and private vices'.<sup>60</sup>

The application of republican analyses of decline and corruption to the English, rather than the Irish nation, meant that the United Irishmen tended to contrast English vice, especially sexual vice, unfavourably with Irish virtue. A letter to the *Northern Star* lavished praise on the 'exemplary conduct of the females of this island', and noted Irish women's superior reputation for conjugal fidelity in comparison to their English counterparts: 'Taking it for granted, the arts and sciences flourish in our sister isle, still our legislative records furnish but a small proportion of that irregularity of conduct for which she stands so notorious.'<sup>61</sup> By the 1790s however, such cyclical political narratives were becoming increasingly marginalized in Irish radical thought. The stress on commercial and social improvement that characterized late eighteenth-century Irish patriotism, and the impact of the French revolution, entailed the gradual abandonment of a cyclical view of history in favour of a purely progressive one.<sup>62</sup> As will be suggested in the following section, linear and progressive concepts of time offered new and different ways of thinking about women's role and the relationships between the sexes.

Concepts of republican motherhood generally reinforced the gender distinctions that

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<sup>59</sup> On the relationship between cyclical political narratives and Dutch concepts of masculinity during the 1780s and 1790s see Stefan Dudink, 'Masculinity, Effeminacy, Time: Conceptual Change in the Dutch Age of Democratic Revolutions', in Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (eds), *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History* (Manchester, 2004), pp. 77-95.

<sup>60</sup> Small, *Political Thought in Ireland*, p. 97.

<sup>61</sup> *Northern Star*, 12 November 1795. For remarks on the superior virtue of Irish women in comparison to both the French and English see Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, pp. 540, 547. A similar contrast between British licentiousness and Irish virtue is evident in William Preston's patriotic poem, *The Female Congress; or the Temple of Cottoy*. This envisages London as a temple of vice and sexual depravity to which innocent Scotsmen and Irishmen are lured. William Preston, *The Female Congress, or, The Temple of Cottoy. A Mock Heroic Poem, in Four Cantos* (London, 1779).

<sup>62</sup> Small, *Political Thought in Ireland*, p. 195.

structured civic humanist thought, offering women an indirect and essentially passive role within the public sphere. However, a more inclusive form of republican citizenship was available at this time in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). While envisioning women's rights as citizens as grounded in their roles as wives and mothers, Wollstonecraft argued that the proper performance of their duties necessitated their admission into the discourse of universal equality and universal rights, and she made a tentative suggestion that women should have political representation.<sup>63</sup>

There is substantial evidence to indicate that the United Irish leaders were aware of Wollstonecraft's arguments. The Belfast Society for Promoting Knowledge, which counted several United Irishmen amongst its members, and to which Thomas Russell<sup>64</sup> was librarian, ordered a copy of the *Vindication* in September 1792.<sup>65</sup> The Belfast bookseller William Magee advertised the *Vindication* in the *Northern Star*, and the paper even devoted an entire editorial to the work under the heading 'The Rights of Woman'. The book was recommended to 'the perusal of every mother who can afford

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<sup>63</sup> The *Vindication* exemplifies the tension generated by the collision between progressive liberal discourse and civic humanism in late eighteenth-century political thought, a fusion that placed great strain on her arguments for female emancipation. Hence, whilst she drew on liberal discourse to argue that women as rational individuals should be accorded equal rights, she was also forced to justify this demand in the terms of the civic duties performed by women in their roles as wives and mothers. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men with A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Sylvana Tomaselli (ed.) (Cambridge, 1995 [1790, 1791]). On the influence of civic humanism, rational dissent and liberal discourses on Wollstonecraft's feminism see G.J. Barker-Benfield, 'Mary Wollstonecraft: Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthwoman', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 50 (1989), pp. 95-115; Virginia Sapiro, *Vindication of Political Virtue: The Political Theory of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Chicago, 1992); and Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*, pp. 129-151.

<sup>64</sup> An army officer and close friend of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Thomas Russell (1767-1803) was involved in the establishment of the first United Irish Society in Belfast, where he periodically resided for most of the 1790s. He belonged to the more social-radical wing of the United Irishmen, and was involved in the United Irish merger with the Defenders. Russell was arrested in September 1796 and remained imprisoned during the 1798 rebellion. He was executed in 1803 following his involvement in Robert Emmet's disastrous uprising. See Denis Carroll, *The Man from God Knows Where: Thomas Russell, 1767-1803* (Dublin, 1995).

<sup>65</sup> Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Minutes of the Linen Hall Library, 1 November 1791- 28 October 1793 Russell considered the question of women's intellectual abilities in his journal, wondering: 'Should women be made learned? Is there a difference of mind? why not as of body? Has it ever occurred to anatomists to observe is their any difference in the brains of men and women, children? Women in public offices as clever as men. Queens, poetesses etc. In merchant houses keep the accounts as well as men. Why not mathematicians?' Thomas Russell, *Journals and Memoirs of Thomas Russell, 1791-1795*, Christopher Woods (ed.) (Dublin, 1992), p. 54. However, these brief considerations on the possible rational equality of women, do not indicate any serious thinking respecting women's political rights, but rather they suggest that Russell's views remained firmly within the tradition of the 'Querelle des Femmes', the early modern debate on women's nature and capacity to reason, which relied on scriptural allusion and the citation of examples of female excellence to argue for women's virtues. See Joan Kelly, 'Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*, 1400-1789', in *Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago, 1984), pp. 65-109.

leisure’:

The work abounds with ingenious observations, which do equal honour to the head and the heart of the writer, it affords a variety of judicious instruction for the early management of the female mind, and frequently, and permanently, corrects the assumptions of the *tyrant* man, with a boldness and justice which demand admiration and convey conviction.<sup>66</sup>

Extracts from the *Vindication* criticizing contemporary systems of female education were published in subsequent editions of the paper.<sup>67</sup> However, the more radical sections of Wollstonecraft’s work concerning women’s claims to civic and political rights were not presented to the *Northern Star*’s readers. This was in keeping with the initial positive response to the *Vindication* within progressive intellectual circles. Most reviewers read the work as a sensible treatise on female education, ignoring those recommendations that might unsettle the relations between the sexes. It was not until after the publication of William Godwin’s memoirs of Wollstonecraft, in which he revealed her unhappy affairs, the birth of a child outside marriage and her suicide attempts, that her reputation as a dangerous sexual and political revolutionary was constructed.<sup>68</sup>

There were more direct links between Wollstonecraft, Ireland and the United Irishmen. Between 1786 and 1787, Wollstonecraft had acted as governess to Viscount Kingsborough’s daughters at Mitchelstown, Co. Cork. One of the daughters, Mary King, later eloped with her mother’s half-brother, Col. Henry Fitzgerald; a scandal which culminated in December 1797 with the shooting of Fitzgerald by Mary King’s brother, followed by a sensational trial in the Irish House of Lords in May 1798. The conservative establishment was quick to draw a connection between Wollstonecraft’s corrupting influence and the affair, further contributing to her reputation as a dangerous sexual libertine. Mary King’s sister Margaret Moore, Lady Mount Cashell became an Irish nationalist and, according to Janet Todd, was closely involved with the United Irishmen.<sup>69</sup> Todd has recently traced Mount Cashell’s radical and nationalist politics to

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<sup>66</sup> *Northern Star*, 17 October 1792.

<sup>67</sup> *Northern Star*, 1 June 1793, June 29 1793.

<sup>68</sup> R. M. Janes, ‘On the Reception of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1978), pp. 293-302.

<sup>69</sup> Janet Todd, *Rebel Daughters: Ireland in Conflict 1798* (London, 2003). Although Todd claims that Lady Mount Cashell joined the United Irishmen, the exact extent of Mount Cashell’s involvement in the

her early education by Wollstonecraft.<sup>70</sup> Archibald Hamilton Rowan became personally acquainted with Wollstonecraft after he fled to Paris where she was resident between 1793-1794.<sup>71</sup> Aware that she was the author of the *Vindication*, he was initially shocked to see her, 'parading about with a child at her heels, with as little ceremony as if it were a watch she had just bought ... So much for the rights of woman thought I'. However, he found her to be an interesting and 'rational' conversationalist and they soon became good friends, Wollstonecraft allowing Rowan to use her house in Le Havre during his journey to America. According to Rowan the 'relative duties of man and wife was frequently the topic of our conversation', but given the fractious relationship between Rowan and his own wife he confessed himself to be deeply perturbed by Wollstonecraft's insistence that 'no motive upon earth ought to make a man and wife live together a moment after mutual love and regard were gone'.<sup>72</sup>

As will be discussed in chapter three, Wollstonecraft's views on the rights of women did strike a chord with certain Irish radical women, namely Mary Anne McCracken and Martha McTier. The response amongst United Irish leaders to Wollstonecraft's arguments is more difficult to measure. While they appear to have been sympathetic to her ideas, at least as far as female education was concerned, their attitude to her claims for female civil and political rights was more ambivalent. Following the publication of Godwin's memoirs in 1798, William Drennan, who had himself met Wollstonecraft, reacted to the revelations respecting her private life by observing that: '... her example shows that the rights of women are not to be exercised for some time, without the

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movement is unclear. Although women were certainly sworn into the movement, Todd does not provide any evidence that Mount Cashell actually took the United Irish oath. Janet Todd, *Rebel Daughters Ireland in Conflict 1798* (London, 2003).

<sup>70</sup> On Wollstonecraft and the King sisters see Todd, *Rebel Daughters*, and N.F. Lowe, 'Mary Wollstonecraft and the Kingsborough Scandal', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 9 (1994), pp. 44-56.

<sup>71</sup> President of the Dublin United Irish society from November 1793, Archibald Hamilton Rowan (1751-1834) was sentenced to two years imprisonment in 1794 for distributing William Drennan's *Address to the Irish Volunteers*. He escaped to France, and subsequently America, but was allowed to return to Ireland in 1803. The frequent arguments between Rowan and his wife Sarah Anne were notorious in United Irish circles. She constantly berated her husband for his involvement with the United Irishmen, and in a memorial to the Lord Lieutenant Camden apologised for her husband's 'mistaken zeal' in the 'pursuit of abstract liberty'. See Archibald Hamilton Rowan, *The Autobiography of Archibald Hamilton Rowan* (Shannon, 1972 [1840]); PRONI, Belfast, Camden Papers, T/2627/4/28. Sarah Anne Hamilton to the Earl of Camden, 1795.

<sup>72</sup> Rowan, *Autobiography*, pp. 253, 259. This social conservatism regarding marriage would appear to be representative of the United Irishmen's views on this issue, as there is no evidence that they ever discussed a liberalization of divorce, such as had been instituted in France following the revolution.

control of man or God'.<sup>73</sup> Yet, as will be suggested below, Drennan did not entirely discount the possibility of extending political rights to women.

#### IV

As one of the members of the committee drafted with preparing plans for parliamentary reform in 1793, Drennan advocated the extension of the franchise to all rent-paying males over the age of twenty-one and appended a detailed statement explaining the reasoning behind his proposals. In this statement he observed that the United Irishmen had to consider 'the practicability as well as the perfection of our scheme', noting that: 'In any plan there must be restrictions and limitations'. He proceeded to consider the example of female suffrage, declaring:

... I never saw a good argument against the right of women to vote; and if the habits of thought, and the artificial ideas of education were worn out, as they may be in some generations, it will, I doubt not, appear as natural that females should exercise this right as males. Neither reason nor women have yet had their full and proper influence in the world, and till they come nearer to that point we can only guess at their power. Much perhaps of the perfection of which society is capable, depends on a nearer equality of the sexes and on their accumulated talents and joint endeavours being applied to most of the studies, and occupations, and offices in life, in short, in bringing their respective powers into use, and not separating, but conjoining their efforts for the public good, mental as well as corporeal.

He concluded this strikingly progressive discussion of women's rights by reflecting that: '... certainly we are not prepared for extending the elective right to this class of society, and nearly as little are we prepared for universal suffrage, in practice though we cannot deny the principle.'<sup>74</sup> While this cautious conclusion somewhat deflates the radical potential of the previous lines, Drennan had adopted a similarly cautious approach to Catholic emancipation in the 1780s, when he had argued that Catholics 'were at an earlier stage of society than the rest of the island' and not yet ready 'for the blessing of freedom'.<sup>75</sup> Rather than locating natural rights in a pre-social state,

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<sup>73</sup> William Drennan to Martha McTier, 21 March 1798 in Jean Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters* (Dublin, 1999) vol. 2, p. 382.

<sup>74</sup> NAI, Dublin, Rebellion Papers, 620/20/1. William Drennan, 'Plan of Parliamentary Representation for Ireland'.

<sup>75</sup> William Drennan, *Letters of Orellana, an Irish Helot, to the Seven Northern Counties not represented*



Drennan's statements on Catholic emancipation in the 1780s, and female emancipation in the 1790s, suggest a conceptual link between progress, enlightenment and political rights for both groups, and indicate Drennan's intellectual affinity with enlightenment theories of historical and social development.

The work of William Drennan in many ways exemplifies the ambivalences within United Irish discourse, ambivalences which are reflected in his considerations on gender. The verses quoted at the beginning of this chapter suggest that Drennan subscribed to a rigid gendering of republican roles, and R. R. Madden identified him as the author of that paean to 'republican motherhood', the 'Jewels of Comelia'.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, Drennan's poetry often depicted a sentimentalized version of Irish womanhood that prefigured the language of nineteenth-century romantic-nationalism.<sup>77</sup> However, his reflections on female enfranchisement suggest quite a different view of the relationship between gender and the public sphere. Drennan, who had studied at both Glasgow and Edinburgh universities, would certainly have been familiar with the conjectural histories produced by Scottish Enlightenment thinkers. These sought to reconcile classical conceptions of virtue with the cultural and economic advances made by modern commercial societies by charting the progress from the austere virtues of antiquity to the refinement of passions and manners that characterized modern civilized societies. Rather than concentrating on the histories of government, the main focus of these histories was civil society, the arena where man's social development could be most clearly delineated. Consequently the history of the family, marriage and relationships between the sexes formed a crucial component of these narratives. John Millar included an essay, 'Of the rank and condition of women in different ages' in his *Observations Concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society* (1771), and Lord Kames considered the progress of women in the sixth sketch of his *Sketches of the History of Man* (1774). Most notably, William Alexander published a two volume history on *The History of Women, from the Earliest Antiquity to the Present Time* in 1779, with a Dublin edition published the same year. Although there were differences of emphasis between the various historians, some identifying a 'golden age' of women in the historic

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*In the National Assembly of Delegates, held at Dublin, October, 1784, for obtaining a more Equal Representation of the People in the Parliament of Ireland* (Dublin, 1785), p. 36.

<sup>76</sup> Madden, *The United Irishmen their Lives and Times*, vol. 4, p. 55.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Drennan's poem 'Erin', *Press*, 5 October 1797.

past, and others displaying anxiety about the corruption of female manners in advanced commercial societies, these narratives generally agreed with Alexander's conclusion that: 'The rank ... and condition, in which we find women in any country mark out to us with the greatest precision, the exact point in the scale of civil society, to which the people of such a country have arrived'.<sup>78</sup>

Enlightenment narratives of progress not only suggested that the position of women was an important index of civilization, but also implied that women played a key role in the civilizing process, acting as a refining influence on men, morals and manners. Such a view in itself did not necessarily connote a radical position on female emancipation. Indeed, none of the Scottish historians explicitly suggested the extension of political rights to women. However, the shift away from a classical republican concept of history, with its associated conceptions of a fragile and corruptible masculinity, liable to lapse into effeminacy under excessive female influence, did point towards the potential for a more positive view of female influence, although it could also suggest greater sexual differentiation between men and women. By locating the progressive and dynamic historical impulse within civil society, these narratives further undermined the rigid republican gendering of the public and private spheres. As noted in the introduction, analyses of eighteenth-century democratic thought that stress the republican gendering of the public and private spheres, tend to overlook the fundamentally 'private' aspect of the eighteenth-century public sphere.<sup>79</sup> In a critique of Joan Landes' account of the gendering of the French public sphere, Daniel Gordon has argued that rather than being predicated on the exclusion of women, Enlightenment narratives of progress, in both Scotland and France, understood the mingling of the sexes and the private discussion of public affairs, as a vital motor of improvement. 'The

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<sup>78</sup> William Alexander, *The History of Women from the Earliest Antiquity to the Present Time* (reprint of 1782 edition, Bristol, 1995), p. 151. On the relationship between civic humanism and Scottish 'philosophical histories' see Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History*. On the role of women in narratives of progress see Sylvana Tomaselli, 'The Enlightenment Debate on Women', *History Workshop Journal*, 20 (1985), pp. 101-125; Jane Rendall, 'Clio, Mars and Minerva: The Scottish Enlightenment and the Writing of Women's History', in T.M. Devine and J.R. Young (eds), *Eighteenth-Century Scotland: New Perspectives* (East Linton, 1999), pp. 134-151; 'Introduction' to William Alexander, *The History of Women*, pp. i-xxvi; "'The Grand Causes which Combine to carry Mankind Forward": Wollstonecraft, History and Revolution', *Women's Writing*, Vol. 4, 2 (1997), pp. 155-171; and Mary Catherine Moran, "'The Commerce of the Sexes": Gender and the Social Sphere in Scottish Enlightenment Accounts of Civil Society', in Frank Trentman (ed.), *Paradoxes of Civil Society: New Perspectives on Modern German and British History* (New York; Oxford, 2000), pp. 61-68.

<sup>79</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Thomas Burger trans. (Cambridge, 1992), chs 1-4, pp. 1-140.

modern public', Gordon concludes, 'was held to be rational on account of the fortuitous concrete effects of three instruments of modern communication: commerce, the press, and the inclusion of women in the discussion of political affairs'.<sup>80</sup>

As has already been discussed, languages of improvement and commercial expansion were unproblematically incorporated into the United Irishmen's radical programme. They firmly believed in the educating and enlightening function of the press and political literature, and its ability to construct a critically-debating reading public that would act as the principal arbiter of political rectitude. That they also understood the inclusion of women, as well as the plebeian masses, in the discussion of public affairs to be a crucial element of Irish political modernity can be inferred. In a variation upon enlightenment stadial narratives of progress, the *Northern Star* identified four ages of Europe - 'the Age of Chivalry, the Age of Religion, the Age of Commerce and the Age of Politics'. The writer identified the present age as the 'age of politics; every person, male and female, high and low, rich and poor, in every country of Europe is now a politician'.<sup>81</sup> Certainly the techniques employed in United Irish propaganda to appeal to the uneducated and illiterate masses - the excision of classical references and lofty political rhetoric in favour of direct, easily comprehensible language - also facilitated the inclusion of women within the radical-oppositional public. Martha McTier attributed her political education to the radical press, Mary Anne McCracken was an avid reader of the *Northern Star* and Mary Fitzgerald, sister of the moderate MP Maurice Fitzgerald, recalled that: 'at the time the paper called the *Press* was published I own I had never thought on the subject of Politicks ... the language certainly had the effect of persuading me that there were great partiality and Injustice practised by some of the Administration in Ireland.'<sup>82</sup>

As the United Irishmen evolved into a mass movement during the final revolutionary stage of their development, there is evidence to suggest that women were drawn into the movement in increasing numbers. By 1796 United Irishwomen societies had been

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<sup>80</sup> Daniel Gordon, 'Philosophy, Sociology, and Gender in the Enlightenment Conception of Public Opinion', *French Historical Studies*, 17, (1992), p. 886.

<sup>81</sup> *Northern Star*, 10 September 1795.

<sup>82</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 25 January 1795, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 125. Anna McCleery, 'Life of Mary Anne McCracken, Sister of Henry Joy McCracken', in Robert M. Young (ed.), *Historical Notices of Old Belfast* (Belfast, 1896), p. 181. PRONI, Belfast, Fitzgerald Papers.

established in Belfast, and by 1797 the Castle informer Francis Higgins was reporting that 'women are equally sworn with men'.<sup>83</sup> A theoretical belief in the importance of women's equal engagement in the public sphere was thus combined with a tactical understanding that female support and cooperation was essential if the revolution was to be successful. During this final stage, in late 1797 and early 1798, the *Press* published two direct addresses to Irish women, both of which appealed to women as members of a critically-debating public. The opening lines of an address to 'To his fair Country Women' by 'Marcus' clearly draw on enlightenment narratives of civilization, making a direct equation between national progress and the status of women:

It has been found a universal truth that in proportion as barbarism prevails in any country, the women of that country are held in slavery and subjection. And it is found equally true, that in those nations which have been illumined by the light of science, the women have at all times asserted the dignity of their nature; and that by such assertion they have both adorned and strengthened society.<sup>84</sup>

He proceeds to stress the refining influence of women on morals and manners and highlights the role that they could play in the national struggle by encouraging their men to fulfill their civic obligations, by withholding their praise from 'the wretch whom his country has pronounced execrated', and by deploying the gentle arts of persuasion and grace to 'cement the work of union'. Marcus underlines the centrality of women's support in determining the success of the United Irish project: 'At this moment the fate of Ireland is in your hands, you have it in your power by your heroic virtue to either snatch it from impending destruction, or ... to reduce it to the most abject and unworthy condition.' While the author uses a combination of flattery and threats to rally his addressees to the United Irish cause, there is no suggestion that active political engagement will translate into political rights for women. Blending a progressive understanding of historical development with republican rhetoric, Marcus suggests that women will remain essentially passive citizens, urging their men on to active performance of masculine military virtue. Invoking the figure of the republican matron Cornelia, he poses a stark choice to the women of Ireland, either to emulate Cornelia, who taught her sons 'how to die in defence of their Liberties', or to be the source of

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MIC/639/4/64. Mary Fitzgerald to Maurice Fitzgerald, 25 January 1800.

<sup>83</sup> NAI, Dublin, Rebellion Papers, 620/18/14. Francis Higgins, 29 January 1797. On the United Irishwomen societies see chapter three.

internecine conflict.<sup>85</sup>

While Marcus's address indicates the persistence of a republican gendering of political participation in United Irish discourse, a second appeal to Irishwomen, signed Philoquanikos, but probably written by Arthur O'Connor, illustrates the potential for progressive frameworks of history to incorporate more egalitarian understandings of women's role. Although O'Connor's general aim is similar to that of Marcus, his arguments reflect a much more sympathetic attitude towards female intellectual and civil emancipation. Whereas Marcus contends that it is women's duty to exercise their feminine graces and beauty for the United Irish cause, O'Connor identifies a transformation in the attitudes of Irishmen, whereby women's intellectual merits carry much higher value than their physical qualities:

Believe me females of Ireland, the youth of this country have of late totally changed their mode of thinking as to you. A young man of an energetic mind ...when he weighs the merit of one of you, does not in the first place inquire if she has the Junoian eye, or the Madonal nose; no his first question is, has her sphere of information extended beyond the novel or the sonnet? Has she read rightly? Is she more than the maker of fire-scenes and fillagree? If these and similar questions can be affirmed, then will we seek her society, her friendship, her alliance, with all her external imperfections on her head.<sup>86</sup>

O'Connor addresses Irishwomen as rational members of a critically-debating public, and appeals to them to consider competing political arguments for themselves before reaching a conclusion, though, like Marcus, he warns that indifference cannot be excused: 'It is absurd to suppose that there is not a preponderance of rectitude either on the part of the government or of the people; if then justice be on one side of the question impartiality is not only pusillanimous but criminal. I only urge you to *investigate and choose your opinions*'. The address combines a conviction that national development necessarily enhances the status of women, with a belief that women themselves can act as an important engine of historical change, and makes a strong case for the consideration of women as political beings in the face of social prejudice:

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<sup>84</sup> *Press*, 1 February 1798.

<sup>85</sup> *Press*, 1 February 1798.

<sup>86</sup> *Press*, 21 December 1797.

In political changes you have been the actuating principle; then oh! determine to act for the melioration of your country in the mighty crisis which awaits her. Methinks I hear a discordant chorus of old women of both sexes scream in abhorrence of the idea of a female politician: Avaunt, ye brainless bedlams! I hate your weak antediluvian restriction. I scorn the reasoning which says, 'what has been, shall be,' and as the champion of womanhood, I tell you, you are traitors to your sex.<sup>87</sup>

As has already been noted, O'Connor, like Drennan, was strongly influenced by the philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment, in particular the political economy of Adam Smith. In the *State of Ireland* (1798), which has been described as the only effort to define Irish Jacobinism at a theoretical level, O'Connor attempted to ground Irish political modernity in a philosophical history of the development of civilization, from which Ireland had traditionally been excluded.<sup>88</sup> O'Connor would undoubtedly have been acquainted with Scottish Enlightenment theories on the relationship between women and social progress. An additional explanation for his self-identification as 'the champion of womanhood' may be found in his relationship with the family of the French philosopher and politician, the Marquis de Condorcet and his wife, the *salonnière* and French translator of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Sophie de Grouchy, whose daughter, Eliza, he married in 1807. In 1790 Condorcet had published an article *Sur l'Admission des Femmes au Droit de Cité*, in which he maintained that women should be allowed to exercise the vote, and stated that it was an 'act of tyranny' to exclude women from the rights of man. In Condorcet's essay on the progress of mankind, the *Esquisse des Progrès de l'Esprit Humain* (1793) he argued that the equality of women was essential for the improvement of manners and morals, and claimed that society could only be perfected when men and women were regarded as equal.<sup>89</sup> O'Connor probably did not become intimate with the Condorcet family until after the 1798 rebellion and the Marquis' death in 1794, but he may have been introduced to the Marquis through his friend General Lafayette during an extended trip to France in 1792. Nevertheless, there is evidence that he was already an admirer of Condorcet's work by 1792, and this would certainly have introduced O'Connor to an

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<sup>87</sup> *Press*, 21 December 1797.

<sup>88</sup> McBride, 'The Harp without the Crown', p. 183; Livesey, James Livesey, 'Introduction', O'Connor, *The State of Ireland*, p. 2.

<sup>89</sup> Barbara Brookes, 'The Feminism of Condorcet and Sophie de Grouchy', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, (1980), p. 300.

important strand of Enlightenment 'feminist' thinking.<sup>90</sup> Although O'Connor did not directly propose the incorporation of female emancipation into the United Irish programme, in the *State of Ireland* he described women as 'deprived of political rights', hinting that they had a just claim to such rights. He also rejected the exclusive formulation 'United Irishmen' and addressed himself instead to the 'United Irish People'.<sup>91</sup>

As these examples suggest, Enlightenment narratives of civilization could provide the United Irishmen with a much more progressive framework for understanding and conceptualizing women's position within the Irish public sphere. At the same time, equating levels of national civilization with the status of women could also produce more restrictive and conservative conclusions, according to which civilization was not reflected in female educational attainment, or political participation, but was most accurately measured by the proper enactment of masculinity.

## V

Recognizing that a United Irish insurrection was not far off, Arthur O'Connor concluded *The State of Ireland* with a rousing call to arms, but he also cautioned his 'brave Countrymen' that in the coming revolution they must treat women with respect and propriety, adding that, 'the noblest privilege of man is to be their protector, and the last act of human depravity is to oppress them. On this head a gallant nation needs no admonitions'.<sup>92</sup> Denoting both marital valour and a refined attentiveness towards women, the identification of gallantry as a national characteristic was a recurring theme in United Irish propaganda.<sup>93</sup> Representations of a vigorous Irish manhood rallying to defend their oppressed womenfolk drew on one of the implicit assumptions underpinning the rhetoric of both modern masculinity and modern nationalism: that masculinity is measured through its ability to defend the feminine, which can often

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<sup>90</sup> Jane Hayter Hames, *Arthur O'Connor, United Irishman* (Cork, 2001), pp. 68-70, 234-235, 242.

<sup>91</sup> O'Connor, *The State of Ireland*, pp. 107, 122.

<sup>92</sup> O'Connor, *The State of Ireland*, p. 122.

<sup>93</sup> While Curtin notes the assertion of a masculine chivalric impulse in United Irish propaganda, she does not observe the potential tension between this chivalric ethos and their civic humanism, or the link between chivalry and contemporary narratives of civilization. Curtin, 'A Nation of Abortive Men', pp. 39-40.

signify the nation.<sup>94</sup> The female personification of the Irish nation had a well-established history, having been elaborated in the Jacobite tradition of *aisling*, or dream, poetry, in which a mournful female figure, symbolising Ireland, would beg for assistance from her Stuart protector. The figure of a snowy-breasted and golden-haired Erin appealing to the men of Ireland for protection features repeatedly in United Irish poetry and literature and the movement employed the figure of the maiden harp, a fusion between the national emblem of the harp and the female personification of Ireland, for their seal (figure one).<sup>95</sup> During the period of government repression preceding the rebellion, these allegorical representations of an abused and suffering female nation were reinforced by reports in the United Irish press of the actual rape of the female population. Accounts of loyalist violations and aggression against women served as an important propaganda tool for United Irish recruitment, the *Press* declaring that 'every ravished woman, or deflowered virgin, will reinforce the cause with not less than a hundred'.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> See Silke Wenk, 'Gendered Representations of the Nation's Past and Future', in Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann and Catherine Hall (eds), *Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 2000), p. 68.

<sup>95</sup> On female personifications of Ireland in United Irish and nationalist iconography see Mary Helen Thuente, 'Liberty, Hibernia and Mary Le More: United Irish Images of Women' in Keogh and Furlong (eds), *Women of 1798*, pp. 9-25; Máirín Nic Eoin, 'Secrets and Disguises? Caitlín Ní Uallacháin and Other Female Personages in Eighteenth-Century Irish Political Poetry', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 11 (1996), pp. 7-45 and L. Perry Curtis Jr., 'The Four Erins: Feminine Images of Ireland, 1780-1900', *Eire/Ireland*, pp. 70-102.

<sup>96</sup> *Press*, 26 December 1797.



The use of female iconography for a political cause was not, of course, restricted to the United Irishmen. In the 1790s one of the most prominent icons of suffering womanhood was the figure of Marie Antoinette, as described by Edmund Burke in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). The catastrophe of the Revolution is Burke's fantastical description of the "Sovereign Lady," forced to flee the royal palace where an chivalrous knight would have protected her. In the *Reflections*, Burke writes: "The Sovereign Lady, who has been carried to the guillotine, is a noble and beautiful woman, who has been the victim of a chivalrous and heroic conduct, according to the ideas of that age. She is the only person who has been able to share this great calamity, because she has been a Queen."



**Figure One**  
*Seal of the United Irishmen*

The use of female iconography for a political cause was not, of course, restricted to the United Irishmen. In the 1790s one of the most prominent icons of suffering womanhood was the figure of Marie Antoinette, as described by Edmund Burke in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). The centrepiece of the *Reflections* is Burke's fantastical description of the fall of Marie-Antoinette, forced to flee the royal palace where no chivalric hand was raised to defend her.<sup>97</sup> As Claudia Johnson has persuasively argued, Burke in this passage is not so much lamenting the fall of Marie-Antoinette, as he is lamenting the loss of a sentimentalized manhood that was inclined to venerate her. It was those same emotions of veneration and delicacy that a chivalric ethos dictated should be demonstrated towards women, which were, according to Burke, the affective basis of the entire civil and political order. By abjuring this chivalric masculinity the French revolutionaries had unsexed themselves, becoming unnatural monsters in a process that heralded the nation's descent into barbarism.<sup>98</sup>

Burke's *Reflections* had a profound impact on the articulation of contemporary responses to the French Revolution, placing gender and sentiment at the heart of the debate. British radicals such as Thomas Paine dismissed his overwrought eulogy on Marie Antoinette as nonsense, symptomatic of the general irrationality of his views on the revolution. In Mary Wollstonecraft's response to Burke, she charged him with suffering from an hysterical sensitivity, and argued that republican virtue was under threat from effeminized, sentimental men like Burke. For Wollstonecraft, chivalric sentimentality was responsible for both the continued repression of mankind under monarchy, and women's oppression by men. A similar reaction to Burke is evident in Ireland; the moderate Whig Daniel Thomas denounced Burke's exaggerated praise for the age of chivalry, an age and ethos which Thomas characterized as destructive and

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<sup>97</sup> '... little did I dream that I should have lived to see such disasters fallen upon her in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honour and of cavaliers. I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult. - But the age of chivalry is gone ... Never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom'. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (ed.) J. G. A. Pocock (Indianapolis, 1987), p.66. It has also been suggested that Burke's depiction of ravaged womanhood in the form of Marie Antoinette draws on the *aisling* tradition that he would certainly have been familiar with. See Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (London, 2000), p. 203.

<sup>98</sup> Claudia L. Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s. Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney and Austen* (Chicago, 1995), pp. 2-11. For further discussion of the role of gender in the debate on the French revolution see Tom Furniss, 'Gender in Revolution: Edmund Burke and Mary Wollstonecraft', in Kelvin Everest (ed.), *Revolution in Writing: British Literary*

superstitious, a combination of 'fulsome bombastic adulation of the fair; a gross sensuality; an unbounded profusion; with a courage of passion, equally vaunting and ferocious.'<sup>99</sup> As Johnson suggests, during the 1790s there was an emerging polarization and politicization of forms of masculinity that set a pro-revolutionary, rational, republican masculinity against the sentimental, chivalric masculinity espoused by Edmund Burke.

The United Irishmen were no less critical of Burke's conservative politics and remained unwavering in their support for the French Revolution. However, despite their hostility to Burke's political opinions they appear to have had much more sympathy for his model of chivalric masculinity than other contemporary commentators. During his stay in France, whilst negotiating a United Irish alliance with the revolutionary regime, Tone attended the republican theatricals that celebrated the French citizen-soldiers' dedication to their country and the revolution. Following one such elaborate ceremony in which a 'band of beautiful young women' had presented sabres to a company of grenadiers, Tone professed himself to have been greatly affected. 'I do not know what Burke may think', he reflected in his journal, 'but I humbly conceive from the effect all this had on the audience that the age of chivalry is not gone in France'.<sup>100</sup> Not only was Tone pleased to discern the persistence of a chivalric spirit in the new revolutionary era, but he also suggested that sentimental masculinity was a particularly Irish attribute. In *An Address to the Roman Catholics of Ireland* (1792), he gave a detailed justification of the United Irishmen's revolutionary politics. With an eye to Catholic fears regarding the increasingly anti-clerical and violent course of the French Revolution, he argued that an Irish revolution would not entail the same consequences. Fundamental to this argument was his contention that the Irish national character was intrinsically different to the French, a difference which was most marked in their respective attitudes towards women. Using distinctly Burkean language, he commented:

There is not perhaps anything which has more influence on the conduct

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*Responses to the French Revolution* (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia, 1991), pp. 65-99.

<sup>99</sup> Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man, Common Sense and Other Political Writings*, Mark Philp (ed.) (Oxford, 1995 [1791]), p. 100; Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, Sylvana Tomaselli (ed.) (Cambridge, 1985[1790]) and Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Wrongs of Woman*, Gary Kelly (ed.) (Oxford, 1998 [1798]), p. 134. Daniel Thomas, *Observations on the Celebrated Pamphlet of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke* (Dublin, 1791), p. 25.

<sup>100</sup> Tone, *Life*, p. 495.

of men than a sense of the value of the fair sex. In ages of Barbarism it softens ferocity, and in civilized times it purifies and exalts the sentiments. As these advocates of old governments are so fond of the example of France they will look there perhaps for Gallantry. But French gallantry will not do. In France the name may exist, but the Essence is gone. True Gallantry dwells only in humane breasts, and is incompatible with cruelty, but modern Frenchmen are ferocious. The Frenchman's gallantry is on his lips the Irishman's in his heart. The one bows to woman from habit, the other from reverence ...The Frenchman is not jealous because he values not chastity, or feels not the enthusiasm of Love, the Irishman acknowledges the force of virtue, and therefore cherishes a female's honour as his own.<sup>101</sup>

At one level this can be understood as a tactical statement, designed to allay the public's fears about the prospect of a revolutionary Terror in Ireland similar to that in France. As Linda Colley has argued, the destruction of the French royal family, and in particular Marie-Antoinette, had a profoundly unnerving effect on British public opinion, especially female opinion, contributing to an increased anxiety about their personal security and the security of their families.<sup>102</sup> The Irish conservative press and periodicals were full of sensational accounts detailing the indignities suffered by French women under the revolutionary regime.<sup>103</sup> At the theatre, William Preston's sentimental dramatization of the plight of the French royal family, *Democratic Rage*, proved immensely popular, drawing a large and fashionable audience on its opening night in February 1793.<sup>104</sup> Such fears about the ferocity of the French revolutionaries were not restricted to conservative circles. Martha McTier warned her brother William Drennan, that the United Irishmen's espousal of republican principles and 'talking of kings as if they were to be their butchers', only served to alarm public opinion, adding, 'it is not good policy to alarm even wives and mothers'.<sup>105</sup>

The United Irishmen's invocations of a gallant and sentimental national masculinity can be partly interpreted as a response to such public perceptions of the French Revolution.

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<sup>101</sup> Theobald Wolfe Tone, 'An Address to the Roman Catholics of Ireland', in T. W. Moody, R. B. McDowell and C. J. Woods (eds.), *The Writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone, 1763-1798*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1998), p. 337.

<sup>102</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London, 1992), pp. 268-271.

<sup>103</sup> See for example, *Walker's Hibernian Magazine*, July 1793 and Robert Jephson, *The Confessions of James Baptiste Couteau, Citizen of France, Written by Himself and Translated from the Original French by Robert Jephson Esq.* (Dublin, 1794).

<sup>104</sup> William Preston, *Democratic Rage; or Louis the Unfortunate. A Tragedy* (Dublin, 1793). On the play's reception see R. B. McDowell, *Irish Public Opinion, 1750-1800* (London, 1944), pp. 153-154.

<sup>105</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 25 December 1792, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*,

These invocations can also be understood as bolstering their claims for national modernity and Ireland's capacity for independence. In 1791, in response to the renewed interest in the concept of chivalry prompted by the publication of Burke's *Reflections*, *Walker's Hibernian Magazine* published an article entitled 'Reflections on the Age of Chivalry', which gave a brief account of its effects 'on the characters and manners of the European nations'. According to the author the development of codes of chivalry in the northern European states during the medieval period 'laid the foundations of new manners, which, in modern Europe, have brought the two sexes more on a level by assigning to women a kind of sovereignty, and by associating love with valour'.<sup>106</sup> The piece quoted from both Adam Ferguson's *History of Civil Society* (1767) and John Millar's *Observations Concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society* (1771). In seeking to explain the transition from barbarism to the civilization of the modern era, Ferguson, Millar, and William Robertson had identified the chivalric ethos as a pivotal factor. In their models of historical development, the veneration and elevation of the female sex that incited men to acts of martial valour and artistic genius also served to encourage the expansion of commerce and the progress of society.<sup>107</sup> As Pocock suggests, Burke drew on the work of Robertson and Ferguson to defend the *ancien régime* that had emerged during the age of chivalry.<sup>108</sup>

In establishing a particular route to modernity, in which the age of chivalry played a crucial role, Scottish historians also implied that there were certain nations that had not progressed through the necessary stages. Asiatic and newly discovered 'savage' societies, such as the native Americans, were often cited as examples of cultures which had failed to evolve from a primitive level. Such analyses could also be extended to Ireland. In his philosophical *History of England* (1759), David Hume identified Ireland as the great exception to European civilization. According to Hume, the Irish had 'from the beginning of time been buried in the most profound barbarism and ignorance' and 'continued still in the most rude state of society'.<sup>109</sup> The perceived barbarity of Celtic

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vol. 1, p. 452.

<sup>106</sup> *Walker's Hibernian Magazine*, February 1791.

<sup>107</sup> Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, Duncan Forbes (ed.) (Edinburgh, 1966), pp. 200-202.

<sup>108</sup> Although Pocock argues that Burke placed a much greater emphasis on the role of the Church and the nobility in the civilizing process, and much less emphasis than the Scottish historians on the role of commerce. J. G. A. Pocock, 'Introduction', Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, pp. xxi-xxiii.

<sup>109</sup> Quoted in Leerssen, *Mere Irish and Fior-Ghael*, p. 65.

antiquity, however, had been challenged by the publication of James Macpherson's versions of the poetry of the Gaelic bard, Ossian in the 1760s. Macpherson's supposed discovery and translation of a Gaelic poetic epic was enthusiastically supported by leading members of the Scottish literati. Ossian's portrayal of a Scottish past where heroic valour was blended with a refinement of sentiment, complicated the conjectural historians' narratives of civilization by presenting a 'golden age' of Scottish civility that predated the establishment of codes of chivalry in Northern Europe. Whilst these historians generally agreed that women in primitive societies were little more than slaves and drudges, the Ossianic fragments suggested that in early Scottish society women had been venerated and exalted.<sup>110</sup>

Macpherson and his supporters were keen to stress the Caledonian origins of Ossian and to refute any suggestion that they were Irish in derivation, using the poems to undermine the prevailing contention that Ireland was 'the mother-country of the Scots'. Comparing his own verses to Irish Gaelic songs and traditions, which dealt with similar material, Macpherson identified the latter as corruptions and fantastical romances 'the spurious brood of modern and ignorant ages'.<sup>111</sup> Irish antiquarians responded with outrage to Macpherson's appropriation of Irish culture and history.<sup>112</sup> In his *Introduction to the Study of the History and Antiquities of Ireland* (1771), O'Halloran criticized both the Scottish historians' 'fabrication' of an ancient history from Irish materials, and their disparaging comments on the 'rudeness' of ancient Irish culture, singling out the works of David Hume for particular attention. Drawing on the Gaelic song-cycles on which Ossian was based, O'Halloran further argued for the Irish origins of orders of chivalry. According to O'Halloran ancient Irish knights were 'romantically brave', and on joining chivalric orders they bound themselves on pain of death 'not to commit violence on women, but rather to defend them', as well as swearing to defend the 'poor, the distressed and oppressed'.<sup>113</sup>

The patriotic antiquarianism of Anglo-Irish writers such as O'Halloran certainly formed

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<sup>110</sup> Rendall, 'Clio, Mars and Minerva', pp. 134-151.

<sup>111</sup> James Macpherson, 'A Dissertation Concerning the Poems of Ossian', prefixed to *The Poems of Ossian, the Son of Fingal. Translated by James Macpherson* (Glasgow, 1793), p. 34.

<sup>112</sup> On the Ossian controversy in Ireland see Joep Leersen, *Mere Irish and Fíor-Ghael*, pp. 338-49.

<sup>113</sup> Sylvester O'Halloran, *An Introduction to the Study of the History and Antiquities of Ireland: In which the Assertions of Mr Hume and other Writers are Considered* (Dublin, 1772), p. 45.

an important intellectual backdrop for the United Irishmen. While they did not argue for Irish independence on the basis of cultural separateness and had a limited interest in the revival of Gaelic culture, they were, as noted above, interested in championing ancient Ireland's claims to civility, and by implication vindicating modern Ireland's claims to meet universal standards of civilization. The Ossianic mode had an important influence on United Irish literary propaganda and they produced several compositions in the bardic style.<sup>114</sup> Not only did the Irish Gaelic versions of *Ossian* indicate the existence of a high degree of refinement in ancient Irish culture, as demonstrated by the elevated status held by women, it also recast heroic virtue in a more palatable form. As Dafydd Moore suggests, much of the appeal of *Ossian* for Scottish Enlightenment thinkers derived from the poems' apparent reconciliation between martial virtue and polite sentiment, what he terms 'muscular sensibility'. In contrast to the more austere stoicism of Greco-Roman concepts of virtue, *Ossian* presented a society in which martial values were softened and humanized through the cultivation of the arts, and the refinement of the passions.<sup>115</sup> The Ossianic mode proved similarly inspirational to the United Irishmen, who were also seeking to reconcile antique military virtue with modern politeness. In a poem entitled 'The Irish Bard', the United Irish writer the Rev. James Porter drew on key Ossianic tropes, and invoked the native chivalry of a bygone era to rouse Irishmen to military action:

Relentless race, why did you not revere  
 Those heavenly charms, which more than sceptres sway,  
 Which greatest Heroes blush not to obey?  
 Did you not see their snowy bosoms rise,  
 Their auburn ringlets, and their azure eyes,  
 Those pearly tears which hearts of ice might move,  
 Nor learn to pity if you could not love?  
 ...O cou'd I glow with *Ossian's* living fire,  
 I wou'd a thousand warriors yet inspire.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Thuente, *The Harp Restrung*, p. 31.

<sup>115</sup> Dafydd Moore, *Enlightenment and Romance in James MacPherson's The Poems of Ossian: Myth, Genre and Cultural Change* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 87-112; see also John Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse*, p. 11.

<sup>116</sup> *Northern Star*, 19 May 1792. The United Irish poet John Corry elaborated a similar version of national chivalric masculinity in his verses describing Irish resistance to the Norse invasions in the ninth century. In an address to his people before the battle, the warrior leader Cormac calls on them to, 'Forbear those sounds of woe, ... / You know our brave forefathers often bled, / To keep the vales of Erin free, / And guard our virtuous women's chastity'. This theme is continued by the bard Conal who accompanies the men into battle, chanting: 'Think how the rapacious foe / Will your women violate'. 'The Patriot. A Poem, Descriptive of an Invasion of Ireland by the Danes, and their Expulsion by the Irish', in John Corry, *Odes and Elegies, Descriptive and Sentimental: With the Patriot, a Poem* (Newry,

According to this formulation the status accorded to women was understood as an important vindication of Irish civility, that demonstrated Ireland's capacity for independence by distinguishing the nation, and the United Irish movement, from the perceived 'ferocity' of the French revolutionaries and the 'barbarity' of less developed societies. Though this conceptualization of gender drew on the Enlightenment narratives of civilization that underpinned the more progressive theories articulated by William Drennan and Arthur O'Connor, the implications for women's position within the United Irish programme were significantly different. Whereas O'Connor and Drennan accorded women an active and dynamic role in the processes of Irish development, suggesting that national progress would require women's intellectual and possibly political emancipation, discourses of sentimental masculinity reduced women to passive objects of male veneration and protection. Rather than seriously considering the role that women might play in a reformed republic, the rhetoric of national gallantry was principally concerned with the proper performance of masculinity, in which the more austere classical republican version of public virtue, expressed through military service to an impersonal state, was extenuated by the politer virtues of modern commercial society.

## VI

Given the diverse range of intellectual influences operating on the United Irishmen, and their own reluctance to work out a systematic and coherent political ideology, it is not surprising to find that their considerations on gender are as multifaceted as many other aspects of their political thinking. As I have suggested here, the transition from the limited Protestant Patriotism of the eighteenth century to a radically inclusive definition of the Irish public sphere that included both Catholics and the plebeian classes, placed a significant strain on the gendered boundaries of political citizenship. Republican rhetoric and the equation of citizenship with the figure of the masculine citizen-in-arms enabled the United Irishmen to transcend both sectarian and class differences, whilst also legitimating the exclusion of women from full citizenship. However, this can only partially illuminate the gender dynamic within the United Irish political programme. Representations of republican femininity though present in United Irish literature are



not dominant, nor did the movement articulate that hostility to female influence and fear of effeminization characteristic of French and British radical-republicanism. The Scottish Enlightenment discourses of commercial and political progress, through which Irish civic humanism was filtered, provide an alternative framework for understanding women's role in the United Irish programme. Rejecting the rigid gendering of private and public spheres associated with classical republicanism, and locating the motor for social and political change within the private realm of civil society, narratives of civilization accorded women an important role in processes of national development. At the same time these evolutionary narratives could also have more restrictive implications. Rather than viewing women as rational members of the oppositional public sphere, chivalric masculinity reduced women to objects of male protection and veneration, Irish masculinity being measured by its gallant treatment of women. As will be argued in chapters six and seven, notions of chivalric national masculinity would increasingly come to predominate in Irish nationalist rhetoric, as the Act of Union raised questions about both Irish civility and masculinity, and as nineteenth-century nationalists sought to vindicate the events of 1798.

## Chapter Two: 'Loyal and National': Elite Women of the Protestant Ascendancy

Writing to her son in 1797, as the country was convulsed by sectarian disturbances and brutal government suppression, Elizabeth Hastings, Lady Moira expressed the internal conflict she felt over current events in Ireland, declaring herself to be both 'loyal and national', but tacitly acknowledging that the current political crisis put both these identifications in conflict with each other, loyalty to the crown being no longer necessarily consonant with loyalty to the Irish nation.<sup>1</sup> Although born in England, Lady Moira had lived in Ireland for over five decades, during which time she had increasingly come to identify herself as Irish. However, the development of the United Irish movement in the 1790s unsettled the loyalties and identifications of elite women like Lady Moira, as their loyalties to their nation, tenantry, religion, families and rank were increasingly brought into tension with each other. Roy Foster has contended that the culture of the eighteenth-century Protestant Ascendancy cannot be accurately conveyed by the correspondence of the 'great ladies' of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy, whose activities he lists as, '... reading *Candide*, building shell-houses ... and even considering Rousseau as a tutor for their children'.<sup>2</sup> Yet the letters of Lady Moira and other elite Irish women can reveal a great deal about the tensions and conflicts that the political ferment of the 1790s presented to the Protestant Ascendancy. Moreover, these women often wielded a degree of influence that enabled them to actively intervene in the political crisis.

Recent research on eighteenth-century elite women in Britain has revealed the extent to which they could, and did, operate as significant political actors.<sup>3</sup> Often recapitulating a

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<sup>1</sup> PRONI, Belfast, Granard papers, T/3765/M/3/6. Dowager Lady Moira, Elizabeth Hastings to Lord Moira, Francis Rawdon-Hastings, 11 March 1797.

<sup>2</sup> Foster is here referring particularly to the correspondence of Lady Louisa Connolly and her sister Emily, Duchess of Leinster. Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London, 1988), p. 169.

<sup>3</sup> Elaine Chalus, 'Women and English Political Life, 1754-1790', (Unpublished D.Phil thesis, Oxford, 1997); 'Elite Women, Social Politics and the Political World of Late Eighteenth-Century England', *Historical Journal*, 43 (2000), pp. 669-697; Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson, (eds) *Women in British Politics, 1760-1860: The Power of the Petticoat* (London, 2000), pp. 19-38; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, (London, 1992), pp. 251-296; Amanda Vickery (ed), *Women, Privilege, and Power: British Politics, 1750 to the Present*, (Stanford CA, 2001); Judith Lewis, *Sacred to Female Patriotism: Gender, Class and Politics in Late Georgian Britain* (New York and London, 2003); Peter Jupp, 'The Role of Aristocratic and Royal Women in British Politics, c. 1782-1832', in Mary O'Dowd and Sabine Wichert (eds), *Chattel, Servant or Citizen: Women's Status in Church, State and*

Namierite view of eighteenth-century political culture, these studies have suggested how female political influence was enhanced by a system in which politics was understood as an informal, dynastic and family concern, primarily aimed at securing power, patronage and places. As Elaine Chalus has noted, in a familial political culture women's political participation 'was generally accepted, often expected and sometimes demanded'.<sup>4</sup> Although elite women usually remained politically subordinate to their male relatives they still enjoyed access to political power that was unavailable to most men of lower rank. Consequently, the United Irishmen's gender-exclusive vision of political rights posed a particular threat to their political power, a power that was based on their class, rather than their gender.

This chapter examines both the nature of elite Irish women's political engagement during the late eighteenth century, and the range of factors that shaped their perceptions of radical politics during this period. The first section examines briefly the political culture of the Protestant Ascendancy, before considering the political outlets available to Irish women of the upper classes. This will demonstrate how the familial culture of eighteenth-century Irish politics facilitated elite women's political engagement, both informal and formal. While the enhancement of familial prestige often determined elite women's political interests, during the eighteenth century a more expansive, patriotic role became available, as women assumed a prominent position in the consumer nationalist campaigns, a role that will be considered in the next section. The second half of the chapter takes the form of three case studies of elite women, Sarah Tighe, Lady Moira and Lady Lucy Fitzgerald, and outlines their very different responses to the development of radical politics during the 1790s.<sup>5</sup> As the patron of a closed borough, Sarah Tighe's political influence was directly threatened by the United Irishmen. Yet, as will be shown, her Methodism led her to feel a degree of sympathy with the

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*Society* (Dublin, 1995), pp. 103-113. For a discussion of the political roles assumed by elite Irish women in the eighteenth century see Mary O'Dowd, 'The Political Writings and Public Voices of Women, c. 1500-1850', in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, Angela Bourke and others (eds) (Cork, 2002), vol. 5, pp. 9-10.

<sup>4</sup> Elaine Chalus, 'My *Minerva* at my Elbow': The Political Roles of Women in Eighteenth-Century England, in Richard Connors, Clvye Jones and Stephen Taylor (eds), *Hanoverian Britain and Empire: Essays in Memory of Phillip Lawson* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 210-228.

<sup>5</sup> The broader category 'elite' has been used here, because although both Lady Moira and Lady Lucy Fitzgerald qualify as members of the Irish aristocracy, Sarah Tighe was untitled. However, her family background, sizeable estates and political clout place her in the higher echelons of the Irish landed gentry.

movement, as well as inspiring a new sense of mission to her tenantry. Despite her prestigious position within the Irish aristocracy, Lady Moira's liberal politics, combined with a concern for the reputation of her family, led her to assume an increasingly oppositional stance during the 1790s, although her sympathy for democratic politics was constrained by her resolutely aristocratic identification. In contrast Lucy Fitzgerald, the sister of the United Irish leader, Edward Fitzgerald, came to commit herself whole-heartedly to the United Irish cause. However, with the death of her brother, the unwritten rules of elite women's political engagement were revealed, as Lucy Fitzgerald's efforts to assert herself as an autonomous political actor brought her into conflict with her family.

## I

Though now used in reference to a period stretching from the late seventeenth century to the early twentieth century, the term 'Protestant Ascendancy' did not in fact feature in Irish public discourse until the 1780s, at which time it denoted a specific ideological position.<sup>6</sup> Whilst the contemporary usage of the term aligned it with conservative Protestantism, hostile to Catholic emancipation, for historians the concept has been largely bleached of its ideological character, becoming a shorthand used to describe the political and social dominance of Anglicanism in Ireland during this period; this is the sense in which the term is used here.<sup>7</sup> The confessional homogeneity of the Anglican elite in Ireland should not obscure heterogeneity within the ascendancy itself. Those who comprised the ascendancy could variously claim Norman, Old English, Cromwellian, or even ancient Gaelic descent. Such diversity of origin is reflected in the backgrounds of the women under consideration here. The Fitzgeralds first settled in Ireland as part of the Norman invasion, though their origins can be traced back to tenth

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<sup>6</sup> According to James Kelly the concept 'Protestant Ascendancy', as developed by conservative Protestants in late eighteenth-century Ireland, denoted 'the fundamentals which Irish Protestants simply could not concede.' These 'fundamentals' included: the preservation of Protestant control of land; the maintenance of the existing constitution in church and state; and the security of the Anglo-Irish connection. James Kelly, 'The Genesis of 'Protestant Ascendancy: The Rightboy Disturbances of the 1780s and their Impact upon Protestant Opinion', in Gerard O'Brien (ed.) *Parliament, Politics and People: Essays in Eighteenth-Century Irish History* (Dublin, 1989), pp. 93-127; and James Kelly, 'Eighteenth-Century Ascendancy: A Commentary', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 5 (1990), pp. 173-187.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Foster, *Modern Ireland*, pp. 167-286.

century Florence.<sup>8</sup> The Tighe family's connection with Ireland dated from 1640 and their lands were granted under the Cromwellian settlement of 1652.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, the intermarriage of Irish nobles with English heiresses throughout the eighteenth century sustained and renewed the connection with England; both Lady Louisa Connolly and her sister Emily, the Duchess of Leinster married into Irish families. Similarly Lady Moira was born and educated in England although her family, the Hastings, had a history of involvement in Ireland.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, despite its elitist overtones the ascendancy contained gradations of wealth and social status; it encompassed urban tradesmen and professionals, artisans and small landowners, peers without property and some great landowners who were not peers.<sup>11</sup>

To a certain extent social and political differentiation between members of the 'protestant nation' was blurred as a result of the exclusivity of their position. However, the Irish political structure remained dominated by a small ruling elite hostile to change. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, 234 of the 300 seats in the Irish House of Commons were still in the control of fifty peers and a handful of influential commoners.<sup>12</sup> Even more so than Britain at this time, the Irish political system was dependent on patronage. Until the 1760s the 'undertaker' system had granted a small number of borough-owning aristocrats most of the political patronage of the country, in return for their support in maintaining a parliamentary majority favourable to the British government. This system had been broken by the Lord Lieutenant, Viscount Townshend, in 1767. He brought the Irish legislature under more direct supervision and resituated the Lord-Lieutenancy at the heart of the patronage network in Ireland, by residing permanently in Dublin and by increasing the numbers of pensions, places and peerages at his disposal. The vice-regal establishment, based in Dublin Castle, replicated the offices of the royal court on a smaller scale, comprising a sizeable retinue which included, a comptroller, a chamberlain, a gentleman usher, gentlemen of the bed

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<sup>8</sup> Stella Tillyard, *Citizen Lord, Edward Fitzgerald, 1763-1798* (London, 1998), p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> W. G. S. Tighe, *The Tighe Story* (Dublin, 1959), pp. 1, 15-16.

<sup>10</sup> *Historical Manuscripts Commission. Report 3, 1872-1874. Appendix* (London, 1890), pp. 431-432.

<sup>11</sup> J. L. McCracken, 'The Social Structure and Social Life, 1714-1760', in T.W. Moody and W.E. Vaughan (eds), *A New History of Ireland* (Oxford, 1986), vol. 4, p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> James Kelly, 'Parliamentary Reform in Irish Politics: 1760-90', in David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (eds), *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion* (Dublin, 1993), pp. 74-87.

chamber, and several aides-de-camp. It was also the centre of fashionable society in Dublin, and the Lord-Lieutenant was expected to provide lavish entertainments, balls, banquets and levees, drawing the fashionable world within his orbit, and maintaining the informal, social character of Castle politics.<sup>13</sup> As the liberal *Dublin Evening Post's* sarcastic advice to the new Viceroy, Lord Westmoreland, in 1790 hinted, this confluence of the social and political necessarily involved women:

If you would succeed amongst those called the country gentlemen, you must find out those that are henpecked by handsome wives, or led by favourite daughters. Here your Castle balls, splendid levees, masquerades, and spruce aide-du-camps come into play - and in the making a few Sheriffs, or placing a few bumpkin Squires in the Revenue, your business will be effectually done.<sup>14</sup>

The informal and familial political culture of the eighteenth-century elite raises difficult questions respecting their position within the eighteenth-century public sphere. In Habermas' model the eighteenth-century bourgeois public sphere is predicated on the demarcation of the conjugal sphere and the bracketing of familial and personal interests by private persons who come together to form a public. Yet the political world of the eighteenth-century elite was one in which private and public practices, familial and political interests, were often indistinguishable. According to Judith Lewis this fluid combination of public and private undermines the Habermasian dichotomy between the state on the one hand, and private persons forming a public on the other. Lewis rejects the applicability of the Habermasian model for Britain (and by extension Ireland) because she understands it to refer primarily to the absolutist monarchical systems of continental Europe, as distinct from the parliamentary systems of Britain and Ireland.<sup>15</sup> This appears to be something of a misreading of Habermas, as the British experience does provide the template for his model of the evolution of the public sphere. The British and Irish cases are certainly more complex than, for example, the French, because the land owning elite could, and did, move between the offices of the state and the oppositional public sphere. In Ireland the abolition of the undertaker system in the

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<sup>13</sup> On the duties and functions of the Lord-Lieutenant see R. B. McDowell, *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution, 1760-1801* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 95-100; and Foster, *Modern Ireland*, pp. 227-228.

<sup>14</sup> *Dublin Evening Post*, 5 January 1790.

1760s served to reanimate the 'court' and 'country' dichotomy. Although court/country alignments continuously shifted, identification with the 'country' interest did suggest an alignment, however temporary, with the oppositional public sphere. In eighteenth-century Ireland this identification with the true interests of 'the nation', albeit the 'Protestant nation', increasingly came to express itself through the Patriot movement, hostility to Dublin castle extending into a broader critique of English influence in Ireland. Though Patriot politicians were often deeply embedded within the familial and informal political culture of the unreformed parliamentary system, the success of their extra-parliamentary campaigns suggests the increasingly important role played by 'public opinion' in Irish politics from the 1770s.<sup>16</sup>

Whilst the French Revolution certainly had a tremendous impact on the British aristocracy, forcing them to reassess their own legitimacy and embroiling them in a lengthy war with France, the impact for their Irish counterparts was even more significant. In Ireland the growth of the United Irish movement in the 1790s brought radical politics ever closer to the centres of aristocratic dominance; it penetrated their estates and homes as their tenantry and servants were enlisted in the radical cause, and their country houses were periodically raided for arms. Furthermore, in the small and exclusive world of the Protestant Ascendancy, it inevitably penetrated their social circles. Several United Irish leaders such as Archibald Hamilton Rowan and Arthur O'Connor came from the upper echelons of the landed gentry and, in the case of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, from the heart of the aristocracy itself. The second half of this chapter considers how Irish women from the Protestant elite engaged with the issues generated by the radical challenge in the 1790s. But firstly the extent of women's political participation within the ruling class is explored, examining their formal and informal political influence and their involvement in the Irish Patriot movement.

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<sup>15</sup> Judith Lewis, *Sacred to Female Patriotism*, pp. 8, 192-193.

<sup>16</sup> On the court/country divide in eighteenth-century Irish politics and the increasing importance of 'public opinion' evident in the extra-parliamentary activity of the Volunteers and the growing influence of the Irish press see James Kelly, *Prelude to Union: Anglo-Irish Politics in the 1780s* (Cork, 1992), pp. 20-21; and Foster, *Modern Ireland*, pp. 231, 240.

## II

The recent body of research on the political activities and influence of elite women in eighteenth-century England has contributed a great deal to our understanding of women's engagement with politics during this period. The aspect that emerges most clearly from these investigations is the degree to which elite women's political involvement was an extension of their familial responsibilities. Although all women regardless of rank were excluded from the 'official public sphere', being unable to sit in either the House of Lords, or the House of Commons in both Ireland and Britain, and according to custom not voting in elections, there remained available to them a wide range of outlets for political participation.<sup>17</sup> The power and influence of elite women in Britain and Ireland was enhanced during the eighteenth century by a demographic trend which saw a marked tendency for male aristocratic lines to die out, meaning that women increasingly inherited family estates and the political power that went with them. Furthermore, many estates were inherited by minors, allowing female heads of families greater influence over their management.<sup>18</sup> Women were also significant actors within the networks of patronage and informal politicking that so exercised radical reformers. It is not within the scope of the present study to establish comprehensively the political roles and influence available to elite Irish women in the late eighteenth century. However, I will suggest some of the ways in which the activities and roles of Irish women mirrored those of their English counterparts. Certainly many of the features of eighteenth-century Irish political life - the fusing of the social and political worlds, the extensive networks of patronage, and the continuing power of privilege and landed interest in determining parliamentary representation - mirrored those aspects of the

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<sup>17</sup> From 1778 women were excluded from the English House of Commons, although in Ireland women were still able to attend parliamentary debates. Colley, *Britons*, p. 262. Women's presence during debates was sometimes alluded to by Irish parliamentarians. In February 1782 the MP, Mr. Brownlow protested at the postponement of debate on the Catholic relief bill in favour of a discussion of a bill for regulating revenues by observing, 'we are honoured with the company of a great many ladies, and shall we treat them with nothing better than whisky?' W. J. McCormack (ed.), *The Parliamentary Register of Ireland: History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland* (Bristol, 1999), vol. 1, p. 240. In 1788 the Fitzgerald family attended the Hastings trial. Sophia Fitzgerald noted that: 'we were all to have gone to the trial to hear Charles Fox speak, my Mother who has been longing all her life to hear him it was so vexatious such a good opportunity offering & it may never be again for the Ladies don't go to the House of Commons here, her being ill is such a disappointment to her'. NLI, Dublin, Lennox/Fitzgerald/Campbell papers, MS 35, 012, 1. Journal of Sophia Fitzgerald, 19 February 1788.

<sup>18</sup> See Amanda Vickery, 'Introduction', in Vickery (ed.), *Women, Privilege and Power*, pp. 8-9; Lewis,



English political system that enabled the engagement and influence of elite women.

Chalus has identified four, frequently overlapping, political roles assumed by elite women in the eighteenth-century, those of confidante, adviser, agent and partner. The role of confidante was the most passive of all these roles, in which women acted as sounding boards for their politically involved male relations and friends. A more reciprocal version of this role was that of adviser, whereby women drew on their often extensive knowledge of politics and their ability to act as gatherers of political information to counsel on political matters and sometimes influence political decisions. Acting as agents women wielded their political influence on behalf of family and friends, this role often shading into that of partner, a role adopted by 'the most highly politicized, directly involved and independent of all political women'. Generally the role of partner involved acting in close conjunction with a husband or son in political affairs.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, although none of the studies cited here have focused specifically on Ireland,<sup>20</sup> the figure of Emily, Duchess of Leinster has attracted some attention due to her prominent role in a highly political family.<sup>21</sup> Daughter of the Duke of Richmond, and sister-in-law to the Whig politician, Henry Fox, she brought a knowledge of, and intimacy with, the workings of English politics to bear on Irish affairs following her marriage to Lord Kildare in 1747.<sup>22</sup> Chalus has cited her as a prime example of the political adviser, using a combination of flattery and manipulation when advising her not very politically gifted husband on political matters.<sup>23</sup> She also proved adept at manipulating the system of patronage to procure a dukedom for Lord Kildare in 1766. If the Duchess of Leinster's relationship with her first husband can be considered as a partnership, her second marriage to her children's tutor William Ogilvie shifted the

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*Sacred to Female Patriotism*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>19</sup> Chalus, 'My *Minerva* at my Elbow', p. 225.

<sup>20</sup> Elaine Chalus attributes this lacuna in her research to the fact that: 'the political world of the Protestant Ascendancy was unique and the involvement of women in Irish political life is a separate topic that deserves to be studied in its own right'. Chalus, 'Women and English Political Life', p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> For references to the Duchess of Leinster see Elaine Chalus, 'My *Minerva* at My Elbow'; 'Elite Women and Social Politics', p. 688; Jupp, 'The Roles of Royal and Aristocratic Women in British Politics', pp. 103-113.

<sup>22</sup> Stella Tillyard, *Aristocrats: Caroline, Emily, Louisa and Sarah Lennox, 1740-1832* (London, 1995).

<sup>23</sup> Chalus, 'My *Minerva* at my Elbow', p. 217

balance, politically at least, towards her. Through her family connections she managed to have Ogilvie brought into the Irish House of Commons as a member for one of the boroughs controlled by her son Henry, Duke of Leinster, and upon entering parliament Ogilvie duly joined the Duke of Leinster's interest. Here, Emily's involvement in patronage clearly follows the pattern discerned by Chalus, whereby women were more likely to use patronage, 'if they were of higher social status than their husbands, if they came from politically active families, or if they had personal political connexions that provided them with more direct access to patrons.'<sup>24</sup>

Elite women were generally expected to adopt the political stance of the families into which they married, but it could be difficult to disavow one's inherited political opinions. The Duchess of Leinster's daughter, Charlotte, had married the Pittite MP, Joseph Strutt and moved to London. Yet she confessed that her sympathies for the Irish Patriots remained, despite her husband's opposition: 'We married women ought to divest ourselves of these Family prejudices & see & hear only with the Eyes of our husband's Families ... for my part I was too Old to Change my creed & I admire what they are doing in Ireland'.<sup>25</sup> A similar conflict between personal political opinions and familial consensus is evident in Lady Moira's decision to support her son Francis Rawdon-Hastings, when he was in opposition between 1781 to 1783. Recalling this period in a letter to Lady Castlereagh she wrote:

You know well that even when all the Family were Patriotic in the estimation of the Populace ... that I was held in the light of Censure for not being of Lord Moira's political opinion; but whilst he opposed whatever my private sentiments & wishes were, I never went to the Castle ... to accept amusement & entertainment from those my family sought to shew enmity towards.<sup>26</sup>

The extent of Lady Moira's political partnership with her son will be discussed in more detail below. More unusually perhaps, she also acted as a political adviser to her son-in-law George Forbes, 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Granard. Under her influence he adopted liberal

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<sup>24</sup> Elaine Chalus, "'To Serve my Friends': Women and Political Patronage in Eighteenth-Century England", in Vickery (ed.) *Women, Privilege and Power*, p. 68.

<sup>25</sup> NLI, Dublin, Lennox/Fitzgerald/Campbell papers, MS 35,005, 3. Charlotte Strutt to Lucy Fitzgerald, 22 January 1793.

<sup>26</sup> PRONI, Belfast, Camden papers, T/2627/4/196. Lady Moira to Lady Castlereagh, 14 January 1796.

principles and became a steady supporter of the policy of Charlemont, Grattan and Curran. Moreover, between 1784 and 1788, when he and his wife were touring the continent, he placed his estates and political interest in Longford under the management of Lady Moira. Throughout this period Lady Moira received numerous applications from men seeking her patronage and political interest, including Richard Lovell Edgeworth, who was hoping to stand as the Granard candidate for the Longford borough. Other applications included requests for her assistance in securing the position of Seneschal for the Manor of Mullingar, another asking for patronage for a place of chairman of the Quarter Sessions, and reminders of promises of preferment granted by the Granards to voters during the last election.<sup>27</sup> A letter from the Granards' candidate, Richard Fox, to Lady Moira in 1784, exhibits both deference to her political guidance and recognition of her political acumen:

... as I am convinced of your Ladyship's friendship & ability on the late election I have no doubt from that & yr Ladyships knowledge of the County of Longford of meeting with every satisfaction in the subject, & shall lay before you the state of the county at present & my own sentiments on the occasion with such particulars as I wish to have more particularly your Ladyship's opinion & directions upon.<sup>28</sup>

Not only did Lady Moira assume a highly politicized role for herself, it is also evident that she encouraged and expected her favourite daughter Selina, Lady Granard to continue in the same line. She frequently advised her daughter on the management of the Granard interest and clearly admired her political skill, probably because it reflected her own interests and abilities. Writing about an apparent snub from the British administration to Lord and Lady Granard, she underlines the extent to which she considered their marriage to be a political partnership:

Selina has an amazing turn for business ... she possesses not only judgment but experience, as it were intuitively. Her Lord and her have been dealt with as two youthful personages, totally ignorant of their own weight and consequence, and who might be treated anyhow. They have battled it with the Chief Governor and Prime Minister so far as to prove they knew what they were. I write they because her husband consults

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<sup>27</sup> PRONI, Belfast, Granard papers, T/3765/J/1/2/16. Richard Lovell Edgeworth to Lady Moira, 21 December 1784; T/3765/J/1/2/19, John Reeves to Lady Moira, May 1787; T/3765/J/1/2/16, Gerard O'Farrell to Lady Moira, 3 March 1787; T/3765/J/1/2/12. John Montgomery to Lady Moira, 6 May 1785.

<sup>28</sup> PRONI, Belfast, Granard papers, T/3765/J/1/2/2. Richard Fox to Lady Moira, 21 December 1784.

her on the most trifling and the most important subjects.<sup>29</sup>

Whilst the above examples show that elite Irish women did exert a degree of indirect political influence, as advisers, managers, and agents, they could also enjoy a more officially recognized role, through the inherited position of borough patron. An approximate survey of the electoral structure in late eighteenth century Ireland indicates that there were at least seven constituencies in which female heiresses acted as patrons.<sup>30</sup> Mrs Walcott inherited the borough interest in Tulsk, Co. Roscommon, from her brother George Caulfield in 1778, and was known for her independent spirit.<sup>31</sup> Other assessments of female borough patrons were less flattering. Mrs Macartney and Mrs Greville, patrons of the Granard constituency, were accused of subordinating political principle to material interests in their choice of candidates, a 1790 commentary on the borough observing that it was the 'weight of their purse and not the extent of their understandings' that determined the choice of representatives for the closed borough.<sup>32</sup>

Handling accusations of corruption and offers for borough interests was certainly a difficulty facing female patrons. Sarah Tighe inherited the borough of Inistogue, Co. Kilkenny from her father Sir William Fownes in 1778, and also took responsibility for the Wicklow corporation during her son William's absence on the grand tour from 1788-1790. In the build-up to the 1790 election she complained to her still absent son about having to field applications to sell her seats: 'All I hear of politics is that seats will sell very dear. I was offered £3000 yesterday for one, and £2,700 today. Ought I not to be affronted at the offer, as it was supposing I was venal? No one I believe would have made such an offer to your father.'<sup>33</sup> Despite her political influence it is apparent that Sarah Tighe felt that as a woman she was unable to command the same authority as a man in political affairs. Discussing with William how she should use her interest in the forthcoming election she noted: 'Mr. Westby shall have my interest, but

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<sup>29</sup> PRONI, Belfast, Granard papers, T/3765/J/1/2/2. Lady Moira to Francis Rawdon-Hastings, 28 February 1781.

<sup>30</sup> Edith M. Johnston-Liik, *The History of the Irish Parliament, 1692-1800. Commons, Constituencies and Statutes* (Belfast, 2002) vol. 2, pp. 371-388.

<sup>31</sup> *Parliamentary Representation; Being a Political and Critical Review of All the Counties, Cities and Boroughs of the Kingdoms of Ireland with Regard to the State of their Representation* (Dublin, 1790), p. 90.

<sup>32</sup> 'Parliamentary Lists 1790 (1)', in Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish Parliament*, vol. 2, p 283.

<sup>33</sup> PRONI, Belfast, Tighe papers, D/2685/1/17. Sarah Tighe to William Tighe, 10 February 1790.

what do you think it is – one vote – Richard says I can influence no more. Your father had personal interest sufficient to influence 14.’<sup>34</sup> Although Sarah Tighe consulted with William on his preferences for candidates, she did not passively acquiesce in his choices. Regarding a list he had sent her with suggested names she concluded: ‘Of all you named, Mr. G. Ponsonby is the only one that I am inclined for, being the nearest relative I have here, and moreover now so distinguished for his abilities and parliamentary conduct.’<sup>35</sup>

Sarah Tighe’s preference for Ponsonby as ‘her nearest relative’ indicates that she saw it as her political duty to further the interests of her kin. As this brief survey suggests, women’s position within the political culture of the Protestant Ascendancy was largely based on the familial character of that culture, in which they acted as political advisers to their male relatives, acquired political influence through lines of patriarchal inheritance and used that influence to further the interests of their families. Although this suggests a world in which political ideology was subsumed by dynastic interests, the oppositional politics of the Protestant Patriot movement presented a more broadly conceived political identity for the Anglo-Irish elite, one which opposed the dominance of vested interests and imbued Irish politics with the language of ‘patriotism’ and the ‘public interest’. The following section examines female participation in the Patriot movement, focusing in particular on women’s role in consumer nationalist campaigns.

### III

In Francis Wheatley’s painting of the Volunteer gathering of November 1779, the scene is dominated by the ranks of Volunteers gathered round the statue of William III, resplendent in red and gold uniforms, plumes of smoke rising from their muskets (figure two). It encapsulates the martial, homosocial character of the movement, but the painting also suggests the peripheral involvement of women, depicted lining the windows of the College Green townhouses and craning to see the spectacle below. This indicates one way in which female members of the Protestant Ascendancy were drawn

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<sup>34</sup> PRONI, Belfast, Tighe papers, D/2685/1/18. Sarah Tighe to William Tighe, 18 February 1790.

<sup>35</sup> PRONI, Belfast, Tighe papers, D/2685/1/20. Sarah Tighe to William Tighe, 1790.

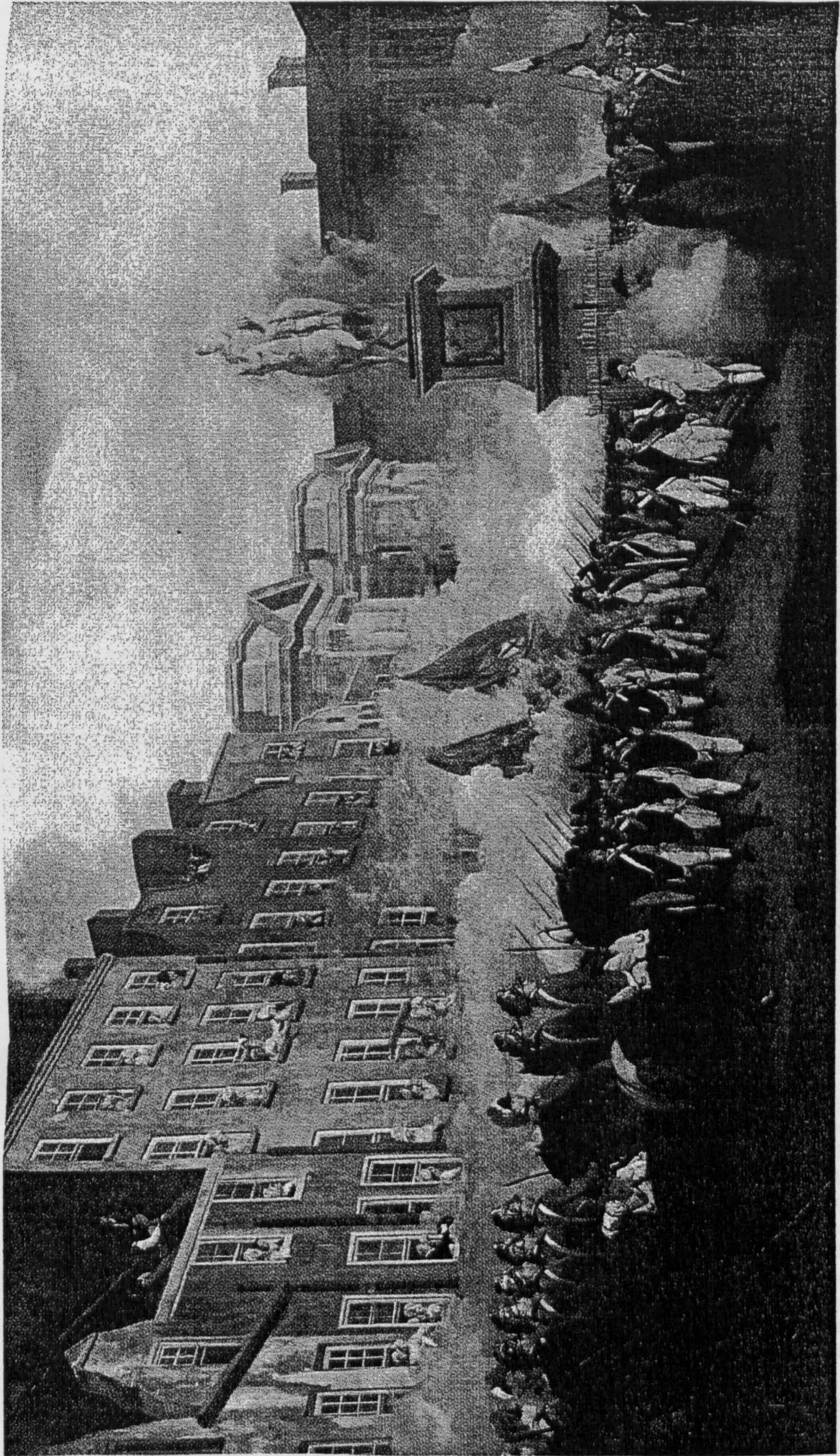
into the Patriot movement: as admiring spectators at parades, reviews and assemblies. During the 1770s and 1780s, as will be discussed in chapter five, Irishwomen writers would also support the campaign for legislative and economic independence through the publication of patriotic literary works. However, perhaps the most significant channel for female patriotism during this period was the 'consumer nationalist' campaign to promote the consumption of Irish manufacturers.

The association between support for Irish manufactures, national prosperity and economic independence from England dominated Irish Patriot thinking in Ireland from its inception. Irish economic depression in the 1720s, and the consequent distress caused to Irish weavers and other related trades, prompted both Jonathan Swift and George Berkley to press for the consumption of Irish goods. In 1731 the Dublin Society was established to encourage Irish agriculture and manufactures, and sought to foster Irish textile industries by granting premiums to the makers of and sellers of linen, cotton, wool and silk. The combination of the economic depression of the 1770s and the American war of independence lent added impetus to these campaigns, the restriction of imports to the colonies as a result of the war, and the example of the American colonists' boycotts, influencing liberal Protestant opinion in Ireland. The Volunteers adopted free trade along with legislative independence as the twin pillars of their reformist manifesto, the significant outlay on uniforms serving a dual function, satisfying members' desires to display wealth and dress up in military fashion, whilst also providing employment for the depressed textile industry. Irish women were implicated in the consumer nationalist campaigns from the outset, as patriot propagandists recognized the importance of their roles as consumers, and arbiters of taste and fashion. Jonathan Swift in his 1729 pamphlet *A Proposal that all Ladies and Women of Ireland Should Appear Constantly in Irish Manufactures*, declared that:

... if the ladies, till better time, will not be content to go in their own country shifts, I wish they may go in rags. Let them vie with each other in the fineness of their native linen: Their beauty and gentleness will as well appear, as if they were covered over with diamonds and brocade.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Jonathan Swift, 'A Proposal that all the Women and Ladies of Ireland Should Appear Constantly in Irish Manufactures' in Herbert Davis (ed.) *Jonathan Swift: Irish Tracts 1728-1733* (Oxford, 1964), p. 126.



**Figure Two**

*The Dublin Volunteers on College Green, 4 November 1799*

**Francis Wheatley, c. 1779-1780**

And it was Katherine Connolly, the wife of William 'Speaker' Connolly, who first initiated the trend for wearing Irish linen scarves, distributing 800 amongst the mourners at her husband's funeral in 1729, in an effort 'to fix that custom in Ireland.'<sup>37</sup>

The political implications of consumption, and the consequent possibilities for women's political participation, is an aspect which has been underestimated in Jürgen Habermas' account of the evolution of the public sphere. However, recent work on the 'material culture of politics' has underlined both the significance of consumption as a component of the public sphere and the corresponding importance of issues of gender.<sup>38</sup> Elaine Chalus' study of the political practices of eighteenth-century aristocratic women in England indicates the extent to which the fusing of the social and the political in the eighteenth century incorporated the politicization of women's dress. Elite women's use of fashion to declare political allegiance extended from the ornamentation of dresses with party colours during electoral campaigns, to the donning of Regency Caps by supporters of the Prince of Wales during the Regency crisis of 1788.<sup>39</sup> The Duchess of Devonshire, the most famous eighteenth-century example of a woman manipulating fashion for political ends, skilfully used her position in the style vanguard of the *bon ton* to support the Whig cause, popularizing the wearing of military style dresses for women at the London militia camps in 1777-1778, and the use of the Whig party colours of blue and buff.<sup>40</sup> Through these means political activism came to permeate the extra-parliamentary spaces of the *beau-monde*, the theatre or ball offering an opportunity to display one's political sentiments.

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<sup>37</sup> K. Connolly to J. Bonnell, 9 December 1729, quoted in Toby Barnard, 'Integration or Separation? Hospitality and Display in Protestant Ireland, 1660-1800', in Laurence Brockliss and David Eastwood (eds), *A Union of Multiple Identities: The British Isles, c.1750-c.1850* (Manchester, 1997), p 134.

<sup>38</sup> Habermas argues that the state's encouragement of consumerism undermined the rational discussion of the public sphere and the autonomy of civil society. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, chs 5 and 6. For a critique of Habermas' account of the significance of consumption in civil society see Martin Daunton and Matthew Hilton, 'Material Politics: An Introduction', in Martin Daunton and Matthew Hilton (eds), *The Politics of Consumption: Material Culture and Citizenship in Europe and America*, (Oxford, 2001), pp 11-12. On women's role in the politicization of consumption in late eighteenth-century anti-slavery campaigns see Kate Davies, 'A Moral Purchase: Femininity, Commerce, Abolition, 1788-1792', in Elizabeth Eger and others (eds) *Women and the Public Sphere: Writing and Representation, 1660-1800* (Cambridge, 2000), pp.133-162.

<sup>39</sup> Chalus, 'Elite Women, Social Politics and the Political World of Late Eighteenth-Century England', pp. 692-697.

<sup>40</sup> Foreman, *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire*, p. 65.



As in eighteenth-century England, social functions in Ireland were the principal arena for the display of patriotic sentiments through dress. In particular, the increasingly popular masquerade balls furnished a pretext for the purchase of new costumes of Irish manufacture. The Duke of Leinster, one of the most prominent leaders of the Patriot movement, held fancy-dress balls at Leinster House at which all the guests were dressed in materials of Irish manufacture, right down to the shoes and petticoats of the attending ladies.<sup>41</sup> Advertisements for public balls often stipulated that admittance would only be allowed to those wearing clothes of Irish origin. Commenting on one such ball, held at the public-rooms in Rutland Street, the *Dublin Evening Post* pointed to the felicitous conjunction of frivolous, fashionable consumption and practical, public benefits:

The request made by the conductors, that all the dresses may be new, will surely meet with universal compliance: which besides the ornament they will add to the entertainment, will contribute materially to serve the manufacturers, likely soon to be severely hurt by the thinness of the town, in consequence of elections.<sup>42</sup>

Though the interweaving of fashion, politics and pleasurable pursuits evident in England during the same period reveals similarities with the Irish consumer nationalist campaign, perhaps a more appropriate parallel can be drawn with the practices of the American revolutionaries. The politicization of the household economy, and the concomitant politicization of women as consumers and household managers during the American war, revolved principally around the boycott of British goods and the encouragement of household production, as women were recruited into the war effort as

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<sup>41</sup> Brian Fitzgerald, *Emily Duchess of Leinster 1731-1814: A Study of her Life and Times* (London, 1949), p. 149.

<sup>42</sup> *Dublin Evening Post*, 30 March 1790. Positioned at the heart of fashionable and political society, the wife of the Lord-Lieutenant was expected to take the lead in the promotion of Irish manufactures, this led to close scrutiny of her purchases in the liberal press. On the arrival of the Countess of Westmoreland at Dublin Castle in 1790, the *Dublin Evening Post* expressed the hope that 'she may be, what in justice she ought to be, the encourager of the manufactures of an oppressed people from whom she will receive a princely revenue'. *Dublin Evening Post*, 6 February 1790. The denomination of elite women as the most suitable patrons of the Irish textile industry was reinforced through the presentation of gifts and petitions from various bodies of textile workers to wealthy and influential women. Thus, shortly after her arrival in Ireland the Countess of Westmoreland was presented with an address from the silk weavers of Dublin, seeking her protection and patronage. *Dublin Evening Post*, 18 February 1790. The ribbon weavers of Dublin presented petitions to the Countess of Camden, the Duchess of Leinster, the Countess of Clare and several other doyennes of Irish society in 1797, pointing to the decline in the ribbon industry due to present fashions which 'excluded ribbons from dress'. The petition succeeded in encouraging a new fashion for wearing ribbons amongst elite women. *Belfast News-Letter*, 20 March 1797 and 27 March

producers of blankets and clothing for the republican army.<sup>43</sup>

The possible parallels and disparities between the American and Irish contexts were also noticed by contemporary Irish observers. A pro-American poetic pamphlet published in 1780 entitled 'The Contrast: or, a Comparison Between the Characters of the English and Irish, in the year 1780' compared the current state of Britain, sunk in luxury and degeneracy, with that of Ireland, which, inspired by the example of America was producing manly heroes in the form of the Volunteers. However, in contrast to the war-time endurances of American women, the writer observed that Irish patriotism required no such heroic sacrifice on the part of Irish women. Rather, he argued, it demanded only the small sacrifice of foreign garments in favour of Irish, thus enabling Irish women to direct their feminine love of luxury and display to the public good:

How happy she, whose milder stars require,  
No painful virtues, no heroic fire;  
Whose flow'ry lot is fall'n in peaceful days,  
When cheap exertions win the patriot praise;  
Whose very foibles give a myriad food,  
Whose very luxuries are public good.<sup>44</sup>

At the same time, elite women's engagement with the Patriot programme could involve less ostensibly 'frivolous' pursuits. Lady Arabella Denny, who founded the Magdalen Asylum in 1766, was an active supporter of the work of the Dublin Society and was the first woman to be elected an honorary member. Through the society she promoted schemes for drying cod, exporting Irish cheese and cultivating madder and flax. She submitted memoranda on the production of linen, damask and other worsted goods and, along with several other aristocratic women, was appointed a patroness of the 'public warehouse' to encourage the manufacture of silk in Ireland.<sup>45</sup> Lady Moira took a similarly scientific approach to the promotion of Irish manufactures. During the 1770s she experimented with means of producing cheap cloth or 'factitious cotton' for the

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1797.

<sup>43</sup> Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in the American Republic* (North Carolina, 1980), p 44.

<sup>44</sup> William Preston, *The Contrast: or, a Comparison Between the Characters of the English and Irish, in the year 1780. A Poem* (Dublin, 1780), pp. 23-24.

<sup>45</sup> Rosemary Raughter, 'A Natural Tenderness: Women's Philanthropy in Eighteenth-Century Ireland' (Unpublished MA thesis, University College Dublin, 1992), p.114.

poor, using mildewed flax dyed with herbs and boiled fish.<sup>46</sup> In addition to encouraging the development of Irish industry, elite women also sponsored the development of Irish arts and antiquarian research. Lady Moira was a subscriber to the literary, scientific and antiquarian periodical *Anthologia Hibernica* and she also engaged in antiquarian research herself, providing materials on Gaelic culture for Joseph Cooper Walker's *An Historical Essay on the Dress of the Ancient and Modern Irish* (1788), and Charlotte Brooke's *Reliques of Irish Poetry* (1789).<sup>47</sup> Thus, while elite women's political activity was often linked to the promotion of familial concerns, the Patriot campaigns offered the opportunity for such women to assert a political and national identity that was less obviously based on dynastic interests.

As noted in chapter one, the United Irishmen did not criticize aristocratic female extravagance and vice, despite such attacks being a commonplace of British and European middle-class reformist propaganda, both conservative and radical. This was partly due to the different connotations of 'luxury' in Irish republican discourse, where the consumption of luxury domestic items was understood as compatible with the aims of the Patriot and United Irish movements. Indeed, the pursuit of luxury was positively to be encouraged. Using their positions as arbiters of taste and fashion in the cause of Irish development, elite Irish women demonstrated the key role that women could play in commercial and cultural progress, reinforcing the positive attitudes towards female influence expressed in liberal narratives of civilization. It is likely that the United Irishmen had such examples in mind when they identified women as both the engine and index of national progress. However, while the United Irishmen may have endorsed elite women's role in the Patriot movement, they were less sympathetic to the political power that women exercised within the unreformed parliamentary system. In an editorial entitled 'The Rights of Women' the *Northern Star* commented:

It was thought a very wild scheme of some French writers, who proposed that women should be admitted to the elective franchise. But the constitution of Ireland, "the glory of human reason," "the collected wisdom of ages", goes much further – for it allows women not merely to vote for, but to nominate legislators. Mrs Tighe and Mrs Walcot have as

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<sup>46</sup> See letters reprinted in *Anthologia Hibernica*, January 1794.

<sup>47</sup> Janet Todd, *Rebel Daughters: Ireland in Conflict 1798* (London, 2003), p. 187.

many representatives in the Irish senate as the city and county of Dublin – So far does the actual absurdity of our practice, soar beyond the wildest dreams of French visionaries.<sup>48</sup>

In political terms at least, elite women, who enjoyed power based on property, inheritance and mediated influence, had the most to lose from the victory of a radical cause that excluded women from their vision of universal political rights. To what extent did elite Irishwomen recognize the particular threat that the republican movement posed to their personal political influence? As one of the women singled out by the United Irishmen, the response of Sarah Tighe to the political developments of the 1790s is worth considering.

#### IV

Born in 1743, Sarah Tighe was the only child and heiress of the Right Hon. Sir William Fownes, 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet of Woodstock, by his wife Lady Elizabeth Fownes. The Fownes were a family with both fortune and political clout. Lady Elizabeth Fownes was the daughter of Brabazon, First Earl of Bessborough and sister to John Ponsonby the Speaker of the Irish House of Commons. John Ponsonby and his brother Lord Bessborough had married the daughters of the Duke of Devonshire during his incumbency as Lord Lieutenant from 1754-1757. Sarah's marriage to William Tighe in 1765 added the Woodstock estate in Co. Wicklow to the Tighe family's holdings at Rosannagh in the same county. It was Margaret Theaker, the second wife of William Tighe's father, who first established the close friendship between the Tighe family and John Wesley, acting as hostess to the religious leader during his frequent visits to Rosannagh. She was also the mother of the Rev. Thomas Tighe, one of Wesley's most devoted followers.<sup>49</sup>

The close relationship between John Wesley and the Tighe family was continued by Sarah, and under his tutelage she developed her own rather stern religious outlook, reputedly burning a manuscript of a novel by her niece and daughter-in-law Mary

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<sup>48</sup> *Northern Star*, 13 June 1792.

<sup>49</sup> For biographical details on Sarah Tighe and the Tighe family see Tighe, *The Tighe Story*; and NLI Dublin, Wicklow papers, MS 4184, Caroline Hamilton, 'Memoir of the Tighe family'.

Tighe, the author of *Psyche*, because of the impious connotations of novel writing.<sup>50</sup> The connection between Wesley and the Tighe family reflects the different strategy with which he approached the Methodist mission in England and Ireland. In England, Wesley's evangelical programme was focused primarily on the poor and plebeian classes, and he frequently criticized the worldliness of the gentry and upper-class patrons of the English church. In Ireland, however, he sought to work downward from the upper classes and established a network of connections with prominent members of the Protestant Ascendancy.<sup>51</sup> Wesley often preached at Rosannagh where an organ was installed in the Long Room specifically for his use. Sarah Tighe's efforts to facilitate his proselytizing work created some friction between the family and the local community. On one occasion she had to remonstrate with an angry mob who had come to seize Wesley from Rosannagh and shots were fired before the crowd would disperse.<sup>52</sup>

Although, as noted above, Sarah Tighe had significant political influence in her own right, through her patronage of Inistogue and the management of her family's political interest in Wicklow, her interpretation of and response to political developments during the 1790s was refracted through the lens of her evangelical beliefs. Responding to her son William's criticisms of the corruption of the Irish parliament, she wrote:

I do not entirely join with you in sentiment about politics. I esteem the poor to be the most numerous body as well as the most respectable, all laws should be made for their advantage ... Compared to them how insignificant appears the conduct of a few individuals who would sell their country to buy a name. Far from being an evil it puts people on their guard against them, by rendering their folly conspicuous.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, despite her access to the formal instruments of power, Sarah Tighe rejected a narrow focus on parliament and parliamentary reform, instead viewing the disenfranchised poor as the proper objects of reform. Whilst these views suggest a lack

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<sup>50</sup> Mary Tighe was the daughter of Theodosia Blachford and married Sarah's son Harry in 1793. She was a close friend of Thomas Moore and her poem 'Psyche' is widely cited as a major influence on Keats.

<sup>51</sup> David Hempton and Myrtle Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster Society 1740-1890*, (London, 1992), p 8.

<sup>52</sup> Tighe, *The Tighe Story*, p. 49.

of sympathy with the Irish radical programme, her religious beliefs also positioned her at an angle to one of the mainstays of the Protestant Ascendancy, the established church. Although evangelicalism has been read as a primarily conservative movement, in late eighteenth-century Ireland the movement's critique of the established church brought its members closer to the views of reforming dissenters in the North. While Methodism's emphasis on the need to maintain social order led its adherents to oppose radicalism, there was a sense of common cause with the disabilities suffered by Irish nonconformists.<sup>54</sup> This complex relationship to the radical programme was expressed by Sarah Tighe in a humorous, but telling, letter in verse sent to a family friend Captain Le Hunt. Written prior to the outbreak of the rebellion, it indicates that she had formerly supported the radical dissenters' reform programme, but the threat of insurrection and civil anarchy had prompted her to revise her views:

... thanks to the efforts of good Mr. Paine,  
 Our countrymen all have been cracked in the brain.  
 And if we may credit the words of the wise,  
 They propose 'ere long in rebellion to rise  
 And bidding defiance to Gods and the crown,  
 To turn the whole kingdom at once upside down,  
 I once, like the rest Sir, did rail at the King,  
 And thought a reform a desirable thing  
 I fervently prayed for the time to be hastened,  
 When Bishops and Kings should be properly chastened  
 I felt to the church God forgive me a spite  
 For Archy I had a bit of a fight,  
 But frighten'd at last by the smell of the birch  
 I'm quite reconciled to the King and the church  
 And now for the state I will make protestation  
 I've the highest esteem, and profound veneration  
 And think we might just as well let it alone  
 At the same time in justice I cannot but own  
 (Excuse my dear Captain, this little digression)

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<sup>53</sup> PRONI, Belfast, Tighe papers, D/2685/1/32. Sarah Tighe to William Tighe, 6 April 1791

<sup>54</sup> Hempton and Hill note that there were separatist tendencies within Irish Methodism from 1773. The definitive break in 1795 recognized Methodism as a denomination outside the Church of England, but left the Methodists in a somewhat ambiguous position, no longer part of the Anglican Church but not yet a branch of the Dissenting community. The split is not referred to in Sarah Tighe's letters, but this separation would have influenced her attitude to the Dissenting community. Hempton and Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster Society*, p. 36; Gerald Parsons, 'From Dissenters to Free Churchmen: The Transitions of Victorian Nonconformity', in Gerald Parsons (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain: Traditions* (Manchester, 1988), vol. 1, p. 82.

Dissenters still suffer no little oppression.<sup>55</sup>

When the rebellion finally broke the Tighe family were situated in one of the most disturbed areas of the country, Co. Wicklow.<sup>56</sup> During this period the family moved to the relative safety of Dublin, returning to Rossanagh when it was considered safe to do so, only to leave when further troubles appeared imminent. Sarah Tighe's son Harry was enrolled in a yeomanry corps responsible for the defence of the garrison at Rathdrum, Co. Wicklow, which guarded the route into the Wicklow mountains and was the site of several serious skirmishes. Gathering information from Harry and other correspondents, Sarah sent regular bulletins of the progress of the rebellion to her friend, and relation on her mother's side, Sarah Ponsonby, one of the 'Ladies of Llangollen'.

What becomes clear throughout this correspondence is Sarah's interpretation of the rebellion in sectarian terms, an interpretation that enabled her to retain her more sympathetic attitudes towards the northern radicals. Only a few days before the rising in Ulster, she prematurely commended them for their restraint: 'The North is quiet and penitent. The reformists had not foreseen what the consequences were likely to be or they would not have aroused that spirit which has frequently deluged this nation with blood'.<sup>57</sup> 'That spirit' she referred to was one of Catholic revenge and retribution. She quickly amassed a collection of reported atrocities and plots against Protestants, which she relayed to Sarah Ponsonby. This interpretation was not unusual, complementing and reinforcing beliefs that were deeply rooted in the Irish Protestant psyche. A key aspect of the ideology of the Protestant Ascendancy, and British Protestants in general, was their self-perception as a Protestant elect, periodically subjected to Catholic

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<sup>55</sup> NLI, Dublin, Wicklow papers, MS 4801.

<sup>56</sup> In May 1798 government forces led by General Craig had begun the disarming of Wicklow, which was accompanied by brutal force, house burning, half hanging and flogging. The scheme for the pacification of Wicklow proved to have the opposite effect, provoking a scattered and previously uncoordinated group of rebels into action. When the signal for the uprising came on 23 May, the Wicklow rebels were amongst the first to respond. By early June the rising had spread to Wexford, Wicklow having largely been quelled with a rebel remnant led by Joseph Holt and Michael Dwyer holding out until October. On the rebellion in Wicklow see Daniel Gahan, *Rebellion, Ireland in 1798* (Dublin, 1997); and Thomas Pakenham, *The Year of Liberty: The Story of the Great Irish Rebellion of 1798* (London, 1969).

<sup>57</sup> NLI, Dublin, Wicklow papers, MS 4813. Sarah Tighe to Sarah Ponsonby, 4 June 1798.

persecution, but ultimately protected by God and raised to power by providence.<sup>58</sup> In Ireland the atrocity literature of Sir John Temple and William King kept the memories of the Protestant massacres and persecution of 1641 alive. The outbreak of the 1798 rebellion seemed to confirm this cycle of persecution, and Sarah Tighe frequently located her experiences during this period within a narrative, not only of Irish Protestant sufferings, but of a centuries old Roman Catholic persecution, invoking 1641, the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre and even stretching back as far as the thirteenth-century Albigensian crusade of Pope Innocent III. 'There is', she concluded, 'evidently something anti-Christian in the Romish church.'<sup>59</sup>

In a similar vein, Sarah Tighe attributed the Protestant nation's deliverance from the Catholic threat as the work of divine providence, writing: 'The Lord seems to favour our cause, he gives wisdom to our rulers and discovers any plot formed against us.'<sup>60</sup> Paradoxically, she exempted her own Roman Catholic tenantry, whom she referred to proprietarily as 'my Catholics', from the general description, praising their assistance in protecting her estate: 'I owe great gratitude to my rebel acquaintances and the Roman Catholics who take care of it. I don't think they are like any other Roman Catholics in the kingdom – ... I shew the world that there are a few better than the rest'.<sup>61</sup>

Sarah considered leaving Ireland for England during the rebellion as many others had already done, but she ultimately decided to stay. Reflecting on providence's role in protecting her family and estates she presented her decision to remain as a submission to a divine will that had ordained her to fulfill a moral mission in the country:

The Lord has been so kind to me, in preserving my family and property

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<sup>58</sup> Tony Claydon and Ian McBride, 'The Trials of the Chosen Peoples: Recent Interpretations of Protestantism and National Identity in Britain and Ireland', in Tony Claydon and Ian McBride (eds), *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland, c. 1650-c.1850* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 3-32; and Linda Colley, *Britons*, pp. 10-58.

<sup>59</sup> NLI, Dublin, Wicklow papers, MS 4813. Sarah Tighe to Sarah Ponsonby, 20 November 1798

<sup>60</sup> NLI, Dublin, Wicklow papers, MS 4813. Sarah Tighe to Sarah Ponsonby, 20 June 1798. A similar providentialist view of the rebellion was expressed by the evangelical Anne, Countess Dowager of Roden, who reflected in her journal in September 1798 that: 'Whoever writes the history of this eventful unhappy summer, will particularly describe the astonishing mercies that have been granted to the defenders of religion and the laws in this distracted country'. 'Diary of Anne, Countess Dowager of Roden', in John Beatty (ed.), *Protestant Women's Narratives of the Irish Rebellion of 1798* (Dublin, 2001), p. 238.

<sup>61</sup> NLI, Dublin, Wicklow papers, MS 4183, Sarah Tighe to Sarah Ponsonby, 18 October 1798.



... that to quit the country where he has been pleased to cast my lot, seem contrary to his will ... I therefore mean to return home and be more active, punctual, careful &c. than before the rebellion.<sup>62</sup>

Like Maria Edgeworth's dissipated aristocrat Lord Glenthorn, roused from *ennui* by rebellion and shaken into a clearer sense of his duties towards his Irish tenantry, Sarah read the events of 1798 as a clarion call to Irish landlords to be more attentive to the moral and social needs of their tenants.<sup>63</sup> This sense of a moral mission reflected and was shaped by contemporaneous currents within the British evangelical movement, most notably the conservative response to radical politics led by Hannah More. More's series of Cheap Repository Tracts, printed from 1795, imitated the style and presentation of popular, plebeian chapbooks, whilst containing a moral, pietistic message that was aimed at reforming the manners of the poor and urging them to thrift, industry, religiosity and sobriety. Though the tracts were initially part of a counter-offensive against the dissemination of Painite and Jacobin literature amongst the lower orders, their wider purpose, as argued by Susan Pedersen, was to form part of the bid for upper-class leadership in the moral reform of the poor.<sup>64</sup> In Ireland the Association for Discountenancing Vice sponsored the publication and distribution of More's tracts, which were printed almost simultaneously in London and Dublin from 1796.<sup>65</sup>

Inspired by the example of More, Sarah Tighe distributed moral tracts amongst her tenantry, writing: 'as to Miss More's little cheap publications, I think them admirable particularly the farmers and shoemaker. I have read all that I could get and given away a great many.'<sup>66</sup> In addition to the distribution of pamphlets she committed herself to a more active role in the management of her estates. Critical of the middlemen, agents and proctors that provoked such antipathy amongst the Irish tenantry, she determined to prove a model landlord: 'Since I became my own agent it gives me the opportunities of being very intimate with them and it shows men of what use landlords might be such as had real religion or even a proper sense of morality.'<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> NLI, Dublin, Wicklow papers, MS 4813. Sarah Tighe to Sarah Ponsonby, 18 August 1798.

<sup>63</sup> Edgeworth's novel, *Ennui* (1809) is discussed in chapter six.

<sup>64</sup> Susan Pedersen, 'Hannah More meets Simple Simon: Tracts, Chapbooks, and Popular Culture in late Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of British Studies*, 25 (1986), pp. 84-113.

<sup>65</sup> Niall Ó Ciosáin, *Print and Popular Culture in Ireland, 1750-1850* (London, 1997), p. 138.

<sup>66</sup> NLI, Dublin, Wicklow papers, MS 4813. Sarah Tighe to Sarah Ponsonby, 20 November 1798.

<sup>67</sup> NLI, Dublin, Wicklow papers, Ms 4813. Sarah Tighe to Sarah Ponsonby, 28 August 1798.

Despite her sometimes anti-Catholic sentiments, and her own devout Protestantism, Sarah Tighe does not appear to have seen any possible tension between her evangelical model of landlord-tenant relations and the Catholic composition of the rural poor. Though she read the rebellion as primarily sectarian, she diagnosed the underlying causes to be Catholic poverty and mismanagement by the landed elite. In several ways her diagnosis reflects the Protestant paternalism and the model of the improving landlord that was expounded by Maria Edgeworth in her Irish novels. She does not appear to have been concerned with the threat the United Irishmen posed to her personal political influence. Indeed, she supported the Act of Union even though it involved the disenfranchisement of her borough, Inistogue.<sup>68</sup> There is little evidence that Sarah Tighe identified herself as Irish. Her daughter Caroline believed that although her mother had been born and raised in Ireland she had always held prejudices in favour of England.<sup>69</sup> However, her decision to stay in Ireland and the renewed sense of purpose prompted by the rebellion indicates that she believed she had a moral mission to remain in the country. Her response to the United Irish movement was thus mediated more by her religious identity than by class, national or political considerations.

## V

Like Sarah Tighe, Lady Moira had close familial connections with the Methodist movement. Her mother Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon was responsible for establishing the Huntingdon connexion, an aristocratic, Calvinist inclined religious movement.<sup>70</sup> However, in Lady Moira's case religion was not the most significant influence on her political views. She frequently declared herself to be liberal and tolerant in all religious matters, and was a proponent of Catholic emancipation. Her

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<sup>68</sup> Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish Parliament*, vol. 2, p. 96.

<sup>69</sup> NLI, Dublin, Wicklow papers, MS 4184. Caroline Hamilton's memoir of the Tighe family.

<sup>70</sup> She established several chapels for the group and exercised her right as a peeress to appoint chaplains to protect clergymen suspected of Methodism. There is evidence that Lady Moira supported her mother's religious movement, regularly opening her house to Calvinistic preachers, and on at least one occasion in the 1780s upsetting the patronesses of Lady Arabella Denny's Magdalen Asylum with a stern sermon delivered by one of her mother's itinerant preachers. Hempton and Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster Society*, pp. 131-132. On Selina Countess of Huntingdon see A. C. H. Seymour, *The Life and Times of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon* (London, 1844), 2 vols.

political identity rested instead on a defiant and unapologetically aristocratic basis. Pride in her own illustrious heritage was combined with a distinctly aristocratic republicanism that imbued in her a profound sense of the rights and duties of rank and property.

Born in England in 1731, the eldest daughter of Theophilus Hastings, 9<sup>th</sup> Earl of Huntingdon, Elizabeth Hastings became the third wife of John Rawdon, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Moira in 1752.<sup>71</sup> The Moira family held substantial estates in Co. Down, and residences at Monalto in the parish of Moira, and Ussher's Quay in Dublin. Under the superintendence of Lady Moira, Moira House became a fashionable literary and political salon, where, according to *Walker's Hibernian Magazine*, Lady Moira 'rendered her house the favourite spot where every person of genius or talents in Dublin, or who visited Dublin, loved most to resort to.'<sup>72</sup> Within the eighteenth-century public sphere the salon operated as a key location for polite sociability, where the aristocracy and members of the literati could interact at a level of some equality. Particularly in France, the culture of the salon was intimately connected with women, female *salonnières* facilitating the rational intellectual discourse and sociability that was characteristic of such gatherings.<sup>73</sup> Although Habermas does not identify a salon culture in the British Isles comparable to the French, stressing instead the role of coffee houses in the development of the public sphere, there was indeed a well-established role for elite women acting as political and literary hostesses.<sup>74</sup> In Ireland the elite salon facilitated the heterosocial interaction between those of different status and different religions. As an oppositional space the salon appears to have been frequented by the upper-class leadership of the United Irish movement. Alicia Lefanu, the sister of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, presided over a Dublin literary salon attended by figures

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<sup>71</sup> On the death of her brother Francis, 10<sup>th</sup> Earl of Huntingdon, in October 1789, Lady Moira succeeded to the barony of Hastings, while the earldom of Huntingdon remained dormant until 1819. Her husband died in 1793, and their eldest son Francis Rawdon-Hastings became the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Moira. Francis Bickley, 'Introduction', in Francis Bickley (ed.), *HMC Report on the Manuscripts of the late Reginald Rawdon-Hastings* (London, 1934), vol. 3, pp. vii-xii.

<sup>72</sup> *Walker's Hibernian Magazine*, May 1808.

<sup>73</sup> On the salon and the French 'public sphere' see Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, pp. 31-34; Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca and London, 1988), pp. 23-31; Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, 1994), pp. 4-7.

<sup>74</sup> On political hostesses in Georgian Britain see Lewis, *Sacred to Female Patriotism*, pp. 96-113.

such as the poet Mary Tighe, the author Sydney Owenson and the United Irishmen, Valentine Lawless and William James McNeven.<sup>75</sup> Lady Moira gathered a similarly eclectic range of individuals to her Moira House coterie, including the Catholic lawyer, Denys Scully, Charlotte Brooke and the United Irishmen, William Todd Jones and William Sampson. In his memoirs Sampson praised Lady Moira as 'a lady distinguished by advantages greater than her high birth, those of a cultivated and solid mind, stored with the richest treasures of erudition'.<sup>76</sup>

As previously mentioned, despite her English birth, Lady Moira had been actively involved in the Irish Patriot movement, and during her long residence in Ireland had increasingly come to identify herself as Irish. Her intimate acquaintances included Margaret, Lady Mount Cashell, whom Janet Todd has identified as a member of the United Irishmen. According to Todd, it was Mary Wollstonecraft, Lady Mount Cashell's governess, and Lady Moira, who together acted as the most significant influences in Lady Mount Cashell's political education, and it was probably at Lady Moira's enlightened salon that Mount Cashell first became acquainted with the United Irish leadership.<sup>77</sup> The close connection between the United Irishmen and elite women such as Lady Mount Cashell, Lady Moira and Lucy Fitzgerald, was noted and denounced by the conservative Bishop of Ossory in a sermon preached immediately prior to the outbreak of the rebellion. Describing the progress of revolutionary principles and atheistic philosophy through the 'higher ranks', he declared that the conversion of elite women to the radical cause was 'a leading object with the conspirators', who knew 'the influence which female manners ever must have on society in any degree polished'.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> According to McNeven's daughter her father 'often spoke to me of Mrs Lefanu ... as one of the loveliest and most accomplished women of the day - at her house he was on the intimate footing of a valued friend and enjoyed exceedingly the reunions of the polished and the learned who delighted to gather round her.' TCD, Dublin, Madden papers, 873/526. Biographical Memoir of Dr W. J. Macneven drawn up for R. R. Madden by his daughter Jane Mary Macneven.

<sup>76</sup> William Sampson, *Memoirs of William Sampson* (2nd edn, Leesburg VA, 1817), p. 72. According to Joan Landes, the exclusion of women from the public sphere during the French revolution was partly based on a reaction against the female dominated 'salon' which the revolutionaries came to identify as 'aristocratic' and 'effeminate'. However, the United Irishmen appear to have had a much more favourable view of women's role within the salon. See Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*, pp. 23-31.

<sup>77</sup> Todd, *Rebel Daughters*, p. 156.

<sup>78</sup> *A Sermon Preached before his Excellency John Jeffries, Earl Camden, Lord Lieutenant, President and the Members of the Association for Discountenancing Vice in St. Peter's Church 22 May 1798, by the*

Certainly the important role that Lady Moira could play as a political hostess was recognized by the United Irish leadership. The United Irish propagandist William Todd Jones was the son of the Moira family's physician, and according to Lady Moira she had always felt for him a 'maternal kindness'.<sup>79</sup> In 1792 Todd Jones approached Lady Moira to help organize a meeting between Theobald Wolfe Tone, Thomas Russell and Lady Moira's son, Francis Rawdon-Hastings.<sup>80</sup> At one point Wolfe Tone declared of Lord Moira, 'he may, if he chooses ... be one of the greatest men in Europe.'<sup>81</sup> However, the United Irishmen would later revise their favourable opinion of Rawdon-Hastings when he joined the British campaign against revolutionary France.<sup>82</sup> In her letter of invitation to the United Irish leadership, Lady Moira demonstrated her enlightened 'rationalism' and her openness to new and different opinions, but she also underlined her own immutable principles:

Lord Moira will be happy to see you, Mr Tone, and Mr Russell, tomorrow, to dinner, and, as you know I relish good sense in whatever drapery it presents itself, of religion or party ... As for making a democrat of me that, you must be persuaded, is a fruitless hope: for, to keep my Manche and Clarence arms, it is more probable I should turn Amazon and, having the blood of Hugh Capet in my veins, am, from nature, a firm aristocrat ... I am not a convertible, but a rational being.<sup>83</sup>

Her declaration that she would rather 'turn Amazon' than become a democrat is revealing, suggesting an awareness that as an aristocrat she wielded more power than she could ever possess as a mere woman in the United Irishmen's democratic republic.

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*Right Revd. Thomas Lewis O'Beirne D. D., Lord Bishop of Ossory* (Dublin, 1798), p. 10.

<sup>79</sup> See letter from Lady Moira to John Philpot Curran reprinted in W. J. Fitzpatrick, *Secret Service under Pitt* (London, 1892), Appendix, pp. 352-355.

<sup>80</sup> After succeeding to the title of Baron Rawdon of Rawdon in 1783, Rawdon-Hastings had taken a seat in the British House of Lords, and upon his father's death he had become the 2nd Earl of Moira. He was a prominent advocate of Catholic emancipation, receiving the Catholic delegation at his home in London in 1792 and promising to use his privilege as a peer to gain them an audience with the king if they failed to secure one.

<sup>81</sup> Indeed, Lord Moira acted as godfather to one of Tone's children. Theobald Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Memoirs, Journals and Political Writings, Compiled and Arranged by William T.W. Tone, 1826*, Thomas Bartlett (ed.) (Dublin, 1998) p. 154.

<sup>82</sup> During Tone's negotiations with the French respecting the possibility of establishing an aristocratic republic in Ireland, he confessed that the only Irish aristocrat who might have held the office of king in such a system was Lord Moira, 'but that he had blown his reputation to pieces by accepting a command against the French.' Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, p. 587.

<sup>83</sup> Lady Moira to William Todd Jones, 1792 reprinted in Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, p. 180.

Although Lady Moira was unwilling to exchange her aristocratic republicanism for the more popular radicalism of the United Irishmen, over the course of the 1790s she became increasingly hostile to both Dublin Castle and the British government. Bishop Percy reported in 1797 that Lady Moira had banished anyone connected with the Castle from entering Moira House, adding that: 'Lady M. carries it so far, that she wears Green Stockings & takes care to lift up her petticoats to show them as she gets in and out of her Carriage'.<sup>84</sup> This provocative attitude was partly due to what she perceived as the administration's mistreatment of her son. In 1797 an abortive scheme was set in motion by radical Whigs at Westminster for the formation of a new ministry, at the head of which Francis Rawdon-Hastings was to be placed.<sup>85</sup> Despite the failure of this plan Lord Moira and the opposition Whigs at Westminster continued to press the British government on the illiberal policies that were being pursued in Ireland, in the hope of embarrassing the Pitt administration and thereby undermining its grip on power. Late in 1797 Lord Moira called for an investigation into the deepening crisis in Ireland, and presented to the British and Irish houses of lords a litany of outrages perpetrated by government forces and their loyalist supporters. His case failed and the policy of coercion was endorsed by both the British and Irish administrations.<sup>86</sup>

Throughout this period Lady Moira supported her son's views and assisted him in efforts to bring the true severity of government suppression in Ireland to light. Writing to him on the state of Ulster, she reported that: 'The disarming of the North pleases nobody', and proceeded to criticize the administration for encouraging the Orange Order's attacks on the Catholic population, a tactic that she believed only served to reinforce the United Irish cause.<sup>87</sup> Lady Moira did not restrict her actions to advising her son, but she also personally intervened with the administration when she felt her family's interests and the interests of her tenants to be threatened. The townland of Ballynahinch formed part of the Moira estate and had been the site of some of the worst

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<sup>84</sup> Quoted in Todd, *Rebel Daughters*, p. 251.

<sup>85</sup> 'Francis Rawdon-Hastings', in Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee (eds), *Dictionary of National Biography* (London, 1885).

<sup>86</sup> Nancy Curtin, *The United Irishmen: Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin 1791-1798* (Oxford, 1998), p. 217.

<sup>87</sup> PRONI, Belfast, Granard papers, T/3765/M/3/6/2. Lady Moira to Francis Rawdon-Hastings, 1797.

brutality during General Lake's disarming of the North. Lady Moira took a personal interest in the treatment of the local community and gathered testimonies from the inhabitants to prove the unnecessary severity of the administration forces, which she presented to Lord Camden the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland in a letter sent in July 1797. Lady Moira insisted that Ballynahinch was a perfectly peaceful town, free from sedition, and she condemned the series of arrests that had been made there and the brutal treatment of the inhabitants, a brutality she compared to Robespierre's reign of terror. More pointedly, she reminded the Lord-Lieutenant of the effect such brutality would have on the people's perception of the monarchy, and how it served to undermine the reciprocal relationship between nobility and the people:

My Family safe in past centuries, not from the Oppression of, but by the Friendship & support & attachment of the share of the People who formed the feudal Tenantry of their ancestors, I feel gratitude to the People, and therefore rationally conclude that his Majesty in somewhat of a similar tho' more extensive view must feel the same towards his subjects; And faithful to their princes as my Family have been, Can I behold the Light in which his Majesty is represented to his Irish Subjects without feeling equal Grief & Astonishment?<sup>88</sup>

Lady Moira's intervention with the Lord-Lieutenant can be read as deriving primarily from familial interests, in this case a desire to protect the honour and reputation of her son Lord Moira. Shortly after he had initiated his public campaign against the administration's policies in Ireland, two employees of the Moira estate, a groom and a bailiff, were arrested on suspicion of being United Irishmen. Lady Moira believed that this was an underhand attempt by the government to embarrass her son by proving that the rebel movement had spread to his own estate, thereby justifying their coercive measures.<sup>89</sup> She would maintain this belief until the end of her life, openly asserting

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<sup>88</sup> PRONI, Belfast, Camden papers, T/2627/4/210. Lady Moira to Lord Camden, 20 July 1797. This was not the first time she had remonstrated with a Lord-Lieutenant on their behalf. In 1772 during an outbreak of agrarian disturbances in Country Down, Lady Moira had ordered a detachment of troops from Newry to protect the inhabitants of Moira in response to rumours that the Hearts of Flint and the Hearts of Steel were threatening them with death if they would not be sworn in. In explaining her actions to the Lord-Lieutenant she expressed regret at the bad impression her decision to call for troops might give of the disturbed state of the country and she pleaded with him not to take retribution on the county and the people, who, she maintained, were driven to extremes by material distress. PRONI, Belfast, Townshend papers, D/4009/3/1. Lady Moira to George Townshend, 4th Viscount Townshend, Lord-Lieutenant, 14 March 1772.

<sup>89</sup> Despite Lady Moira's indignation at these allegations, there is some evidence that she may have helped United Irish rebels to escape during the 1798 and 1803 rebellions. See Fitzpatrick, *Secret Service Under*

that Lord Moira's servant had been bribed to conceal seditious papers on the Moira property.<sup>90</sup> At the time Lord Moira was rather apologetic about his mother's public declarations of a conspiracy against him. Writing to Lady Londonderry on this matter, he begged her to excuse his mother's 'immoderate impartiality for me.'<sup>91</sup> However, there is some evidence to support the view that Lord Moira's estate was singled out during the disarming of the North. When General Lake declared that a town in the North should be burned as an example, Lord Moira's was reputedly the first to be suggested.<sup>92</sup>

A familial motivation for Lady Moira's intervention would fit the pattern for elite women's political behaviour delineated by Chalus, Lewis and others, whereby aristocratic women engaged with politics primarily to further family interests. Yet there is also evidence that Lady Moira was motivated by a broader concern for the welfare of her tenantry and her firm belief that her rank entailed upon her a duty to protect their interests. During the 1798 rebellion the Moira's demesne of Monalto, Ballynahinch, Co. Down, became an ad hoc camp for the rebel army led by Henry Munroe, Lord Moira being at the time in London. Within a few days government troops led by General Nugent closed in on the rebels, burning the surrounding towns and villages on their way before routing the rebels based at Monalto.<sup>93</sup> Lady Moira's immediate response was to attend to those of her tenantry who had suffered at the hands of the troops. She requested the local apothecary to administer to those in need at her expense and also financed the repair of the houses which had been burned.<sup>94</sup> Perhaps because of these actions she was fondly remembered in a nineteenth-century ballad commemorating the

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*Pitt*, p. 137. Janet Todd also suggests that she may have sheltered Lord Edward Fitzgerald at Moira House as he tried to evade arrest. Certainly, Lady Moira helped Pamela Fitzgerald, who gave birth whilst her husband was in hiding, and allowed her to stay at Moira House during this period. Todd, *Rebel Daughters*, pp. 254-255.

<sup>90</sup> PRONI, Belfast, Granard papers, T/3765/J/11/2/1. Lady Moira to Lord Viscount Forbes, March 1803.

<sup>91</sup> PRONI, Belfast, Camden papers, T/2627/4/209. Lord Moira to Lady Londonderry, 13 July 1797.

<sup>92</sup> Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish Parliament*, vol. 6, p 147.

<sup>93</sup> Pakenham, *The Year of Liberty*, pp. 227-231.

<sup>94</sup> PRONI, Belfast, Granard papers, T/3765/M/2/32/8. Mr. J. M. Johnston to Lady Moira, October 1798. Interventions on behalf of their tenantry by elite women were relatively common during and after the rebellion. Most famously perhaps, Mrs Peter LaTouche mediated the surrender of the Wicklow rebel, Joseph Holt. See Peter O'Shaughnessy (ed.), *Rebellion in Wicklow: General Joseph Holt's Personal Account of 1798* (Dublin, 1998), p. 108; and NAI, Dublin, Rebellion Papers, 620/56/97, Joseph Holt to Mrs Peter LaTouche, 15 January 1799. For petitions to and from elite women on behalf of their tenants see NAI, Dublin, State Prisoners Petitions, 512, 660, 794; and NAI, Dublin, Rebellion Papers,



Battle of Ballynahinch, which declared, 'Here's a health to Lady Moira, and long may she reign,/ We fought our last battle all in her domain'.<sup>95</sup> Again she perceived the government's actions as unnecessarily brutal. She was especially outraged by a glowing account of the battle at Ballynahinch given in the *British Military Journal; or Magazine* the following March, in which the battle was 'portrayed in colours superior to a victory of the great Frederick's over their Opponents'.<sup>96</sup>

Despite Lady Moira's hostility towards the British and Irish administrations, her aristocratic independence led her to view both the government and the rebels with an equally censorious eye. She declared the idea of the rights of man to be a 'chimera', but was similarly critical of the abuses of power by the Irish Protestant oligarchy, most members of which, when compared to her own noble lineage, she considered mere upstarts. Reflecting on the tumultuous events set in train by the French Revolution, she outlined her position:

The times are singular, both Parties & their contingent Auxiliaries in my Opinion acting as absurdly in each of their Procedures as it is possible ... – I have seen wondrous Changes in political Sentiments, & Conduct within the course of a few Years – An Aristocrat of the genuine Breed no currish Cross in my Race, I loved the People & thought it my duty to protect & serve them, I shou'd not, nor do I chuse to be tyrannized by the mob having never had the least inclination to practice tyranny over those who were subject to my influence, I am loyal & national – but I sigh when I behold those who never had a Great Grandfather, to whom the Noble Feudal feelings of grateful attachment to a faithful Follower & the Indulgence of the power to protect & Serve are unknown – talking of the People pretending to despise & govern them, & pretending to Airs of Consequence & the Exertion of Force, devoid of Prudence.<sup>97</sup>

Lady Moira's presentation of her self as both 'loyal & national' underlines the tension between these two identities, which the revolutionary decade served to heighten. She

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620/3/51/12.

<sup>95</sup> 'General Munroe', in R. R. Madden, *Literary Remains of the United Irishmen of 1798* (Dublin, 1887), p. 238.

<sup>96</sup> NLI, Dublin, Scully papers, MS 27, 485, 16. Lady Moira to Dennis Scully, 23 March 1799. Amongst the Granard papers is a copy of this article annotated in Lady Moira's hand in which she corrected its inaccuracies including the glossing over of several unprovoked acts of violence committed by General Nugent's forces. PRONI, Belfast, Granard papers, T/3765/M/3/6/1. Lady Moira to Lord Moira, 11 March 1797.

<sup>97</sup> PRONI, Belfast, Granard papers, T/3765/M/3/6/1. Lady Moira to William Todd Jones (?), 11 March

was profoundly conscious of the power and privilege that her aristocratic rank allowed her to wield over those 'subject to her influence', and hence was committed to the maintenance of the established order. Yet she was also critical of the British and Irish administration and evinced some sympathy towards the United Irish cause. At one level her attitudes during the 1790s conform to the pattern of elite women's political practice, as her oppositional stance was partly based on a defence of her familial interests and a desire to vindicate the reputation of her son. At the same time, her self-conception as a rational and enlightened political actor led her to assess the United Irish programme according to less overtly personal criteria. While her liberal religious views, aristocratic republicanism and patriotic sentiments coincided on some points with the views of the United Irishmen, the rupture between property and power was one she could not countenance and perhaps, as hinted at above, indicates a recognition that as a woman, any hope of exercising political influence remained dependent on the maintenance of this connection.

## VI

Of all the women considered here the Fitzgeralds were the most closely implicated in the United Irish movement and the 1798 rebellion. They are also the figures who have received most attention from historians and biographers. From the death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald to the present, his personal history and passage from prominent aristocrat to martyred rebel has been an object of fascination, Lord Byron declaring that his life would 'make the finest subject in the world for an historical novel.'<sup>98</sup> The female members of the Fitzgerald family, the matriarchal Emily, Duchess of Leinster, and her sisters Lady Louisa Connolly and Sarah Napier, have also been the subject of much attention, most recently in Stella Tillyard's study of the sisters. The details of Edward Fitzgerald's development into a republican revolutionary do not require extensive retelling here. Several elements of his family background facilitated this evolution; his father the Duke of Leinster's leadership of the Irish Patriot movement and

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1797.

<sup>98</sup> R. R. Madden, *The United Irishmen their Lives and Times* (New York, 1916 [1842-46]), vol. 5, p. 63.

his familial links with the English radical Whigs, led by his cousin Charles Fox, were contributing factors. Tillyard has also indicated the influence of his mother Emily, Duchess of Leinster, whose political principles she suggests were more radical than his father's.<sup>99</sup> Her children's democratic leanings were further encouraged by their Rousseauian education under their tutor, subsequently step-father, William Ogilvie. Edward was an enthusiastic supporter of the French Revolution from the outset, an enthusiasm that was confirmed by his visit to Paris in 1792, where he became involved in the radical circle surrounding Thomas Paine, and where he dramatically renounced his title in November 1792. He returned to Ireland in 1793 with his new wife Pamela, reputedly the illegitimate daughter of the educationalist Madame de Genlis and Philippe 'Egalité', Duc d'Orleans, a match which lent further credibility to his republican image. He quickly made his republican principles public, denouncing the Irish parliament's act prohibiting Volunteer assemblies. Despite his open republicanism he did not join the United Irishmen until 1796, whereupon he shortly became one of the organization's most important leaders.<sup>100</sup>

In accounts of Lord Edward's life his sister Lucy Fitzgerald's participation in his republican activities has traditionally been interpreted as deriving from her deep affection for him, Gerald Campbell's assertion that she 'loved the cause because he loved it, whom she loved above all things', influencing subsequent accounts.<sup>101</sup> Added to this explanation is another that attributes Lucy's enthusiasm for the radical cause to an infatuation with Edward's close friend Arthur O'Connor.<sup>102</sup> The first explanation tends to undermine the individual agency of Lucy Fitzgerald's political involvement, suggesting that her political sympathies were indistinguishable from her personal affections. As to the second explanation, although Lucy Fitzgerald developed a close

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<sup>99</sup> This she has inferred more from omissions rather than overt declaration in her correspondence - she never praised the English monarchy nor expressed regret at the French royal family's execution - and also from her choice of potential husbands for her daughters, encouraging a match between Lucy and the Foxite Lord Grey in 1794. Tillyard, *Aristocrats*, pp. 72, 360.

<sup>100</sup> For further details see Stella Tillyard, *Citizen Lord. Edward Fitzgerald, 1763-1798* (London, 1997).

<sup>101</sup> Gerald Campbell, *Edward and Pamela Fitzgerald. Being some Account of their Lives Compiled from the Letters of those who Knew them.* (London, 1904). Gerald Campbell's explanation is repeated in Helena Concannon's account of Lucy Fitzgerald in *The Women of '98* (Dublin, 1919), p. 249.

<sup>102</sup> This explanation is cited in Helena Concannon's *Women of '98*, p. 251, Brian Fitzgerald, *Emily, Duchess of Leinster 1731-1814. A Study of her Life and Times* (London, 1949), p. 225, and Stella Tillyard, *Aristocrats*, p. 376; and *Citizen Lord*, p. 209.

relationship with Arthur O'Connor, the emphasis on this aspect appears to derive from the same romantic view of the women involved with the United Irishmen that has led to much speculation about Mary Anne McCracken's feelings for Thomas Russell. What is clear is that Lucy Fitzgerald shared in several of the formative influences that made Lord Edward so responsive to revolutionary politics. Moreover, she was brought up within a circle of highly politicized women, where political discussion was encouraged and expected.

Certainly it was her brother that first excited Lucy's interest in the radical ideas generated by the French Revolution. However, her account of Edward's initial revolutionary enthusiasm is not an altogether uncritical one. Describing his visits to the family residence in London in 1790, she wrote:

... he is mad about the French affairs, the levelling principle, and indeed seems intirely [sic] engrossed by these subjects ... tho' I fear he has made a system to himself too perfect for this world and which to bring about would be the cause of much disorder and much blood would be spilt, this he denies, but I fear it will but too soon shew itself – for it gains by his accounts great grounds – one must never say the mob before him but the people ... I think it charming to hear talked of but I fear they will never realize it.<sup>103</sup>

Initially cautious about the violent implications of revolutionary ideology, in the following years Lucy became increasingly engaged with the republican cause. She developed a close friendship with Edward's wife Pamela, delighting in her complete disregard for the opinion of Irish aristocratic society, who viewed her with suspicion because of her connection with the French Revolution. Rumours circulated that Pamela wore a red handkerchief dipped in the blood of Louis XVI.<sup>104</sup> Lucy gleefully described Pamela's appearance at a Dublin ball in April 1793. The guests, in mourning for the execution of Louis XVI, all wore black as did Pamela, but in a defiant gesture she added pink ribbons to her hair. Lucy wrote, 'you may imagine the surprise of the Doblin

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<sup>103</sup> NLI, Dublin, Lennox/Fitzgerald/Campbell papers, MS 35,004, 7. Lucy Fitzgerald, undated, unaddressed.

<sup>104</sup> NLI, Dublin, Lennox/Fitzgerald/Campbell papers, MS 35, 012, 1. Journal of Sophia Fitzgerald, February 1793.

liddies [sic] in short they stared her out of countenance.’<sup>105</sup> The concept of a self-conscious revolutionary style was vigorously pursued by Edward and Pamela Fitzgerald, Edward cropping his hair in the French revolutionary style and donning a green cravat. To a degree this was simply an extension of pre-existing modes of elite political expression and the politicization of clothing discussed above. But, in the context of the 1790s such political symbolism, because of its associations with the French Revolution was becoming less acceptable amongst Irish upper-class circles. The fusing of the political and the fashionable was no longer the preserve of the elite, as the lower orders adopted the ‘croppy’ hairstyle and began wearing green cockades and patriotic emblems. By 1797 Lucy had also adopted the revolutionary style, recording in her diary: ‘Went to town for a Ball at Lady Clare’s. I had my hair turn’d close up, was reckon’d Democratic, and was not danced with’.<sup>106</sup> Such forms of political expression did not differ greatly from the patriotic posturing of Lucy’s father wearing shamrocks at a masquerade ball, or her mother dressing in support of Irish manufactures, but the political meaning attached to them had been significantly altered.

During a prolonged visit to Edward and Pamela at their residence in Kilrush, Co. Kildare from late 1796 to early in 1797, Lucy further participated in the interweaving of the social and the political that shaped the couple’s lifestyle. Lucy, Edward and Pamela, together with Arthur O’Connor, infused every activity with democratic significance. They danced to Irish jigs played by a travelling piper, inviting the servants and maids to join them, pasted patriotic emblems into Lucy’s pocket-book, listened to Arthur O’Connor reading *Julius Caesar* and stayed up late discussing politics. Lucy’s circle of republican acquaintances broadened as she was introduced to the United Irishmen William MacNeven, Oliver Bond and Samuel Barber among others, and she presented a green cravat to a Mr. Henry, noting ‘a green cravat is a sign of good principles.’<sup>107</sup> However, this was also a period of crisis for the United Irishmen and those close to the Fitzgeralds. In December 1796 Tone had led the failed French expedition force to Bantry Bay and in February 1797 Arthur O’Connor was imprisoned for sedition

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<sup>105</sup> NLI, Dublin, Lennox/Fitzgerald/Campbell papers, MS 35,004, 9. Lucy Fitzgerald to Sophia Fitzgerald, 18 April 1793.

<sup>106</sup> Unfortunately Lucy Fitzgerald’s diary is now lost but there are extensive extracts in Campbell, *Edward & Pamela Fitzgerald*, p. 118.

following the publication of his pamphlet *An Address to the Electors of Co. Antrim*. O'Connor wrote to Lucy and Pamela from prison recalling the times they had spent together in Kildare: 'the dear song, and the old dance, the conversation, the humble meal and the jug of native punch, accompanied with social friendship – shall we ever pass those days again?'<sup>108</sup>

It would be misleading to characterize Lucy's republicanism as purely social or superficial. She must have been in the confidence of the United Irish leaders who met at Kilrush and been privy to their plans. According to William Macneven's daughter, her father often described the enjoyable evenings he spent with Edward Fitzgerald, his wife and sister and recalled in particular the evening when the company first received the news that the United Irishmen had secured French assistance: 'They conversed on the brightening prospects of the country, the two ladies entering with ardent enthusiasm into all their feelings and sharing in their brilliant anticipations'.<sup>109</sup>

At this stage the Duchess of Leinster does not appear to have been overly concerned about her daughter's increasing involvement with the republican movement. Indeed, she seems to have trusted Lucy to restrain some of Edward's more extreme tendencies, while also acknowledging the sincerity of Lucy's political interests:

And so my sweet Lucy, you have had conversations with that Angel Edward! I can easily believe you might say many things that might have effect and do good, as it is a subject you have read a great deal about, consider'd well, and your own good judgment wou'd assist you, but it is difficult to combat enthusiasm.<sup>110</sup>

The family's tolerance of Lucy's political activities ended with the arrest and death of Edward Fitzgerald in June 1798. Almost immediately upon hearing of her brother's death Lucy wrote a short pamphlet entitled *An Address to Irishmen*, in which she invoked her brother's memory beginning: 'Irishmen, Countrymen, it is Edward

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<sup>107</sup> Campbell, *Edward & Pamela Fitzgerald*, pp. 110-114, 117-119.

<sup>108</sup> Arthur O'Connor to Lucy and Pamela Fitzgerald, 14 February 1797, full text quoted in Campbell, *Edward & Pamela Fitzgerald*, p. 115.

<sup>109</sup> TCD, Dublin, Madden papers, MS 873/526. Jane Mary Macneven, 'Biographical Memoir of Dr. W.J. Macneven drawn up for R. R. Madden by the daughter of Dr. W.J. Macneven', 22 September 1842.

<sup>110</sup> Fitzgerald, *Emily, Duchess of Leinster*, p. 228.

Fitzgerald's sister who addresses you, it is a Woman, but that Woman is his Sister she would therefore die for you as he did'. She further urged the rebels to continue their struggle proclaiming, 'this is the moment, the precious moment which must either stamp with Infamy the name of Irishmen ... or raise the Paddies to the consequence which they deserve and which England shall no longer withhold'.<sup>111</sup>

The address is an uncompromising articulation of Lucy Fitzgerald's commitment to the republican cause. Styling herself simply as a 'devoted countrywoman' she renounced her rank as assuredly as her brother did, making common cause with the Irish 'people.' Although she used her connection with Edward Fitzgerald as the pretext for the address, her declaration that she would willingly 'die as he did', enabled her to establish a republican identity independently from him. Intended for publication, the address was suppressed by Lucy's step-father, William Ogilvie, presaging an increasingly fractious relationship between Lucy and her extended family. She did manage however, to send a picture of Edward to Thomas Paine. Addressing him plainly as 'Citizen' she asked him to 'accept ... this picture from his unhappy sister, place it in your House my heart will be satisfied with such a Pantheon, it knows no consolation but the approbation of such men as you & the soothing recollection that he did his duty & died faithful to the cause of liberty & for his Country'.<sup>112</sup>

Lucy's continued adherence to the United Irishmen after her brother's death brought into sharp relief the acceptable limits of elite women's political participation. Her half-sister, Mary Fitzgerald, who had previously shared Lucy's republican enthusiasm, confessed that:

... without beloved Eddy all interest for the cause vanished with me ... I found the Paddy's so unworthy so precious a life's being lost for them ... I now stand neuter & when arguments press on both sides the safest method is to give ourselves up to neither & then we avoid error.<sup>113</sup>

Mary was evidently suggesting to Lucy that now Edward was dead and she had no

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<sup>111</sup> NLI, Dublin, Lennox/Fitzgerald/Campbell papers, MS 35,005, 13.

<sup>112</sup> NLI, Dublin, Lennox/Fitzgerald/Campbell papers, MS 35,005, 13.

<sup>113</sup> NLI, Dublin, Lennox/Campbell/Fitzgerald papers, MS 35,005, 7. Mary Fitzgerald to Lucy Fitzgerald, 19 October 1798.

familial ties to the movement, she too should give up her support for the United Irishmen. Although Lucy's response is not extant she was clearly offended, Mary adding in a post script to her next letter: 'Lucy tell me you love me as much as ever tho' we have differ'd in Politics, what has that detestable word to do with friendship'.<sup>114</sup> It did affect their friendship, Lucy writing to Arthur O'Connor, at the time imprisoned in Kilmainham, that: 'Mary and I have now no communication whatever as her Husband says I am a democrat.'<sup>115</sup>

Family tensions and anxieties were further heightened by an awareness that their correspondence was under surveillance by the government. In the autumn of 1797 Samuel Turner, a government spy resident in Hamburg, suspecting that Lord Edward was passing coded information to the United Irish Directory through the correspondence of Lucy and Pamela Fitzgerald, warned the administration that all their letters should be inspected.<sup>116</sup> In September 1798 Mary Fitzgerald alerted Lucy to the fact that, 'all letters to or from a Fitzgerald are opened.'<sup>117</sup> The possibility of official scrutiny of ostensibly private letters added a new political significance to women's epistolary practice, an aspect that will be considered in greater depth in chapter three. Even Lady Moira preferred to send her post by person rather than obtaining a government frank, 'for I wou'd not chuse to be thought to doubt by Lees & Co.'<sup>118</sup> Despite the threat of government censorship Lucy continued to openly avow her support for the United Irish cause in her correspondence. Her aunt Sarah Napier anxiously advised her to be more cautious:

I wish you not to write what may be turned against you if read, for tho' you are indifferent to the opinion of the World your friends are not so for you. I know your Brother Leinster wishes your letters to Mary did not keep up any recollections that lead to Political Opinions because 'tho unhappily our Private family interests were so united to Public interest

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<sup>114</sup> NLI, Dublin, Lennox/Campbell/Fitzgerald papers MS 35,005, 7. Mary Fitzgerald to Lucy Fitzgerald, 28 November 1798.

<sup>115</sup> NLI, Dublin, Lennox/Campbell/Fitzgerald papers, MS 35,005, 14. Lucy Fitzgerald to Arthur O'Connor, 1798.

<sup>116</sup> Stella Tillyard, *Citizen Lord*, p. 230.

<sup>117</sup> NLI, Dublin, Lennox/Campbell/Fitzgerald papers, MS 35,005, 7. Mary Fitzgerald to Lucy Fitzgerald, September 1798.

<sup>118</sup> This is a reference to John Lees, secretary to the Irish Post Office. NLI, Dublin, Scully papers, MS 27, 485, 15. Lady Moira to Dennis Scully, January 1799.



that we could not separate them in the Instance of the dear Edwards – yet now the link is broken & Women undoubtedly cannot enter into much Consideration on Political subjects without assuming a consequence in those Events which no man can wish his Sister or Daughter to do in pen, leaving her private opinions (which undoubtedly must originate from attachment to individuals) to the mercy of the Post Office &c.&c. to control ones own thoughts by the Rules of Worldly Prejudice would be mean – but to treat the Post Office with reserve is surely wise among very young Women who have not a Husband's support in the abuse they may get in Gossiping Circles of the World.<sup>119</sup>

Sarah Napier does not appeal to Lucy Fitzgerald so much on the grounds that her activities might be interpreted as treasonable, but rather insists that Lucy must be aware of her reputation as a young unmarried woman without a husband's protection. Although Lucy had already transgressed against her rank by allying herself with a republican movement which sought to abolish the political monopoly of the Irish ruling class, Sarah presents this as secondary to her transgression against her sex. The political role that was acceptable for Lucy while Edward was alive and 'Private family interests were so united to Public interest' could no longer be tolerated now that he was dead. Her comments offer a revealing insight into the boundaries that structured elite women's political participation, indicating that public political activities and even radical principles could be tolerated, so long as these were mediated through a male relative.<sup>120</sup> In the case of Margaret, Lady Mount Cashell, who was equally involved in the United Irish cause, the fact that she was married seems to have shielded her from such familial scrutiny. Similarly, as an elderly widow and family matriarch, Lady Moira's provocative politics were unlikely to affect her reputation. However, for Lucy Fitzgerald, unmarried and vulnerable to 'the Gossiping circles of the world' her independent, unmediated political position appears to have positioned her outside the acceptable limits of aristocratic women's political behaviour.

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<sup>119</sup> NLI, Dublin, Lennox/Campbell/Fitzgerald papers, MS 35,004, 7. Sarah Napier to Lucy Fitzgerald, 3 November 1798.

<sup>120</sup> Linda Colley has made a similar argument respecting the scandal that accompanied Georgiana, the Duchess of Devonshire's involvement in the 1784 Westminster election. According to Colley, by publicly supporting Charles James Fox, a man who was not a blood relative, Georgiana laid herself open to the accusation 'that she was interfering in the political process out of conviction rather than from a suitably feminine attachment to individuals'. Colley, *Britons*, p. 259. Judith Lewis, however, has recently questioned this interpretation, observing that there are other examples of women campaigning for men to whom they were not related. Lewis, *Sacred to Female Patriotism*, pp. 132-134.

## VII

The part played by elite women in the political culture of eighteenth-century Ireland has generally been overlooked by historians, yet they could exert significant influence within the familial culture of the eighteenth-century political world. Much of their influence derived from precisely those aspects of the unreformed political system that the United Irishmen identified as corrupt: the subordination of public interest to familial concerns, the privileging of informal influence above public accountability, and political power as a form of hereditary property. While this suggests an inherent antagonism between the political interests of elite women and Irish radicalism, the cases considered here present a more complex picture. Although the United Irishmen were critical of the power women wielded as borough patrons, it is probable that they also appreciated the roles that elite women could play in Irish commercial and cultural development, as arbiters of taste and fashion, and as hostesses of literary and political salons.

Similarly, elite women's responses to the development of radical politics in the 1790s were determined by more complex considerations than a simple recognition of the threat the movement posed to their rank and influence. In the case of Sarah Tighe it was her Methodist beliefs that shaped her response to Irish radicalism in the 1790s, engendering both a degree of sympathy with the Ulster Dissenters and a renewed sense of mission towards her tenantry, whilst also reaffirming her own evangelical Protestantism. Lady Moira's involvement in the Protestant Patriot movement led her to feel some affinity with the United Irish movement, and her position as a political and literary hostess meant that she could mediate between the oppositional public of the United Irishmen and the official public sphere of the Protestant state. Yet despite her self-identification as a liberal and rational political actor, Lady Moira's alignment with the oppositional public sphere was limited. In challenging the authority of Dublin castle, her primary motivation was a desire to protect her family's interests, combined with a distinctly aristocratic sense of the rights and duties conferred by property. Of all the women considered here, Lucy Fitzgerald aligned herself most emphatically with the republican movement. Her involvement has traditionally been understood as deriving

from a sisterly affection for her brother, and this would certainly conform to the familial character of elite women's political behaviour. However, Lucy Fitzgerald's continued support for the United Irishmen following her brother's death suggests that her commitment to the radical cause stemmed from more than personal attachment. It was this rebellion against the familial boundaries of elite women's political activity, rather than her radical politics, that was deemed unacceptable.

### Chapter Three: 'Only Echoes?': Radical Presbyterian women in Belfast

In 1793, Martha McTier, the sister of the United Irishman, William Drennan, observed that 'women connected with men whose side is known, ought to be very cautious, as they are supposed to be only echoes'.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, the tendency to subsume women's political identities under that of their male relatives, described in chapter two, did not only affect elite women. However, as McTier's comments suggests, she was reluctant to accept this negation of her individual political identity. As the previous chapter demonstrated, elite women of the Protestant Ascendancy exercised political influence by virtue of their rank and in spite of their gender. In contrast, the middle-class Presbyterian women that are considered in this chapter had traditionally been excluded from the political process because of a combination of their religion, class and gender. As the Presbyterian middle classes came to challenge the religious and class boundaries that framed the Irish political nation, both men and women were drawn into the oppositional public sphere. Yet, at the same time, women would also increasingly be excluded on account of their gender. This chapter will focus primarily on the activities and experiences of Martha McTier during the 1790s, and to a lesser extent Mary Anne McCracken and Jane Greg, and will suggest how they negotiated and challenged the gendered boundaries of the public sphere.

Habermas' model of the development of the eighteenth-century public sphere provides a particularly appropriate framework to describe the civic and political culture of Belfast during this period, and the economic, social and political structure of the town is considered in the first section of this chapter. By the late eighteenth century Belfast had a burgeoning commercial and mercantile community and a lively urban culture. The civic assertiveness of the Belfast middle classes would be channelled firstly into the Volunteers, and subsequently into the United Irishmen, earning Belfast its reputation at the vanguard of the Irish reform movement. Within the relatively tight-knit community of the Belfast middle classes, women were necessarily involved in the political debate that animated the town. The following section indicates those elements of Belfast's civic culture that facilitated female politicization, and will consider female education in

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<sup>1</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 1 April 1793, in Jean Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters* (Dublin, 1998), vol. 1, p. 510.

Belfast, women's participation in the Belfast reading public, and the role of the Presbytery as a site of politicization.

Although there were heterosocial spaces within Belfast's civic sphere, in which women could assert themselves as members of the critically-debating public, the principal sites of the political-public sphere, the Volunteers and Masons, were largely homosocial organisations. At the same time, Belfast in the 1790s witnessed the emergence of separate female associations: the philanthropic initiatives, the Humane Female Society and the Union school, as well as the more explicitly political United Irishwomen societies. As will be argued, Martha McTier was able to articulate her radicalism through her charitable activity, as well as engaging with a wider network of liberal, female philanthropists. In addition, I will argue that through her personal correspondence McTier was able to construct herself as a political subject and to actively engage in the oppositional discourse of the radical public sphere. The final section examines the United Irishwomen societies and compares Mary Anne McCracken and Martha McTier's responses to contemporary debates on female emancipation.

## I

By the late eighteenth century Belfast was beginning to establish itself as the regional capital of north-east Ulster. With an estimated population in 1791 of 18,000 it had doubled in size over the previous three decades but remained nevertheless a tenth of the size of Dublin. One of the three points that formed the Ulster 'linen triangle',<sup>2</sup> Belfast's positioning at the mouth of the Lagan estuary meant that it was both an accessible market for the linen-producing hinterland of Antrim and Down and a gateway for exports to the British Isles.<sup>3</sup> The town's economic influence was further enhanced by

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<sup>2</sup> The other two points of the triangle were Newry and Dungannon.

<sup>3</sup> On the economic and social development of Belfast in the eighteenth century see Nancy Curtin, 'Ideology and Materialism: Politicization and Belfast Weavers in the 1790s', in Marilyn Cohen (ed.), *The Warp of Ulster's Past: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Irish Linen Industry, 1700-1920* (London, 1997), pp. 111-138; David Kennedy, 'The Early Eighteenth Century'; and R. B. McDowell 'The Late Eighteenth Century', in J. C. Beckett and R. E. Glasscock (eds), *Belfast: The Origin and Growth of an Industrial City* (Kent, 1967), pp. 39-66; W. H. Crawford, 'The Belfast Middle Classes in the Late Eighteenth Century', in David Dickson, Kevin Whelan and Dáire Keogh (eds.), *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism, and Rebellion* (Dublin, 1993), pp. 62-73.

the introduction of cotton manufacturing in 1777 and this was to provide much of the basis of Belfast's economic success in the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> From the seventeenth century Belfast had been involved in both transatlantic and European trade; there was a thriving wine trade with France, several leading merchants owned plantations in the West Indies and by 1775 the Belfast merchants Waddell Cunningham and Thomas Gregg owned the largest shipping company in New York.<sup>5</sup> On a visit to Belfast in 1787 the Lord Lieutenant the Duke of Rutland recorded in his journal: 'Belfast is a giant of a town, flourishing in everything ... Their trade is immense. They go to the West Indies and to almost every quarter of the globe'.<sup>6</sup>

The Ulster middle class was predominantly Presbyterian, with the majority of the landed classes belonging to the established church.<sup>7</sup> The fact that Belfast was neither a parliamentary, legal or administrative centre, meant that it had little to attract the aristocracy and consequently the middle classes were solely responsible for meeting the challenges of an expanding town, as well as profiting from the opportunities generated by its commercial development. As Crawford notes, the plural 'middle classes' is more useful than the singular in describing Belfast's social composition during this period.<sup>8</sup> There were few town gentry but a significant number of leisured individuals of independent means; the professional classes, consisting of the clergy, medical practitioners and schoolmasters, enjoyed a degree of esteem and influence. The most numerous class however, were the merchants, manufacturers and shopkeepers who facilitated the development of Belfast's industrial base from 1780. It was from these classes that many of the men and women most closely identified with the United Irish movement were drawn. Martha McTier was the daughter of a Presbyterian minister, her brother William Drennan was a doctor and her husband Samuel McTier was a chandler, who was later employed as a public notary. As such she was positioned at the lower end of the Belfast middle classes, genteel but not wealthy.<sup>9</sup> Mary Anne McCracken's

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<sup>4</sup> Conrad Gill, *The Rise of the Irish Linen Industry* (Oxford, 1925), p. 227.

<sup>5</sup> For example, the wine traders the Black family possessed plantations in Grenada and Trinidad. Nini Rodgers, *Equiano and Anti-Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Belfast* (Belfast, 2000), p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in A. T. Q. Stewart, *A Deeper Silence: The Hidden Origins of the United Irishmen* (Belfast, 1993), p. 132.

<sup>7</sup> Ian McBride, *Scripture Politics: Ulster Presbyterianism and Irish Radicalism in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1998), p. 30.

<sup>8</sup> Crawford, 'The Belfast Middle Classes', p. 64.

<sup>9</sup> For a biographical account of Martha McTier and William Drennan see Jean Agnew, 'Introduction', in

father, John McCracken, was employed by the prominent Belfast wine merchants, the Blacks, as the principal captain of their fleet of trading vessels. He was deeply involved in the development of Belfast's port facilities and in the 1770s joined his brother-in-law in the cotton firm of Joy, McCabe and McCracken. Her maternal grandfather Francis Joy was a lawyer and the founder of the town's first newspaper the *Belfast News-Letter*. McCracken's uncle Robert Joy was responsible for the introduction of cotton manufacturing to Ulster and, with his brother Henry, he continued the father's printing firm. Henry Joy, a lawyer like his father, was one of the founding members of the Belfast Chamber of Commerce and was elected a Burgess of the town in 1781 following the repeal of the Test Act.<sup>10</sup> Martha McTier's close friend, Jane Greg belonged to one of the wealthiest merchant families in Belfast. Her father Thomas Greg was a partner with Waddell Cunningham in a transatlantic trading house. She was a sister of Cunningham Greg one of the most successful merchants in Belfast, and of Samuel Greg, the proprietor of the Quarry Bank Mill cotton firm in Styal, Cheshire.<sup>11</sup>

The town itself was the sole property of a single family, the Chichesters. By the 1750s poor management by the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Donegall had left Belfast in a dilapidated state. The renewal of urban leases by the absentee 5<sup>th</sup> Earl in the 1760s led to something of a renaissance in Belfast and the construction of several new public buildings. These included an assembly room in 1769, a poorhouse and parish church in 1774, a new Presbyterian church in 1783, a theatre in 1784, and the White Linen Hall in 1785. Although these initiatives had been led by the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Donegall they also reflected a growing civic assertiveness amongst the Belfast middle classes. However, while the Presbyterian middle classes involved themselves in such civic and commercial activities they were effectively excluded from more explicit political activities. The burgesses and sovereign of the town were appointed by Lord Donegall and usually bestowed on members of the established church, often absentees. In turn, the burgesses and Sovereign nominated Belfast's two MPs meaning that even after the repeal of the Test Act prohibiting Presbyterians from holding public office in 1780, these offices remained

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Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol.1, pp. xi-xxvii.

<sup>10</sup> Mary McNeill, *The Life and Times of Mary Anne McCracken 1770-1866: A Belfast Panorama*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Belfast, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> See Thomas M. Truxes (ed.), *Letterbook of Greg and Cunningham, 1756-1757. Merchants of New York and Belfast* (Oxford, 2001); and Jean Agnew (ed.) *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 3, p. 716.

in the gift of Lord Donegall.<sup>12</sup>

The increasingly tense relationship between Belfast's affluent citizens and the landed aristocracy points to one of the root causes of its receptiveness to radical politics in the late eighteenth century. The influence of a native strain of Ulster Presbyterian radicalism and the importation of Scottish Enlightenment ideas has already been discussed in chapter one. And, while the American Revolution had a galvanizing effect on the movement for Irish parliamentary reform throughout the island, in Belfast's burgeoning mercantile community its economic and political impact was particularly profound, acting as a catalyst for the development of what Crawford describes as 'that powerful community spirit' over the decade from 1775 to 1785.<sup>13</sup> It is from this period that the town's reputation as the radical vanguard of Irish politics can be traced. In March 1778 the Belfast First Volunteer Company was formed. Although there is some evidence to indicate that other companies had previously been raised in Cork and Offaly, the Belfast company was the pioneer of a coherent Volunteer association that was shortly to spread throughout the country and play a crucial role in the winning of legislative independence in 1782.<sup>14</sup> The Belfast Volunteers would maintain the radical initiative after 1782, determined to push for further parliamentary reform and a complete renunciation from Britain of any right to legislate for Ireland.<sup>15</sup> A series of Volunteer conventions held at Dungannon, Co. Tyrone, between 1782 and 1783, provided the stage for the articulation of the Ulster companies' continued demands for reform. However, it was also at this point that the issue of Catholic emancipation, which was to prove so divisive to the Belfast reform movement, was introduced. As on several other issues the Belfast Volunteer companies played a leading role in the acceptance of Catholic members, both the Belfast First Company and the Blue Company opening their ranks to individuals of all religious persuasions in 1784. In May of that year both companies paraded to attend Mass at the town's first Catholic church, and raised a collection to contribute towards the cost of building. Yet by this point tensions were emerging in the Volunteer movement, with the more affluent

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<sup>12</sup> Crawford, 'The Belfast Middle Classes in the Late Eighteenth Century', p. 63; McDowell, 'The Late Eighteenth Century', pp. 57-59.

<sup>13</sup> Crawford, 'The Belfast Middle Classes in the Late Eighteenth Century', p. 65.

<sup>14</sup> Stewart, *A Deeper Silence*, p.6.

<sup>15</sup> Stewart, *A Deeper Silence*, pp. 30-43.



members such as the Earl of Charlemont, expressing wariness over the arming of Catholics and the downward social shift in Volunteer membership. In July 1784 a town meeting was held in Belfast to consider the question of Catholic enfranchisement, but the issue remained unresolved as the reforming momentum of the Volunteer movement began to wane.

Recognizing this loss of impetus William Drennan attempted to revive the Volunteering spirit in his *Letters of Orellana, an Irish Helot*, published in the *Belfast News-Letter* between 1784-85. The *Letters* were a stirring call to the Volunteers to rouse themselves from the lethargy they had fallen into. In the fifth letter Drennan argued for a unity of all sects and urged the necessity of incorporating Catholics into the reform movement, although as previously noted, he considered this incorporation to be dependent on the continued progress of the Catholic community towards enlightenment.<sup>16</sup> However, Drennan's intervention came too late to be effectual and the Volunteer movement already appeared moribund. As Martha McTier wrote to her brother: 'What is become of that torrent of patriotism which, in a rush over the whole land, promised to bear down all before it had reached its height ... must it decline so very rapidly, not surely without some deep concealed mine which though powerful is yet unsuspected?''<sup>17</sup>

It was the French Revolution five years later that tapped into the 'deep concealed mine' of Irish radicalism. The revolution was initially greeted with enthusiasm by Belfast's liberal citizens. The Belfast First Company was revived and a Northern Whig Club was established in the town, drawing its membership from the landed gentry around Belfast and some of the town's wealthier merchants. Adopting a cautious approach to parliamentary reform, the limited objectives of the Whig Club soon exasperated the more radical elements of the reform movement, including William Drennan. Following a plan first conceived by Drennan in the 1780s, the first Society of United Irishmen met in Belfast in October 1791.<sup>18</sup> Again the issue of Catholic emancipation caused a rift between Belfast reformers, and by 1792 William Drennan and his erstwhile comrade,

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<sup>16</sup> William Drennan, *Letters of Orellana, an Irish Helot, to the Seven Northern Counties not Represented in the National Assembly of Delegates held at Dublin, October 1784, for Obtaining a More Equal Representation of the People in the Parliament of Ireland* (Dublin, 1785), p. 40.

<sup>17</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 1784, in Agnew (ed.), *The Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 1, p. 177.

<sup>18</sup> Although Stewart suggests that the society may have already been established before this date.

the Presbyterian minister, Rev. William Bruce had publicly fallen out, following Bruce's condemnation of the United Irish Test, composed by Drennan, in the *Belfast News-Letter*. The rift over Catholic emancipation produced a schism in Belfast society, with many of the wealthiest and most influential members of the reform movement opposing United Irish aims, including Waddell Cunningham, Henry Joy, William Bruce, Cunningham Greg and the Black family. Over the course of the 1790s further divisions would wrack the formerly coherent political culture of the Belfast middle classes. By 1795, following his trial for sedition, William Drennan had retreated from active involvement in the movement he had been so instrumental in founding, and by 1798 his former ally in the cause of reform and confidante for his plans for a union of all Irishman, William Bruce, had become a staunch loyalist.<sup>19</sup>

## II

Reporting on a visit to Belfast in 1778 the Scottish author Elizabeth Hamilton noted somewhat disapprovingly, 'there politics engross the greatest part of discourse in every company; and man, woman and child enter as zealously into every debate, as if they had been perfectly acquainted with all the hidden springs of government'.<sup>20</sup> Writing six years later, at a time when Belfast's Volunteer inspired radicalism seemed to be moribund, Martha McTier bemoaned the temporary absence of serious political discussion amongst her female acquaintances, protesting: 'I once thought our women were better than common'.<sup>21</sup> Taken together these statements suggest two related conclusions: that Belfast women did actively engage in the political debate which animated the town in the late eighteenth century, and that the extent of their politicization was considered unusual by contemporaries. This section will consider those aspects of Belfast and Ulster Presbyterian society which may have promoted women's political participation.

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Stewart, *A Deeper Silence*, pp. 153-154.

<sup>19</sup> On these developments in Belfast politics see Stewart, *A Deeper Silence*, pp. 149-196; and McBride, *Scripture Politics*, pp. 165-185.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Hamilton to Charles Hamilton, 1782, quoted in Elizabeth Benger, *Memoirs of the Late Mrs Elizabeth Hamilton with a Selection from her Correspondence, and Other Unpublished Writings* (London, 1818), vol. 1, p. 89.

<sup>21</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 1784 in Agnew (ed.) *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 1, p. 178.

In relation to the rest of Ireland women's position in north-east Ulster was most clearly distinguished by their comparatively high literacy rates. In his analysis of the 1841 census Niall Ó Ciosáin has estimated, by an examination of literacy in English according to age cohorts, that by the 1770s roughly 70% of the female population of Antrim could read.<sup>22</sup> However the proportion of women who could both read and write was significantly lower. As Ó Ciosáin concludes, this gulf between women's ability to read and their ability to both read and write in north-east Ulster is partly explained by the Presbyterian emphasis on the individual's access to the Bible, with writing being considered a secondary attainment for women.<sup>23</sup> Even without full literacy, an ability to read would grant women access to radical propaganda, increasing the likelihood of their politicization.

Although these figures suggest a higher than average reading ability amongst women in north-east Ulster they reveal little about formal educational attainment amongst middle-class Presbyterian women. Martha McTier, who was born in 1742, appears to have been educated at home by her father. She knew some Latin and may have had a rudimentary education in the classics.<sup>24</sup> In terms of female education the most important establishment in Belfast was David Manson's English Grammar school. In 1755 he had proposed a new school for Belfast where children would 'be taught to read and understand the English tongue without the discipline of the rod by intermingling pleasurable and healthful exercise with their instruction'.<sup>25</sup> The school was co-educational and counted amongst its pupils, Mary Anne McCracken, members of the Joy family, the physician, mineralogist and antiquarian James McDonnell, the naturalist John Templeton, and Elizabeth Hamilton's sister Katherine. Amongst Manson's innovative teaching techniques was a system whereby each classroom was divided into

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<sup>22</sup> Censuses were conducted in Ireland from 1821. The 1841 census was the first to be completed by householders rather than government enumerators. Along with information concerning age and occupation, the census also recorded details of literacy. Although the records of the 1841 census were destroyed in 1922, transcripts of many of the forms remain extant.

<sup>23</sup> This compares with a figure of under 40% in the province of Leinster, and less than 20% in Munster. Figures for male reading ability in Antrim for the same period are around 85%. However, the gap between men and women widens considerably when writing ability is taken into account. Full literacy rates for men in Antrim were at 60% for the 66-75 age cohort and only 22% for women in the equivalent age group, ratios which are replicated in both Down and Londonderry. Niall Ó Ciosáin, *Print and Popular Culture in Ireland, 1750-1850* (London, 1997), pp. 25-51.

<sup>24</sup> Agnew, 'Introduction', in Agnew (ed.), *Dreman-McTier Letters*, vol. 1, p. xii.

<sup>25</sup> McNeill, *The Life and Times of Mary Anne McCracken*, p. 44.

two companies, and each company divided into social ranks, from King and Queen, to Princes and Princesses, down to tenants and under tenants. The pupils' movement through the ranks was based on their academic performance. The less able tenants and under-tenants were assisted by the more able students, who became their landlords, every line learned by the tenant earning the landlord £1 of rent, which was noted in their ledger. On Saturdays the King and Queen called a Parliament where arrears were settled. This combination of meritocracy, social responsibility and political education clearly appealed to the radical citizens of Belfast and Manson was made a freeman of the city in 1779. On his death in 1792 the *Northern Star* commended him as a 'citizen of liberal and patriotic principles'.<sup>26</sup> As the *Belfast Monthly Magazine* commented after his death, his legacy was of lasting importance:

Young ladies received the same extensive education as young gentlemen. He, and the schoolmasters taught by him were the great cause of infusing into their delicate and tender minds the rudiments of the good sense and erudition for which our ladies during this age have been remarkable.<sup>27</sup>

In the 1790s Robert Telfair was continuing the work of David Manson in his Private Writing School, which taught young girls writing, arithmetic and single and double entry bookkeeping.<sup>28</sup> The provision of such a business-orientated education for women suggests that women's involvement in trade was an acceptable feature of Belfast's economic life. A brief survey of advertisements in the *Northern Star* identified at least sixteen Belfast women who were established in their own right as haberdashers, milliners and cloth retailers.<sup>29</sup> Not included among these figures is the most well-known example of a late eighteenth-century Belfast business woman, Mary Anne McCracken. Mary Anne's mother, Ann had opened a muslin shop in Belfast in her twenties. She gave this up upon her marriage, but when her family was old enough resumed her interest in business by starting a small muslin industry. Mary Anne had early shown an aptitude in bookkeeping and arithmetic, and in the late 1780s joined with her sister Margaret in establishing a muslin business. As Mary McNeill has suggested in reference to Ann McCracken and her daughters, the motivation to engage in business

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<sup>26</sup> *Northern Star*, 3 March 1792.

<sup>27</sup> *Belfast Monthly Magazine* quoted in McNeill, *The Life and Times of Mary Anne McCracken*, p. 47.

<sup>28</sup> *Northern Star*, 24 September 1796.

<sup>29</sup> *Northern Star*, 1792-1797.

did not derive from necessity; these women came from comfortable backgrounds and could have easily been supported by their families.<sup>30</sup> Nancy Curtin has interpreted Mary Anne McCracken's activity in business as drawing on both the classical republican and the radical dissenting tradition that identified industry with virtue, and as a religious, moral and civic obligation.<sup>31</sup> This suggests that amongst the Belfast middle-classes there was no significant tension between gentility and women's participation in business.<sup>32</sup>

It is difficult to make any direct connection between middle-class women's work and their politicization. In Jürgen Habermas' account of the development of the public sphere it is education and a material interest in the political regulation of the commercial economy that underpins the expansion of the oppositional bourgeois public.<sup>33</sup> Given the climate of late eighteenth-century Belfast in which economic concerns were so closely allied with political agitation, especially during the American revolution and the subsequent agitations for free trade, it may be suggested that those women engaged in business would have had an immediate interest in political reform.<sup>34</sup> Like their elite counterparts, middle-class Belfast women also played an important role in the consumer nationalist campaigns. In 1784 the women of Belfast established an association for the promotion of Irish manufactures in response to a resolution of the town's inhabitants, which called on a 'matron' of 'spirit, good-sense and patriotism' to lead the way and prove 'that our public virtue is not confined to sex, but pervades every

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<sup>30</sup> McNeill, *The Life and Times of Mary Anne McCracken*, pp. 37, 41, 57.

<sup>31</sup> Nancy Curtin, 'Women and Eighteenth-Century Irish Republicanism', in Margaret MacCurtain and Mary O'Dowd (eds), *Women in Early Modern Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1991), p. 141.

<sup>32</sup> It is impossible to accurately assess, without further research on this subject, whether Belfast had a higher proportion of women involved in trade than other cities in the British Isles during this period. In figures drawn from eighteenth-century trade directories, Kathleen Wilson has estimated that a combined total of 211 women were working as merchants, manufacturers and retailers in Newcastle, Liverpool, Norwich and Manchester between 1768-1783. Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (Cambridge, 1995), appendix, pp. 441-442. In her study of women and work in eighteenth-century Edinburgh, Elizabeth Sanderson had found that women from a wide range of social backgrounds were involved in the retail trade. Elizabeth C. Sanderson, *Women and Work in Eighteenth-Century Edinburgh* (Basingstoke, 1996).

<sup>33</sup> Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, 1992), p. 56.

<sup>34</sup> According to Henry Joy, in 1784 almost every shopkeeper in Belfast took an oath agreeing not to sell anything but Irish goods. It is probable that female retailers, as well as male, took the oath. Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Henry Joy papers, vol. 7. Henry Joy, 'General Material for a History of the Town of Belfast', p. 206.

description of our inhabitants'.<sup>35</sup>

By the late eighteenth century Belfast's economic prosperity and civic activity had given rise to a vibrant print culture. The *Belfast-Newsletter* had been Ulster's primary source of news since its establishment in 1737. During the 1780s it was joined by the more radical, but short-lived paper, the *Belfast Mercury*, later the *Freeman's Chronicle* (1783-87), and from 1792 Belfast was home to the principal mouthpiece of the United Irish movement, the *Northern Star*. As previously mentioned, both Martha McTier and Mary Anne McCracken were enthusiastic consumers of the Belfast press. Upon recovering from a serious fever during the 1790s, Mary Anne McCracken's first concern was reputedly that 'she had missed so many Stars'.<sup>36</sup> This active engagement in the literary public sphere is also evident in the impressively wide range of enlightenment texts read by Martha McTier. In the correspondence between Martha and her brother they often reflected critically on their reading, which included works by Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, as well as contemporary political tracts.<sup>37</sup> The impact of the more direct and robust style of radical political writing in the 1790s upon Martha McTier's political opinions is evident in her response to Thomas Paine's, *The Rights of Man* (1791). 'Truth seems to dart from him in such plain and poignant terms', she enthused, 'that he or even she who runs may read'.<sup>38</sup>

Belfast's lively reading public found institutional expression in the Belfast Reading Society, which was established in 1788.<sup>39</sup> Although a Belfast Circulating Library had been in existence from the 1770s, its collection consisted primarily of novels.<sup>40</sup> In

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<sup>35</sup> 'Resolution of the Inhabitants to Give Exclusive Encouragement to Irish Manufactures, April 1784', in Henry Joy, *Historical Collections Relative to the Town of Belfast: From the Earliest Period to the Union with Great Britain* (Belfast, 1817), pp. 285-289.

<sup>36</sup> Anna McCleery, 'Life of Mary Anne McCracken, Sister of Henry Joy McCracken', in Robert M. Young (ed.), *Historical Notices of Old Belfast* (Belfast, 1896), p. 181.

<sup>37</sup> For a discussion of Martha McTier and William Drennan's literary interests see Maria Luddy, 'Martha McTier and William Drennan: A "Domestic History"' in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 1, pp. xxvi-xlvi.

<sup>38</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 28 October 1792, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 1, p. 417.

<sup>39</sup> The Belfast Reading Society was modelled on the Library Company of Philadelphia founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1731. John Killen, 'The Reading Habits of a Georgian Gentleman, John Templeton, and the Book Collections of the Belfast Society for Promoting Knowledge', in Bernadette Cunningham and Máire Kennedy (eds), *The Experience of Reading: Irish Historical Perspectives* (Dublin, 1999), pp. 100-101.

<sup>40</sup> See advertisements for the Belfast Circulating Library in *Northern Star*, 4 January 1792 and 26 June

contrast, the committee of the Belfast Reading Society early resolved not to purchase 'any common novel or book of trivial amusement'.<sup>41</sup> The society was originally dominated by radical artisans and provided a forum for education, self-improvement and political discussion.<sup>42</sup> Although the society excluded from its remit matters relating to 'local politics, polemical divinity, and practical branches of law and medicine', in January 1792 it published a set of resolutions in the *Northern Star* calling for immediate parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation and asserting that: 'Doctrines of faith and modes of worship can neither give nor take away the rights of man'.<sup>43</sup> In 1794 Thomas Russell was appointed librarian and the society's members included several United Irishmen and their former allies in the cause of reform: William Bruce, Alexander Haliday and Waddell Cunningham.

In 1792 a motion was passed stating that: 'Ladies be admitted members of this Society – exempt from personal attendance, but in other respects amenable to the general rules'. It is not clear whether 'exempt' was here a euphemism for 'excluded' and there is no means of ascertaining whether female members attended the society's meetings. Between 1792 and 1799, nine women joined the society.<sup>44</sup> Martha McTier was admitted to membership in place of her husband after his death in 1795 and Mary Anne McCracken was also admitted in place of her brother Henry, following his execution in 1798, suggesting that women whose male relatives were already members benefited from indirect access to the society's collection of books. The library's collection was focused entirely on scientific, historical, philosophical and political works, including Lord Kame's *Sketches on the History of Man*, William Godwin's *Political Justice*, as well as Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women*.<sup>45</sup> Although the numbers of women admitted to the society were small, their inclusion at all indicates their participation in the politicized, associational culture of Belfast.

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1794.

<sup>41</sup> Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Minutes of the Linen Hall Library, March 3, 1792.

<sup>42</sup> Dennis Carroll, *The Man from God Knows Where: Thomas Russell, 1767-1803* (Dublin, 1995), p. 83.

<sup>43</sup> Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Minutes of the Linen Hall Library, 26 January 1792.

<sup>44</sup> These were: Mrs. Clarke, Miss Catherine Clarke, Miss Margaret Clarke, Miss Jones, Miss Anne Stewart, Mrs. Isabella Brown, Martha McTier and Mary Anne McCracken. Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Minutes of the Linen Hall Library, 1 November 1791-28 October 1793, and 7 November 1793-8 September 1812.

<sup>45</sup> Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Minutes of the Linen Hall Library, 1791-1812.

An additional component of Belfast political culture, which cannot be overlooked, is the Presbytery. The centrality of Presbyterianism to the development of Belfast radicalism has already been discussed, and its potential significance for women's political engagement may be identified in two aspects: the democratic organization of the Presbyterian Kirk and the interlinking of religion and politics in the Belfast pulpit. The self-governing structure of the Kirk, its lack of hierarchy, and the involvement of congregations in the election of ministers, were core elements of the Presbyterian position.<sup>46</sup> In theory at least, the governing structures of non-prelatical churches did not exclude women. Yet, as Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have concluded, in their examination of Dissenting chapels in early nineteenth-century England, women's role in church government was never fully clarified. Whilst there was an absence of scriptural certainty as to male and female rights in church government, in practice women were excluded from voting, decision-making and the holding of office.<sup>47</sup> In the records of the Belfast First congregation, to which Martha McTier belonged, seventeen women, including Martha's mother Ann Drennan, are named as paying stipends in 1775, out of a total of 113 contributors. An elected committee, entirely male, was responsible for managing the church funds and determining expenditure in matters such as the minister's pay and the maintenance of the meeting house. Periodically the heads of families and other subscribing members of the congregation met to decide on issues such as the selection of a new minister. There is no record of any women being present at these meetings until 1801, when five women including Martha McTier, participated in a vote to dismiss the congregation's clerk.<sup>48</sup> It is difficult to reach any general conclusion about women's participation in church government from such patchy evidence. It would appear that unmarried or widowed women who were heads of families were theoretically included in the church constitution, even if their participation was irregular.

The role of Presbyterian ministers in female politicization is also difficult to ascertain. Certainly there were large numbers of Ulster Presbyterian ministers involved in the

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<sup>46</sup> See Pieter Tesch, 'Presbyterian Radicalism', in Dickson, Whelan and Keogh (eds.), *The United Irishmen*, pp. 33-48; and McBride, *Scripture Politics*, p. 92.

<sup>47</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London, 1987), pp. 130-140.

<sup>48</sup> PRONI, Belfast, MIC/1B/2/3 and MIC/1B/2/4. Committee Book of the Old Meeting House of Belfast.



Volunteer movement and a significant number were also involved in the United Irishmen.<sup>49</sup> Writing to Dublin Castle in 1796, Lord Downshire declared that Presbyterian ministers were ‘undoubtedly the great encouragers and promoters of sedition.’<sup>50</sup> Most notably William Steel Dickson, in three sermons published in his collection *Scripture Politics*, formulated a scriptural justification for the French Revolution and preached the cause of the United Irishmen.<sup>51</sup> The Rev. James Porter travelled around Ireland spreading revolutionary principles while he gave lectures on natural philosophy, and in 1796 he advertised a series of morning classes for young ladies in Belfast.<sup>52</sup> The role of ministers was, as Pieter Tesch notes, more influential in the rural areas of Ulster, where the minister was an essential link between the community and the wider world, and where it was primarily through him that new ideas were filtered.<sup>53</sup> In Belfast there were other conduits of political opinion, but the pulpit could still function as a platform for radical politics. Within the Belfast Presbytery McBride has identified four ministers and one probationer who were suspected of involvement in the 1798 rebellion, the most well known being Thomas Ledlie Birch and Sinclair Kelburn.<sup>54</sup> Kelburn was the minister of the Belfast Third Congregation to which both Mary Anne and Henry Joy McCracken belonged. In the hey-day of the Volunteer movement he was reported to have preached in full uniform, with his musket propped up against the pulpit door and his armed audience reputedly expressed their approbation by striking the butts of their muskets on the meeting-house floor. On his arrest in 1798 the Rosemary Street congregation issued a memorial to the Lord-Lieutenant pleading for his release and offering to stand bail for him.<sup>55</sup> However, the link between the political views of a minister and those of his congregation were by no means straightforward. Martha McTier, while admiring William Bruce’s preaching and his religious zeal, developed a distaste for his political views following his very public

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<sup>49</sup> See Nancy Curtin, *The United Irishmen: Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791-1798* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 118-119; and McBride, *Scripture Politics*.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, p. 118.

<sup>51</sup> See appendix to William Steele Dickson, *A Narrative of the Confinement and Exile of William Steel Dickson*, (Dublin, 1812). On the participation of the Presbyterian clergy in the United Irishmen see McBride, *Scripture Politics*, pp. 204-206.

<sup>52</sup> *Northern Star*, January 4, 1796. See Jim Smyth, *The Men of No Property. Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1992), p. 159.

<sup>53</sup> Tesch, ‘Ulster Radicalism’, p. 40.

<sup>54</sup> McBride, *Scripture Politics*, p. 233.

<sup>55</sup> J. W. Kernohan, *Rosemary Street Presbyterian Church Belfast: A Record of the Past 200 Years* (Belfast, 1923), pp. 32-33.

split with William Drennan over Catholic emancipation.<sup>56</sup>

Although women's participation in Belfast's economic, intellectual and religious spheres, suggests possible locations for their politicization, the fact remains that they were excluded from two of the most significant vehicles of Belfast radicalism: the Volunteers and the Masonic Lodges. As A. T. Q. Stewart has argued, these organizations were crucial to the development of the United Irish societies in Ulster. The Masonic Societies, in particular, provided one of the few spaces in which Catholics and Protestants could interact as equals. Martha McTier's husband, Samuel, was a mason, and Stewart speculates that William Drennan was also a member.<sup>57</sup> Freemasonry in both Britain and Ireland during the eighteenth century appears to have been a decidedly masculine affair. According to Kathleen Wilson English Masonic Lodges maintained a homosocial ethos of conviviality that staked out 'both physically and ideologically a male domain within the socially mixed and potentially transgressive spaces of urban society'.<sup>58</sup> Despite their exclusion from membership of the Volunteers and the Masonic Lodges, there were other structures in which women could organize themselves and practice self-government separately from men. The following section will consider Belfast women's philanthropic activity.

### III

During the latter half of the eighteenth century Irish women became increasingly

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<sup>56</sup> The First Belfast Congregation, to which Bruce was minister, issued an address to the Lord Lieutenant Cornwallis following the outbreak of the rebellion, in which they signaled their disapproval of the insurrection and further declared: 'we have never been instructed by our Minister in any Doctrine's favourable to such destructive measures'. PRONI, Belfast, MIC, 1B/2/4, Committee Book of the Old Meeting House of Belfast, 25 June 1798.

<sup>57</sup> Stewart, *A Deeper Silence*, pp. 176-177.

<sup>58</sup> Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, p. 71. In contrast women were actively involved in both French and Dutch freemasonry, enabling them, as Janet Burke and Margaret Jacob argue, to participate in the new enlightenment sociability of the late eighteenth century. Janet Burke and Margaret Jacob, 'French Freemasonry, Women and Feminist Scholarship', *Journal of Modern History*, 68 (1996), pp. 513-549. Though women were denied access to the inner circles of the Ulster Masonic Lodges, the Freemasons did participate in civic activities alongside women. At a public ceremony in Ballymena for the newly elected MP, James Wilson, in 1776, a procession of 400 masons in full regalia was followed by a train of five hundred young women dressed in white, ornamented with blue ribbons and carrying green boughs in their hands accompanied by a band of female musicians playing patriotic airs. Joy, *Historical Collections*, pp. 134-136.

involved in philanthropic activity. In 1766 Lady Arabella Denny established the Magdalen Asylum in Dublin to assist unmarried mothers who had been abandoned by their families. It was the first Irish charity initiated and run by women, the overall management of the institution being undertaken by fifteen governesses elected by the female subscribers. Several other female philanthropic initiatives followed, including the Female Orphan House established in 1790. The organizers of these charities were predominantly drawn from the upper classes, fitting into a broader pattern of elite women's philanthropic practice that included the establishment of schools of industry by women such as Lady Louisa Connolly and Mrs Peter La Touche. According to Rosemary Raughter, eighteenth-century philanthropy drew on established notions concerning women's domestic and maternal role, while also enabling women to extend the sphere of their activities. While recognizing that charitable activity could allow women to assume more public roles, she concludes that female charity was rarely concerned with challenging the social order and was essentially conservative in character.<sup>59</sup>

Although elite women's philanthropic practice can be understood as fitting into a framework of Protestant paternalism aimed at maintaining a hierarchical social order, equivalent middle-class initiatives can be read as a challenge to the political hegemony of the ruling classes. It was precisely these kinds of voluntary associations, located within civil society that provided the training ground for the European middle classes preparing to assert their fitness for government.<sup>60</sup> The Belfast Charitable Society founded in 1752 by a collection of Belfast's leading merchants can similarly be viewed as part of the Belfast middle classes growing civic assertiveness and as a challenge to the Chichester family's dominance of the town. As R. W. M. Strain comments in his history of the Society: 'Perhaps the determination of the new Ulster Scot to take some part in the administration of the town in which he lived had something to do with his philanthropic actions, but this cannot have been the motive in the first instance'.<sup>61</sup> Over

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<sup>59</sup> Rosemary Raughter, 'A Natural Tenderness: Women's Philanthropy in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', (Unpublished MA thesis, UCD, 1992) and 'A Natural Tenderness: The Ideal and Reality of Eighteenth-Century Female Philanthropy', in Maryann Gialanella Valiulis and Mary O'Dowd (eds), *Women & Irish History: Essays in Honour of Margaret MacCurtain* (Dublin, 1997), pp. 71- 88.

<sup>60</sup> Geoff Eley, 'Nations, Publics and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century', in Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge MA, 1992), pp. 296-303.

<sup>61</sup> R. W. M Strain, *Belfast and its Charitable Society: A Story of Urban Development* (Oxford, 1961), p.

the following decades the Society would be responsible for the establishment of a poorhouse and infirmary. In its activities it balanced both charitable and commercial concerns; when Robert Joy and Thomas McCabe first introduced cotton manufacturing to Belfast they started by installing the relevant machinery in the Belfast poorhouse to prepare the children for apprenticeship in the mills that Joy intended to establish in the town. By 1795 the Charitable Society had also assumed responsibility for Belfast's water supply. As an exercise in local self-government the Society attracted many prominent Belfast political figures and several United Irishmen. Samuel McTier was on the committee from 1768, as were Thomas McCabe and William Sampson, and Samuel Neilson was appointed treasurer in 1790.<sup>62</sup>

Geoff Eley suggests that female exclusion from such associational initiatives reinforced their exclusion from the bourgeois public sphere, and while there is some evidence that women visited the female children resident in the poorhouse, there is no record of women taking an official role in the society until the formation of a ladies committee in 1814 chaired by Mary Anne McCracken.<sup>63</sup> However, Mary Ryan argues with reference to nineteenth-century North America, that despite their exclusion from male associational culture, middle-class women successfully constructed their own alternative, woman-only voluntary associations as a means of gaining access to public political life.<sup>64</sup> This pattern is also discernible in Belfast. In December 1793 Martha McTier called a meeting of Belfast women to establish a new charity, the Humane Female Society for the Relief of Lying-in-Women. The leadership of the society was drawn from the local aristocracy, with Lady Donegall being appointed patroness and Lady Harriet Skeffington acting as vice-patroness, but it is probable that the society's one hundred and forty-four female members were drawn from Belfast's middle classes, and this middle-class composition was recognized in the election of Martha McTier as secretary.

The object of the society was to provide an institution for the medical care of

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<sup>62</sup> Strain, *Belfast and its Charitable Society*, pp. 15, 130-147, 188.

<sup>63</sup> Eley, 'Nations, Publics and Political Cultures', pp. 265-266; Mary McNeill, *The Life and Times of Mary Anne McCracken*, p. 254.

<sup>64</sup> Mary P. Ryan, 'Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth-Century America', in

impoverished pregnant women, and the *Belfast News-Letter* welcomed the Humane Female Society's plan as 'a scheme that does honour to the heart that conceived it, and to all who are instrumental in bringing it to perfection'.<sup>65</sup> However, there does appear to have been opposition from certain quarters. In a speech to the society at the end of its first year, Harriet Skeffington outlined the two principal obstacles to its success. According to Martha McTier these were, 'one we had long been used to combat, the pretended bad effect of admitting women of lost reputation, the other we had lately discovered, envy of those midwives not employed'. The latter problem was addressed by a resolution that the society would henceforth employ in turn the midwife recommended by each physician. The question of admitting unmarried women and prostitutes was more problematic, and appears to have caused some division within the society itself. McTier reported to her brother that despite 'the appearance of unanimity', she saw a 'party forming under the pretext of keeping out unmarried women', which she believed was attempting to raise opposition against 'those who are now deemed democrats'.<sup>66</sup> She was being half-ironical; her report of the meeting was deliberately couched in the language of parliamentary reports to entertain her brother. Yet the suggestion that the debate over the admittance of unmarried women reflected the wider political divisions that were exercising the town, indicates that the Female Society was not impervious to, or unaffected by broader political currents. Equally, Martha's self-mocking account of the proceedings of the society belies the fact that it did involve women in democratic participation and self-government; the members elected the committee and were balloted on significant questions. When a paper was forwarded suggesting that Lady Donegall should be elected perpetual patroness, Lady Skeffington responded, 'that she would not read anything to the meeting recommendatory, as she thought everyone ought to act entirely from their own opinion', thus deflecting any criticism that she was using her aristocratic position to influence the society's middle-class members.<sup>67</sup>

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Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, pp. 259-288.

<sup>65</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 3 January 1794.

<sup>66</sup> In the end Lady Donegall was only elected for one year. Martha McTier to William Drennan, 28 December 1794, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 1, p.115.

<sup>67</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, December 28, 1794, in Agnew (ed.) *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 115. For further information on the Human Female Society for the Relief of Lying-in-Women see Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Belfast Charitable Society MS, MIC/61/5, Belfast Charitable Society

Both Maria Luddy and Rosemary Raughter have concluded that eighteenth-century Irish women's philanthropy was essentially conservative in nature, and religious in motivation and orientation.<sup>68</sup> The example of Martha McTier suggests that there was the potential for female philanthropy to be more radically inflected than these interpretations allow. In 1794 she began her own independent school for a small number of poor young girls, whom she collected at an early hour and educated at her home. The school came to the notice of the editors of the *Belfast News-Letter* who commended the scheme noting that, 'this mode of instruction is superior to that of Sunday Schools, which, in towns, too seldom have been found to answer the purpose'.<sup>69</sup> Not only did Martha McTier teach the girls to read and knit, but she also encouraged their political education. In 1795 William Drennan published a *Letter to his Excellency Lord Fitzwilliam* in which he proposed a comprehensive system of national education for Ireland. He denounced as the most 'pernicious error' the prejudice that 'there is one sort of knowledge fit for the learned, and another adapted to the vulgar', and criticized the Charter school system which sought to convert the lower orders to the established church.<sup>70</sup> Having read the pamphlet Martha related her own experience of teaching to Drennan's political demands, writing:

If every individual that could, would do what I now find my most pleasing and even delightful occupation, a change in the country I am convinced would soon take place, more to its advantage than all the charters will ever produce. My little girls do not gabble over the testament only, nor read with that difficulty which prevents pleasure in it. I take care to give them books and treatment, which makes my absence, or being sent from school, a punishment they are not able to bear ... I keep up my number and four of them can read Fox and Pitt.<sup>71</sup>

It is also possible that Martha's experiences as a woman, denied the extensive education available to her brother, prompted a heightened identification with the conditions of the

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Committee Book, 1791-1794.

<sup>68</sup> On the denominational character of Irish philanthropy see Maria Luddy, 'Religion, Philanthropy, and the State in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Ireland', in Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes (eds), *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform from the 1690s to 1850* (London, 1998); and *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Cambridge, 1995).

<sup>69</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 1 December 1794.

<sup>70</sup> William Drennan 'A Philosophical Essay on the Moral and Political State of Ireland: In a Letter to Earl Fitzwilliam', in *William Drennan: The United Irish Years, 1791-1798*, Brendan Clifford (ed.) (Belfast, 1998), vol. 2, p. 190.

<sup>71</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 17 January 1795, in Jean Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 121

lower orders. Reflecting on how vital the press had been to her own political education she considered a scheme for extending the same opportunities to those less fortunate than herself: 'So much have I gained by newspapers and so ardently have I seen them sought for and enjoyed by the lower orders, that I intend for their good to institute a *gratis* news room with fire and candle'.<sup>72</sup> There is no evidence that this proposal was ever put into practice, but it indicates that Martha McTier's philanthropy had a relatively radical orientation that could complement the United Irish programme of mass plebeian politicization.

It is likely that Martha McTier's small school provided the inspiration for a more ambitious undertaking by Belfast women in 1795. In March of that year Martha McTier and Lady Harriet Skeffington proposed a scheme for the education of poor girls. The planned Union school was to be residential, with food and clothing for the children also provided. The aim was to prepare the girls for domestic service and other apprenticeships and to teach them reading and 'every sort of needlework' the wider objective being, 'to *protect* innocence, to *prevent* vice, and to *instruct* ignorance'.<sup>73</sup> The scheme was endorsed by a town meeting in April, but the proposal aroused some controversy, prompting a debate within the pages of the *Northern Star* and the *Belfast News-Letter*.<sup>74</sup> A letter to the *Northern Star* signed 'The Bucks' attacked the proposed institution on the grounds that it would disrupt the social order, educate girls above their station and corrupt their morals. In sarcastic approbation of the school it declared: 'We love girls educated above their rank, and their heads filled with ideas beyond their means. We by experience, know the consequence – we shall always have fresh supplies from your excellent seminary.'<sup>75</sup> In the following issue a letter signed 'No Bucks' was printed that praised the ladies' laudable intentions but questioned the benefits of plebeian education:

The lower orders of people, from habit, listen with greater avidity to

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<sup>72</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 25 January 1795, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 1, p. 125.

<sup>73</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 20 March 1795.

<sup>74</sup> *Northern Star*, April 27 1795.

<sup>75</sup> *Northern Star*, April 30 1795. In his criticism of the Union School the author may have been drawing on a prevalent view of the ill effects of boarding schools on the morals of young women. An extract from Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* criticizing boarding-schools was published in the *Northern Star*. See *Northern Star*, 5 June 1793.

what is mean and ridiculous, than to sentiments of a more refined tendency; and as the vulgar productions of weak minds are far too numerous at present, these girls when taught to read, will swallow up as much of that pernicious stuff as they can meet with – now vice is heaped upon vice! They form societies, they vend and retail out this poisonous nonsense so rapidly, that they infect all who are so unfortunate to be of their party.<sup>76</sup>

In response to the hostile reaction to the Union school some members of the committee printed a defence of their plan in the Belfast press, insisting that the school would not become ‘a seminary of vice’.<sup>77</sup> In spite of the opposition voiced against the school, the ladies’ society prevailed and the Union school opened on 23 May 1795. Eight girls were initially admitted and taught to read, knit and spin.<sup>78</sup> The governesses continued to print notices on the school’s progress, reassuring their subscribers that their contributions had not been misapplied, and requesting the inhabitants of Belfast to send their extra needlework to the school, thus enabling the girls to support themselves through their own industry. Though the institution never became self-sufficient, by 1797 it was supporting twenty-one girls.<sup>79</sup>

It is difficult to attribute specific political agendas to such philanthropic endeavours. Apart from Martha McTier, there was no other woman on the committee of the Union School or the Humane Female Society who was married or closely related to a United Irishman.<sup>80</sup> Lady Harriet Skeffington, the patron of both societies, was part of a prominent circle of aristocratic evangelicals encompassing her own family - the Rodens of Co. Down - and the influential Powerscourt family.<sup>81</sup> She appears to have had little

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<sup>76</sup> *Northern Star*, 7 May 1795. It is not entirely clear whether the ‘pernicious’ literature the author describes is a reference to popular chapbooks and ballads, or United Irish and other radical propaganda. Niall Ó Ciosáin has indicated that both radicals and conservatives were critical of the cheap publications consumed by the lower orders and disapproving of their effects on the morals of the young. Ó Ciosáin, *Print and Popular Culture in Ireland*, p. 133.

<sup>77</sup> See letters from ‘Marcia’ and ‘Angelique’, *Northern Star*, 27 April 1795 and 7 May 1795. The authors of these two pieces were almost certainly Lady Harriet Skeffington and Mrs Boisragon. See PRONI, Belfast, Foster-Masserene papers, D/562/2687, Chichester Skeffington to Harriet Skeffington, 30 April 1795.

<sup>78</sup> *Northern Star*, 6 April 1796.

<sup>79</sup> *Northern Star*, 7 April 1797.

<sup>80</sup> An exception is Mary Isabella Joy, who was married to the moderate Counsellor Henry Joy, cousin of Mary Anne and Henry Joy McCracken.

<sup>81</sup> David Hempton and Myrtle Hill, ‘Women and Protestant Minorities in Eighteenth-Century Ireland’, in Margaret MacCurtain and Mary O’Dowd (eds), *Women in Early Modern Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1991), p. 199.



interest in politics, her mother describing her as a 'poor politician'.<sup>82</sup> As the example of the Belfast Charitable Society demonstrates, radicals, moderates and conservatives did cooperate within charitable institutions. At the same time, differences of emphasis can be identified within the broader aims of such coalitions. Whilst there may have been a degree of consensus that the poor should be educated, opinions on the form and extent of plebeian education could reveal differences between radical and conservative philanthropists.<sup>83</sup> According to the conservative evangelical Hannah More, the instruction of the lower orders should be restricted to reading and principally religious in content.<sup>84</sup> The more radical approach can be seen in the establishment of working-class reading clubs and societies for self-improvement such as the Belfast reading society, and in Martha McTier's independent school, the aims of which transcended basic literacy.

Recent research on female philanthropy in Britain has identified networks of dissenting female philanthropists, whose liberal Whig and religiously latitudinarian principles informed their charitable activity, situating it within a more reformist framework and distinguishing it from evangelical models of female philanthropy, although they often worked alongside more religiously and politically orthodox women. This network included the York-based Unitarian, Catherine Cappe, the Scottish Presbyterian writer, Elizabeth Hamilton and Elizabeth Fletcher, the wife of the Edinburgh reformer, Archibald Fletcher.<sup>85</sup> In an effort to share ideas and models of practice they participated

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<sup>82</sup> PRONI, Belfast, Foster-Masserene Papers, D/562/2571. Lady Anne Roden to Lady Harriet Skeffington, 24 May 1794. Harriet Skeffington did make an unsuccessful attempt to alter Martha McTier's political principles. In April 1798 she sent Martha a selection of conservative pamphlets, including an account of the French incursion in Swabia, on which Martha dryly commented, 'my what a scene of ravishings the good lady has sent me'. Martha McTier to William Drennan, April 1798, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 388.

<sup>83</sup> For a discussion of the main historiographical debates on philanthropy see Alan Kidd, 'Philanthropy and the "Social History" Paradigm', *Social History*, 21 (1996), pp. 180-192.

<sup>84</sup> Stressing her schools' strictness and limitations More wrote: 'They learn of weekdays such coarse works as may fit them for servants. I allow of no writing ... Principles, not opinions, are what I labour to give them.' Despite More's publicly avowed conservatism her educational schemes were still viewed with suspicion by some who saw any attempt to educate the lower orders as playing into the hands of English Jacobins and Dissenters. Robert Hole, *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order in England, 1760-1832* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 138-139. Jane Greg reported to Martha McTier a conversation she had in Bath in which 'a person high in office said she was the most p( ) democrat in England, and added that had Hannah More been hanged ten years ago there would have been no mutiny in Portsmouth.' Martha McTier to William Drennan, 19 March 1798, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 377.

<sup>85</sup> Jane Rendall, "'Ladies Suspected of Democratic Principles": Reforming and Dissenting Women, Philanthropy and Surveillance, 1790-1820' (Unpublished conference paper); Helen Plant, *Unitarianism, Philanthropy and Feminism in York, 1782-1821: The Career of Catherine Cappe* (York, 2003).

in 'philanthropic tourism', visiting other charitable initiatives from which they could draw inspiration. In 1807 Elizabeth Fletcher spent a week with Samuel and Hannah Greg of Quarry Bank Mill in Cheshire, where the Greg's Apprentice House, founded in 1789 provided education and welfare for the parish apprentices.<sup>86</sup> Samuel Greg was born in Belfast but had joined the family cotton business in Manchester, before founding his own very successful mill at Styal, Cheshire. He was the brother of Martha's friend Jane Greg, who lived with the family for a time after the political disturbances in Belfast in 1794, and who died at Quarry Bank Mill in 1817.<sup>87</sup> Samuel's wife, Hannah, was widely respected as a highly intelligent, liberal and humane woman and the main driving force behind the charitable innovations at Quarry Bank Mill, including the foundation of a Sick Club and Women's club. Hannah was also closely involved in the teaching of the apprentices, and encouraged her daughters to do likewise. She visited her husband's relatives in Ulster in 1794 where she was struck by the poverty of the Irish peasantry. In a letter written during this visit she demonstrates a degree of sympathy with Irish radicalism that she may have imbibed from her sister-in-law:

... certain will be the day of retribution – England has not so much to answer for – but the crimes of this country and the crimes of old France are crying and will be visited ... to be Irish has always been sufficient to make anything obnoxious to the English government.<sup>88</sup>

It is likely that Martha would have met, or at least been aware of Hannah Greg through her friendship with Jenny Greg. She was also acquainted with Elizabeth Hamilton. On a visit to Belfast in 1793 Hamilton had been invited to one of Martha's reading parties. While there, she was struck by hearing one of the girls that Martha had instructed reading Milton. She subsequently asked if she could employ the girl as a companion as

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<sup>86</sup> Mary Richardson, *Autobiography of Mrs Fletcher with Letters and other Family Memorials* (Edinburgh, 1875), p. 97.

<sup>87</sup> Peter Spencer, *A Portrait of Samuel Greg* (Styal, 1989), p. 24.

<sup>88</sup> There is evidence to suggest that Hannah and her husband were sympathetic to political radicalism in the 1790s. Samuel Greg was a member of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society and during the 1790s the family feared that they were under official surveillance because of Samuel Greg's nationality. Peter Spencer, 'Hannah Greg née Lightbody', *Cheshire History*, 8 (1981), p. 71; and Spencer, *A Portrait of Samuel Greg*, p. 14. For further information on the Gregs see Mary B. Rose, *The Gregs of Quarry Bank Mill: The Rise and Decline of a Family Firm 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1986); and Ruth Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians in England, 1760-1860* (London, 1998), pp. 71-72, 88-89.

her eyesight was failing.<sup>89</sup> It is not clear whether Martha McTier had any further relationship with Hamilton, but her friend and correspondent Jane Greg, who like Hamilton spent much time in Bath during the 1790s, was closely acquainted with her, and as Hamilton's literary fame grew she was often discussed in Jane's letters to Martha. There are other points of contact between the two women. Both were acquainted with the Scottish philosopher Dugald Stewart, and like Martha, Elizabeth Hamilton was engaged in philanthropic activity, being deeply involved in the Edinburgh House of Industry, an institution for the education of working-class girls.<sup>90</sup> These, admittedly distant, relationships with Hamilton and the Gregs, do suggest Martha McTier's peripheral involvement within a wider network of liberal dissenting philanthropy, in which female charitable activity assumed a more reformist character.

The relationship between Martha McTier's philanthropic activity and the United Irish programme is less clear. In 1796, at Martha's behest, William Drennan published an article in the *Northern Star* headed 'To the Public Spirit of the Ladies of Belfast', in which he applauded the governesses of the Union school for their demonstration of 'domestic virtue' in founding a seminary for the education of young girls. He continued:

The promoters of this well intended ...charity were of the opinion that even the first and lowest step towards knowledge, was an advancement to virtue, in their sex as well as the other: they thought that while the patriotism of men affected to take a wide and comprehensive range, the patriotism of the female consisted in charity, and that no charity could be better selected than the emancipation of young girls from the penalties of ignorance and hard necessity, the parents of infamy and prostitution.<sup>91</sup>

The essay illustrates Drennan's approval of female education. Indeed he had recommended to Martha that the school's motto be: 'The advantages that men possess

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<sup>89</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 15 December 1805, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 3, p. 399. This may have prompted a small tribute to Martha in Hamilton's satire on Godwinian philosophy, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), in which the virtuous heroine, Harriet Orwell has David Hume's *History of England* read to her 'by a little orphan girl she had herself instructed'. Elizabeth Hamilton, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, Claire Grogan (ed.) (Peterborough, 2000 [1800]), p. 73.

<sup>90</sup> Benger, *Memoirs of the Late Mrs Elizabeth Hamilton*, vol. 1, p. 169.

<sup>91</sup> *Northern Star*, 11 April 1796.

above women are principally owing to the neglect of female education'.<sup>92</sup> The distinction he draws between male and female patriotism and his characterization of women's virtue as domestic suggests a classical republican gendering of civic participation, in which women's public duties are considered an extension of their familial role. However, in the light of Drennan's considerations on the question of female suffrage discussed in chapter one, it is possible that he saw in the philanthropic activity of his sister, and the women of Belfast, that conjunction of male and female 'efforts for the public good, mental as well as corporeal' that he believed was essential 'for the perfection of society'.<sup>93</sup>

#### IV

Apart from notices and letters of thanks on behalf of the Humane Female Society and Union School, there is no evidence that Martha McTier ever ventured into the press on any more explicitly political subjects. Indeed, besides some items that will be discussed in greater detail below there are few identifiable political contributions by women to either of the Belfast newspapers. However, this may perhaps obscure their more indirect participation in the public sphere, through letter writing.<sup>94</sup> In Habermas's account, the development of the 'republic of letters' was the foundation upon which late eighteenth-century demands for political republics was based. He observes that epistolary networks played a crucial role in the construction of the 'republic of letters' and the coming together of private persons to form a critically debating public that ultimately gave rise to the political public sphere, and he stresses both the centrality of letters to the development of the press and their role in the rise of the novel through the use of the epistolary form.<sup>95</sup>

Access to the 'republic of letters' was theoretically universal and women's participation in epistolary exchange, and the construction of a publicly-oriented private interiority

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<sup>92</sup> William Drennan to Martha McTier, 15 May 1795 in Jean Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 150.

<sup>93</sup> NAI, Dublin, Rebellion Papers, 620/20/1. William Drennan, 'Plan of Parliamentary Representation for Ireland'.

<sup>94</sup> The arguments developed in this section are more fully explored in an article entitled "'Womanish Epistles?': Martha McTier, Female Epistolarity and Late Eighteenth-Century Irish Radicalism', *Women's History Review* (forthcoming, 2005).

was sanctioned and encouraged by the use of the female voice in male-authored epistolary novels, such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1741) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761). The letter form was also vital to the development of oppositional political spheres such as that which the United Irishmen sought to create. For radicals it could represent openness, accessibility and democracy, and its popularity is evident in the use of the epistolary genre in political tracts such as those by Junius, the pseudonymous Whig pamphleteer and author of a series of letters published between 1769 and 1772.<sup>96</sup> However, critics who have explored the implications of Habermasian theory for the gendering of public and private spheres have noted the polarity in the construction of the public sphere, between the essentially private heroines of sensibility, such as Richardson's *Pamela*, who are represented in the literary public sphere, and the rational-citizen critic who is the proper subject of the political-public sphere.<sup>97</sup> Underpinning eighteenth-century discourse on epistolarity was an implicit gulf between the female letter-writer and the citizen critic. It is a discourse that has coloured subsequent accounts of eighteenth-century women's letter writing and accounts for what Gilroy and Verhoeven describe as 'the persistence of a rhetoric that equates epistolary femininity and feminine epistolarity, a rhetoric that derives largely from a particular view of the eighteenth-century novel and its association with women'.<sup>98</sup>

Whilst it would be simplistic to conflate real and fictional eighteenth-century female letter-writers, prevailing literary conventions would certainly have influenced actual epistolary practice; Richardson originally intended *Pamela* to serve as a letter-writing manual. From this perspective it is interesting to note Martha McTier's response to contemporary epistolary fiction and models of epistolary femininity. She dismissed

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<sup>95</sup> Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>96</sup> William Drennan was an admirer of Junius and used the epistolary form in several of his own works. Epistolary networks also formed the basis for radical organizations in the 1790s such as the London Corresponding Society. See Mary Favret, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics and the Fiction of Letters* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 8.

<sup>97</sup> See Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, *Epistolary Bodies: Gender and Genre in the Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters* (Stanford, 1996).

<sup>98</sup> Amanda Gilroy and W. M. Verhoeven, 'Introduction', in Amanda Gilroy and W. M. Verhoeven, *Epistolary Histories. Letters, Fiction, Culture* (Charlottesville VA, 2000), p. 1. See also Carolyn Steedman, 'A Woman Writing a Letter', in Rebecca Earle (ed.), *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945* (Aldershot, 1999), p. 121.

Rousseau's *Nouvelle Heloise* as overwrought and overrated<sup>99</sup> and declared Samuel Richardson's novels 'all intrigue'. Comparing Richardson's works to Isabella de Montolieu's *Caroline of Lichfield* (1786),<sup>100</sup> she wrote, 'Caroline is highly interesting without a rake, a confidant, a love letter, or almost anything from her on the subject of love'.<sup>101</sup> As already noted, Martha McTier engaged enthusiastically with the radical reading public and her literary preferences were reflected in her epistolary style. On being asked by her brother to write to him 'about something, or if you please, about what you know nothing about', she responded by asserting her unwillingness to subscribe to female literary conventions, retorting: 'You desire I may write to you "of what I know nothing about", that is to say, give play to my fancy, and allow it to flash out, a long, agreeable womanish epistle, but if these are the sort you relish you must bespeak a more youthful correspondent'.<sup>102</sup> Whilst Martha and William's letters to each other did touch on personal, and sometimes romantic affairs - usually involving William's search for a suitable wife - a dominant theme of their correspondence was always politics.<sup>103</sup> Congratulating William on his engagement in 1793, Martha added in a postscript, 'I think this is one of the first letters I ever wrote you without one word of politics'.<sup>104</sup> For William, who was absent from Belfast for most of the 1790s practicing as an obstetrician in Dublin, Martha's letters were a vital source of news, enabling him to maintain a link with Belfast's political culture and to judge the political mood of Belfast's citizens. For Martha, these discussions with her brother allowed her to participate freely in the political debate that was exercising the nation and to assert her identity as a member of the critically debating public. However, the assertion of this identity required the deliberate rejection of a 'feminine' epistolary style. Indeed, when Martha and William first began to suspect that their letters were being intercepted, William assured Samuel that Martha had nothing to fear for, 'if they have opened

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<sup>99</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, April 1785, in Jean Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 1, p. 203.

<sup>100</sup> A partly epistolary novel by the Swiss novelist Isabella de Montolieu, which was translated from the French by the radical English writer Thomas Holcroft. Frank Gees Black, *The Epistolary Novel in the Late Eighteenth Century. A Descriptive and Bibliographical Study* (Eugene, 1940), p. 7.

<sup>101</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 1785, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 1, p. 204.

<sup>102</sup> William Drennan to Martha McTier, June 1788 and Martha McTier to William Drennan, June 1788, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 1, p. 300.

<sup>103</sup> The Drennan-McTier letters also contains a wealth of detail on eighteenth-century social and domestic life. This aspect of the correspondence is explored in Maria Luddy, 'Martha McTier and William Drennan: A Domestic History', in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 1, pp. xxix-li.

<sup>104</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 1793, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 1, p. 502.

Matty's letter, they will never think that a woman wrote it'.<sup>105</sup>

Recent re-examinations of eighteenth-century women's correspondence have revealed the extent to which politics permeated elite women's letters.<sup>106</sup> The epistolary relationship between Martha McTier and William Drennan shares many of the features that Elaine Chalus has identified in her study of eighteenth-century elite women's political practice.<sup>107</sup> Twelve years older than her brother, Martha often assumed the role of a political adviser and exerted a considerable influence over her brother's political writings. She was 'always on the watch for a good subject for your pen', and William frequently acted on her recommendations.<sup>108</sup> She also provided critical feedback, sometimes unwelcome, on his publications, thus assuming an indirect editorial role. William Drennan himself readily acknowledged the influence of Martha's opinion on his political activities and publications, and in his collection of poetry published in 1807 he paid tribute to 'her, who in conduct and counsel doth blend, the sister, the parent, Minerva and friend.'<sup>109</sup>

The depth of the political partnership between brother and sister is illustrated by Martha's involvement in the so-called 'Pollock affair'. In 1792 William was approached by John Pollock, an attorney and government agent and asked to become a paid writer for the administration. Although William refused this offer, his curiosity was piqued and he continued to allow Pollock to court him, Pollock stressed that their transactions were to remain confidential, to which William replied that he could not keep the discussions secret from either Martha or her husband, whose opinions he highly valued. According to William, Pollock 'protested against my sister, talked much against disclosing any important matter to any woman'.<sup>110</sup> Martha fully supported

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<sup>105</sup> William Drennan to Samuel McTier, 31 December 1792, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 1, p. 454.

<sup>106</sup> However, in Olga Kenyon's anthology of women's letters she draws a distinction between the content of elite and middle-class women's letters, maintaining that eighteenth-century middle-class women 'were usually more preoccupied with their emotions'. Olga Kenyon (ed.), *800 Years of Women's Letters* (Stroud, 1992), p. xiv.

<sup>107</sup> Elaine Chalus, 'My *Minerva* at My Elbow': The Political Roles of Women in Eighteenth-Century England', in Richard Connors, Clyve Jones and Stephen Taylor (eds), *Hanoverian Britain and Empire: Essays in Memory of Phillip Lawson* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 210-228.

<sup>108</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, January 1789, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 1, p. 321.

<sup>109</sup> From William Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces*, cited in Agnew (ed.) *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 3, p. 520.

<sup>110</sup> William Drennan to Samuel McTier, 1 December 1792, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol.

William's refusal to be bought and on Pollock's suspicions in regard to her responded: '... what a compliment. ... it is possible he might have heard I was not a weak sister, or to speak more modestly that I was one who might influence you'.<sup>111</sup>

William was initially unconcerned about Pollock's interest in him, but it soon became apparent that Pollock was attempting to gather information on William in order to have him tried for sedition. In December 1792 William had written an *Address to the Volunteers* on behalf of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen, in which he called on 'citizen-soldiers' to take up their arms and demand reform. The address furnished the Irish administration with a pretext for the suppression of the United Irish societies. At the end of 1792 another United Irishman, Archibald Hamilton Rowan, was arrested for distributing copies of the address and was put on trial for seditious libel in January 1794. A few months later Drennan was also arrested on the same charge. Prior to his arrest Pollock's role in the prosecutions became known and Drennan urged Martha to write to him, making it clear that they were aware of the part he had played. Accordingly, she sent him a letter demanding that he 'cease – 'tis a damning cause, nor can it come to good' and threatening to reveal the details of Pollock's activity as a government agent to the public, who, 'would read with avidity, judge equitable, and pass its sentence of scorn on the chief actor'.<sup>112</sup> In an elegant but caustic reply Pollock deliberately stressed the impropriety of a woman addressing a complete stranger on such a matter:

As to the advice you have done me the honour to give me, I receive it with all due consideration. It is peculiarly kind in a lady to whom I have the misfortune of being wholly unknown, to take so much trouble on my account, yet looking up as I do, to the great superior talent, to the gentleness, the feminine expression, and to the beautiful and amiable insinuation and manners that mark every line of the performance you have bestowed upon me, allow me to assure you, that whenever I shall venture to solicit your advice I shall most thankfully receive and attend it

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1, p. 435.

<sup>111</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 8 December 1792, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 1, p. 437.

<sup>112</sup> Copy of letter in Martha McTier to William Drennan, 10 March 1794, Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 26-27.

<sup>113</sup> John Pollock to Martha McTier, 10 March 1794, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 35-38.



Pollock's allusion to Martha's 'feminine expression' and 'amiable insinuation' was sarcastic, a commentary on her failure to couch the letter in the diffident, ornamental language expected from a woman. Undeterred by this, and clearly relishing the heated exchange, she fired off a response, in which she defended her refusal to 'gild an address like mine with some tinsel, apologetical lines'. She concluded with a full articulation of her own political principles:

You condescended to give me some of your political ideas, and even here, on this forbidden ground (perhaps the rather as my sex may protect me), I shall venture to say that I join with the man... who wishes to see both King and constitution unshackled, and freed from that abuse forced on them by a set of petty tyrants, who care not ruin involves millions in [the] future, so they can with strutting importance fret out their little hour.<sup>114</sup>

This exchange between Martha and John Pollock indicates the extent to which Martha was prepared to challenge the conventions of female epistolarity, by addressing a stranger, by adopting a direct and robust style, and by freely voicing her republican beliefs to a government agent.<sup>115</sup> The fate of the correspondence also underlines the difficulty in categorizing the letter as emblematic of the private sphere. As Janet Gurkin Altman observes: 'Whether intended for publication or not, whether addressed to public figures or to intimate friends, letters have always been subject to confiscation, circulation among unintended readers, and publication without the author's or addressee's consent.'<sup>116</sup> Shortly afterwards the letters began to be circulated amongst Pollock's acquaintances and Drennan likewise showed them to his United Irish colleagues. They seem to have earned Martha some acclaim, especially within radical circles, and she was identified in Ulster society as the woman 'who wrote the clever

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<sup>114</sup> Martha McTier to John Pollock, 1794, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 44.

<sup>115</sup> This was not the only occasion on which Martha McTier put pen to paper to assist those close to her. In 1794 she wrote to John Keogh the Catholic leader and United Irishman on behalf of Thomas Russell, requesting a financial provision for Russell, who was then living in Belfast in straitened circumstances, and who had done much work on behalf of the Catholic cause. See PRONI, Belfast, Drennan Papers, D/729/36, (undated draft) Martha McTier to John Keogh; and William Drennan to Martha McTier, 13 March 1794, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 29. Although McTier's intercession on behalf of Thomas Russell did not have the desired result, she was more successful when she petitioned General Nugent to spare Joseph Crombie, the son of a family friend, who had been involved in the Northern rebellion. Crombie later escaped, or was allowed to escape, and emigrated to America. See PRONI, Belfast, Drennan papers, D/531/4, (draft petition) Martha McTier to General Nugent, 1798.

<sup>116</sup> Janet Gurkin Altman, 'Women's Letters in the Public Sphere', in Elizabeth C. Goldsmith and Dena Goodman (eds), *Going Public: Women and Publishing in Early Modern France* (Ithaca, 1995), p. 100.

letters'.<sup>117</sup> She received further public attention when a letter to a friend in Scotland was found amongst the papers of Thomas Muir, the Scottish radical, upon his arrest in 1793. During Muir's trial for sedition, Martha's perfectly innocent letter was read in court and apparently much admired.<sup>118</sup> Although there is no evidence that Martha McTier wrote on behalf of the United Irishmen, she did achieve a literary reputation amongst Irish republicans, her brother teasingly comparing her public reputation to 'Mrs Wollstonecraft and Mme Roland', women who, 'make the town ring with their out o' door fame'.<sup>119</sup>

William was acquitted of the charge of sedition in 1794 and following his trial he gradually retreated from active involvement in the United Irishmen. Between 1794 and 1796 the movement transformed itself into a mass-based revolutionary organization, intent on achieving its aims with the assistance of the French revolutionary government. Martha and William were wary of this shift towards a conspiratorial organization and the involvement of foreign powers in Irish affairs. However, William continued to contribute to the United Irish press and both he and Martha remained broadly supportive of the aims of the United Irishmen and of their friends who remained involved in the movement. Despite William's withdrawal from the leadership of the United Irishmen, he continued to be viewed with suspicion by the Irish and British administration, and this had a significant impact on the correspondence between brother and sister. The upsurge in radical activism in the British Isles following the French Revolution had led to increased vigilance on the part of the government. During the 1790s the state amassed increasing powers in order to monitor the potentially subversive communication between radicals. Letters between suspected individuals were opened, read and rerouted into the hands of the Home Office. In her exploration of the transformations of the epistolary genre in the context of the 1790s, Mary Favret argues that the revolutionary decade witnessed the emergence of two competing discourses on the epistolary form. For radicals the letter was an open democratic medium,

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<sup>117</sup> A comment by the Marquis of Downshire, for whom John Pollock acted as agent. Martha McTier to William Drennan, 2 January 1797, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 284.

<sup>118</sup> *The Trial of Thomas Muir Esq. Younger of Huntershill; Before the High Court of Justiciary, upon Friday and Saturday the 30th and 31st of Days of August 1793 ... On a Charge of Sedition* (Edinburgh, 1793), appendix, p. 8; and William Drennan to Martha McTier, November 1793, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 1, p. 568.

<sup>119</sup> William Drennan to Martha McTier, 21 February 1798 in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol.

representing the dialogue between equals that constituted the idealized public sphere. For conservatives the radical letter was identified as a tool of conspiracy and treason, necessitating the regulation of all correspondence in a move that exploded the fiction of the privacy of personal correspondence.<sup>120</sup>

It was following William's arrest that Martha first became alerted to the fact that their letters were under surveillance from agents within the Irish post office. In 1794 she received an anonymous letter written 'as if in blood, in large red letters', that 'bade her write no more high flown letters' to her brother and promised her a place 'as matron to a madhouse in Botany Bay' if she did not stop.<sup>121</sup> William confirmed that the paper on which the warning was written was the same as that used by the post office and from this point on their letters to each other were framed by an awareness that their correspondence was being monitored. They carefully examined their letters for signs that the sealing wafer had been opened and there is evidence that their suspicions were valid. Amongst the Irish state papers from this period is an official memorandum detailing the contents of a letter written by Martha to William in September 1796, in which Martha reports on the arrests of key republican figures in Belfast, including many of Martha and William's friends, and describes the public response to this unprecedented demonstration of governmental severity.<sup>122</sup> The mass arrests were accompanied by a raid on the United Irish newspaper, the *Northern Star*, and it was finally suppressed by the government in May 1797.<sup>123</sup> With the closure of this newspaper Martha's reports were more vital than ever for the communication of accurate news from Belfast. Yet this role was increasingly fraught and Martha was one of several noted republican sympathizers in Belfast, who received an anonymous threat from the authorities instructing her not to 'converse on or meddle with government

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2, p. 369.

<sup>120</sup> Both Favret and Nicola Watson link this shift in the perception of the letter to a more suspicious interpretation of the sentimental epistolary narrative. It is this political shift, they contend, that explains the decline of the genre in the early nineteenth century, rather than, as previously argued, the inherent stylistic limitations of the letter narrative. Mary Favret, *Romantic Correspondence*; and Nicola J. Watson, *Revolution and Form of the British Novel, 1790-1825: Intercepted Letters, Interrupted Seductions* (Oxford, 1994).

<sup>121</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 17 May 1794, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 56.

<sup>122</sup> NAI, Dublin, Rebellion Papers, 620/25/82.

<sup>123</sup> Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, p. 211.

matters'.<sup>124</sup>

In this context Martha's insistence on her right to continue to write critically of the Irish and British administrations is doubly defiant. Not only was she challenging a discourse that gendered the rational citizen-critic as male, but she was also exposing herself to governmental persecution. Refusing to be cowed, she declared to her brother, 'in these times I never will be gagged', a reference to the infamous Gagging Acts of 1794 and 1795.<sup>125</sup> Recognizing that her correspondence was being read by a third person, whom she rightly suspected was Thomas Whinnery, the Belfast Postmaster, she proceeded to insert provocative notes in her letters, challenging Whinnery to find anything seditious in them. Reporting on the trial of William Orr in 1797, resulting in Orr's execution, and widely regarded as a travesty by Irish radicals, she wrote:

His [Orr's] confession was a fabrication which will soon be brought to light, but out of respect to Mr. Whinnery's feelings I will not impose so disagreeable a task on him as to read the account of it from my pen, or trouble him with a long letter, for to my hand – his fingers have a strong attraction.<sup>126</sup>

While it was in part her relationship with her brother, that made Martha McTier the object of official scrutiny, her letters to William Drennan were not the only part of her correspondence that were subject to government surveillance. Alongside the correspondence with her brother the other dominant epistolary relationship in Martha's life was with her close friend Jane Greg. In May 1797, Whinnery alerted John Lees, secretary to the Irish Post Office, to the correspondence between Martha and Greg, claiming that the latter was 'very active' in Belfast, and 'at the head of the Female Societies' there.<sup>127</sup> Greg became aware that her correspondence was being intercepted through information passed to her brother and he was commissioned to write to Whinnery declaring that Jane was a 'United Irishwoman in principle' and enclosing Martha's letter to her as proof of her innocence. Reflecting on this episode Martha

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<sup>124</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 25 September 1796, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 265.

<sup>125</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 25 September 1796, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 265.

<sup>126</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 9 October 1797, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 341.

<sup>127</sup> NAI, Dublin, Rebellion papers, 620/30/194. Thomas Whinnery to John Lees, 25 May 1797.

observed that, 'it is strange that an obscure name, and female could be noticed by strangers', though, she added, 'I flatter myself I am not insignificant enough however to be termed a neutral'.<sup>128</sup>

## V

When Martha discovered that her letters to Jenny Greg had been seized by the administration she inserted a strongly worded protest in a letter to her brother, presumably intended for Thomas Whinnery's eyes, denying any involvement in, or knowledge of the United Irishwomen's societies:

Let me here ... declare that I know of no society of United I[rish]women, that I never heard it said there was one in the place, that I never even subscribed as thousands did to the relief of prisoners, that private transactions are my abhorrence, that I was never engaged in any act I should care was known either to the public or secret committee...

Although Martha was trying to clear herself of any suspicion by this assertion, it is likely that she was telling the truth, and like William Drennan, who disengaged from the United Irishmen after it had become a secret, conspiratorial organization, her abhorrence of 'private transactions' was genuine. However, given Martha's connections with leading Belfast radicals it is puzzling that she claims not to have known of the United Irishwomen societies. In his *Annals of Ulster* Samuel McSkimmin recorded that several United Irishwomen societies were founded in Ulster following the suspension of Habeas Corpus in 1796 and that they were commonly known as 'teapot clubs.' According to McSkimmin the main object of these societies was, 'an obligation to keep their tongues quiet as to what they might hear or see regarding political affairs, to communicate such news as they might learn, and to collect from each society a subscription to the common fund.'<sup>129</sup> These societies may have been the organizations for the relief of prisoners to which Martha referred. While the existence of United Irishwomen societies suggests that radical women did initiate separate organizations, it is probable that many were also incorporated into the main body of the United Irish

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<sup>128</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 16 June 1796, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 319

<sup>129</sup> Samuel McSkimmin, *Annals of Ulster from 1790-1798*, E. J. McCrum (ed.) (Belfast, 1906 [1849]), p.

movement. Middle-class women were active members of the Dublin United Irishmen; Margaret Bond is supposed to have carried a bible with her at all times, ready to swear in new female members, and William James MacNeven was sworn into the society by a woman.<sup>130</sup> This active involvement in the movement was undoubtedly replicated by their more radicalized counterparts in Belfast, the travel writer, John Gamble, recording the presence of 'United Irishwomen' in the polite circles of Ulster society.<sup>131</sup> It is unlikely that Martha McTier ever became a member of the United Irishmen, but Mary Anne McCracken's sister-in-law, Rose McCracken, is reputed to have taken the oath. Although Mary McNeill doubts that Mary Anne McCracken ever formally joined the movement, in a letter to her brother Henry Joy McCracken in 1797, she reported that their mutual friend, John Templeton, had become a United Irishman, and expressed the hope 'that his sisters will soon follow so good an example'.<sup>132</sup> As she was so eager to see the Templeton sisters join, it would seem surprising if she was not herself a member.

There is certainly evidence that the suspension of Habeas Corpus and the mass arrests in Belfast in 1796 prompted Ulster women's more public engagement with the radical cause. In response to the government's extensive imprisonment of suspected United Irishmen, Ulster leaders organized mass assemblies under the pretence of harvesting the potatoes of the imprisoned men. In October 1796 the *Northern Star* reported that over three thousand people had assembled to dig the potato field of Francis Dinsmore, who had been imprisoned in Carrickfergus. They also noted with approval that 'numbers of the fair sex assisted on these occasions unwilling that the men should exceed them in promoting union, or assisting the oppressed.'<sup>133</sup>

The detention of United Irishmen also appears to have generated the few identifiable publications by women in the *Northern Star*. Between November 1796 and January

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<sup>130</sup> NAI, Dublin, Rebellion papers, 620/30/211. 'Left Hand' to Secretary Pelham and Secretary Cooke, 27 May 1797; R. R. Madden, *The United Irishmen their Lives and Times* (New York, 1916 [1842-46]), vol. 6, p. 18.

<sup>131</sup> John Gamble, *A View of Society and Manners in the North of Ireland in the Summer and Autumn of 1812* (London, 1813), p. 159.

<sup>132</sup> McNeill, *The Life and Times of Mary Anne McCracken*, p. 129. TCD, Dublin, Madden papers, 873/151. Mary Anne McCracken to Henry Joy McCracken, 16 March 1797.

<sup>133</sup> *Northern Star*, 21 October 1796.

1797 the paper printed three anonymous poems ‘by a lady.’<sup>134</sup> In a poem entitled ‘On the Captivity of a Worthy Patriot’ the author urged Irishmen to raise arms to defend their compatriots, torn from their families and imprisoned by a tyrannical government.<sup>135</sup> In October 1796 a letter from the Society of the United Irishwomen was published in the *Northern Star*. It was a response to a ‘Letter Addressed to the Marquis of Downshire’ by ‘A Lover of Truth’, published in the *Belfast News-Letter* the previous week, which had criticized both the American and French Revolutions for their failure to establish free government and argued that revolutionary reform was a fundamentally flawed strategy. The letter opens with the following declaration:

I am directed by the Society of United Irishwomen to which I am Secretary, by your favour, to notice a publication which we have read in the News-Letter ... signed *A Lover of Truth* – It is evidently from its levity, designed for our sex, but we wish to shew, that *women as we are*, we are not to be taken by anything so light.<sup>136</sup>

The author proceeds to give a detailed critique of the arguments proposed by ‘A Lover of Truth’, countering his emphasis on the violence of both the American and French Revolutions, by asserting that the violence was entirely the fault of the English who had waged war on the new republics.

The letter is a well-executed piece of political rhetoric that would suggest a highly educated author, it is signed Lucy Stirling, most likely a pseudonym. Rumours circulated that Martha McTier wrote for the *Northern Star* and she may have been pointed out as the author of this letter, an allegation she strongly denied.<sup>137</sup> A more likely candidate perhaps is Jane Greg, and clearly the authorities suspected her. She was closely acquainted with Francis Jordan, a member of the United Irishmen and one of the proprietors of the *Northern Star*, who had business holdings in Manchester where Greg stayed at intervals during the 1790s. Reporting on a republican woman who had been

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<sup>134</sup> ‘Stanzas by a Young Lady on La Vendee of Ireland’, *Northern Star*, 28 November 1796, ‘Stanzas by a Young Lady addressed to the Northern Star’, *Northern Star*, 23 January 1797 and ‘On the Captivity of a Worthy Patriot by a Young Lady’, *Northern Star*, 30 January 1797.

<sup>135</sup> ‘On the Captivity of a Worthy Patriot by a Young Lady’, *Northern Star*, 30 January 1797.

<sup>136</sup> *Northern Star*, 17 October 1796.

<sup>137</sup> William had written to Martha: ‘Mrs. Orr who is a sort of hysterical politician has been just telling me with an air of great importance, that several aristocrats here have been mentioning your name as being a very busy woman in Belfast at present and that you should take care of yourself as you were supposed to write for the *Northern Star* while in existence.’ William Drennan to Martha McTier, 10 June 1797, in

assaulted by the Ancient Britons quartered in Newry, Chief Secretary Pelham commented that the lady in question was ‘as active as the Misses Greg at Belfast’.<sup>138</sup> In November 1797 Lord Lieutenant Camden communicated in a letter to the Duke of Portland that Jane Greg and her brother had been giving food and assistance to some members of the Monaghan militia imprisoned in Belfast, who had been condemned to death for joining the United Irishmen.<sup>139</sup> Her brother’s house was attacked by loyalist members of the militia, an action that appears to have been condoned by Dublin Castle, and this may have led her to leave Belfast.<sup>140</sup> She was reported to have been stopped and searched for United Irish propaganda upon her arrival in England.<sup>141</sup> Greg was also a close friend of George Smith, a radical London barrister, who was part of Arthur O’Connor’s defence team during his trial for sedition, and who later defended Roger O’Connor. In 1800 she returned to Belfast with Smith and O’Connor’s children, who had been visiting their father, then imprisoned at Fort George, Scotland. Martha McTier thought this was an imprudent decision on Jenny’s part: ‘It was curious and rather unlucky, that after all which passed and the far more which has been said, poor J G should make her first entrance here with an O’Connor party’.<sup>142</sup>

While the letter from the United Irishwomen suggests that their interests included more than merely acting as fund-raising clubs for United Irish prisoners, it tells us little about the actual composition of the societies. By March 1797 Mary Anne McCracken had become aware of the United Irishwomen societies and expressed an interest in visiting them, writing to her brother Henry Joy, at that time imprisoned in Kilmainham:

I have a great curiosity to visit some female society in this Town, though I should like them better were they promiscuous as there can be no other reason of having them separate, but keeping the women in the dark, and certainly it is equally ungenerous and uncandid to make tools of without confiding in them, I wish to know if they have any rational ideas of liberty and equality for themselves or whether they are contented with

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Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 318.

<sup>138</sup> W. J. Fitzpatrick, *Secret Service Under Pitt* (London, 1892), p. 393.

<sup>139</sup> For a discussion of the impact of these executions on the United Irish movement see Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, pp. 172-73.

<sup>140</sup> PRO, Kent, HO/100/70. John Jeffries, Lord Lieutenant to Duke of Portland, 3 November 1797, p. 193.

<sup>141</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 1 June 1797, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 317

<sup>142</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, August 1800, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 624-625.



their present abject and dependent situation, degraded by custom and education beneath the rank in society in which they were originally placed.<sup>143</sup>

## VI

As Mary Anne McCracken's remarks on the United Irishwomen indicate, she had begun to relate United Irish revolutionary doctrines to the condition of women, as a result she has been identified as a pioneer of Irish feminism.<sup>144</sup> While the 'pioneer' epithet is in many ways justified, this should not obscure the broader social and political currents that shaped and informed McCracken's feminism. The 1790s are widely regarded as a pivotal period in the formation of an identifiably 'modern' feminism. The emergence of a discussion of women's rights during the late eighteenth century is linked to two contemporaneous revolutions: the middle class 'cultural revolution', which witnessed the consolidation of middle-class cultural authority, and the French Revolution.<sup>145</sup> A further contribution was made by late eighteenth-century rational dissenters and their promotion of women's moral and intellectual equality.<sup>146</sup> All these influential strands can be identified in Belfast in the late eighteenth-century: an assertive middle class, revolutionary politics and radical religious dissent, which suggests that it could provide an environment responsive to feminist ideas.

The relatively favourable response to Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* in the *Northern Star* has already been mentioned in chapter one. It would have been accessible to Mary Anne McCracken either through the library of the Belfast Society for the Promoting Knowledge or from the Belfast bookseller William Magee. She also expressed an interest in other radical feminist works, recommending Mary Hay's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) and Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written during*

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<sup>143</sup> TCD, Dublin, Madden Papers, 873/151. Mary Anne McCracken to Henry Joy McCracken, 17 March 1797.

<sup>144</sup> See McNeill, *The Life and Times of Mary Anne McCracken*; John Gray, 'Mary Anne McCracken: Belfast Revolutionary and Pioneer of Feminism', in Dáire Keogh and Nicholas Furlong (eds), *The Women of '98* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 47-63; and Curtin, 'Women and Eighteenth-Century Irish Republicanism', pp. 138-143.

<sup>145</sup> See Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860*; Barbara Caine, *English Feminism, 1780-1890* (Oxford, 1997); and Karen Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950, A Political History* (Stanford, 2000), pp. 50-76.

<sup>146</sup> For an analysis of the influence of the dissenting tradition on Mary Wollstonecraft see G.J. Barker Benfield, 'Mary Wollstonecraft: Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthwoman', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 50 (1989), pp. 95-115. On the contribution of Unitarians to the debate on the role of women see

*a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796), to her brother Henry during his imprisonment in Kilmainham.<sup>147</sup> The influence of the *Vindication* can be traced in Mary Anne's commentaries on the condition of women. Like Wollstonecraft she attributed women's degradation to 'custom and education', argued for a rational and equal companionship between men and women, and dismissed the contention that men's superior bodily strength denoted superior intellectual powers, declaring:

... as to any necessary connection between strength of mind and strength of body, a little examination will soon overturn that idea, I have only to place the McCombs, Val Joyce and our worthy Sovereign opposite to Mr. O'Connor, Mr. Tone and our dear departed friend Dr. Bell (three little men possessing much genius) to shew the futility of such an argument.<sup>148</sup>

She also realized the potency of abolitionist discourse to describe women's position, writing, 'there can be no argument produced in favour of the slavery of women that has not been used in favour of general slavery'.<sup>149</sup>

As discussed in chapter one, the United Irishmen did not explicitly include the issue of women's rights in their revolutionary programme, yet despite this Mary Anne was optimistic about the benefits that would accrue to women if they succeeded in their cause, expressing a hope, 'that it is reserved for the Irish nation to strike out something new and to shew an example of candour generosity and justice, superior to any that have gone before.'<sup>150</sup> It is possible that Mary Anne's association with the more socially radical members of the United Irishmen, Thomas Russell, her brother Henry and the radical weaver James Hope, encouraged this optimistic view of the United Irishmen's position on female equality. As she conceded to her brother, there were many who would think that her views on female emancipation were 'mere bombast or fanciful

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Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians in England*.

<sup>147</sup> TCD, Dublin, Madden papers, 873/150. Mary Anne McCracken to Henry Joy McCracken, 26 March 1797.

<sup>148</sup> TCD, Dublin, Madden papers, 873/151. Mary Anne McCracken to Henry Joy McCracken, 17 March 1797. Mary Wollstonecraft put forward a slightly different version of this argument in the *Vindication*. She believed that physical strength was too neglected in both men and women and was more likely to see a connection between a robust constitution and intellectual ability. See for example, Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Sylvana Tomaselli (ed.) (Cambridge, 1995 [1791]), pp. 109-111.

<sup>149</sup> TCD, Dublin, Madden Papers, 873/151. Mary Anne McCracken to Henry Joy McCracken, 17 March 1797.

<sup>150</sup> TCD, Dublin, Madden Papers, 873/151. Mary Anne McCracken to Henry Joy McCracken, 17 March

speculation'; however, she concluded, 'it is not to such I write, but to one whom I suppose to be capable of forming an opinion from his own experience without consulting the stupid multitude of common thinkers'.<sup>151</sup>

Although there is no evidence that Martha McTier ever articulated a feminist position as fully as Mary Anne McCracken, she too read and admired Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*, writing to William in 1793: 'Have you read Mrs. Wollstonecraft – I suppose not, or surely you would have mentioned her to me – you ought, even as a politician, and she too conspires to make an important change'.<sup>152</sup> The following year she commissioned William Sampson, the United Irish propagandist, to 'write a parody on Rule Britannia' for one of her female reading parties, 'that might make some use of Moll Wollstonecraft'.<sup>153</sup> After reading Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798), Martha McTier pronounced the work, 'a coarse ill-written catchpenny', but while she clearly disapproved of Wollstonecraft's irreligion she was more sympathetic to her experiences and views, writing:

True, in her very clever Rights of Women she had neither what is generally called much religion nor moral precept, but nobly did she assert her sex's independence – yet what a miserable slave was she. Virtue and prudence must ever be absolutely necessary to independence. In short, though this book is beneath criticism and sinks its author, yet I rather think the little it contains a triumph to virtue than an inducement to vice.<sup>154</sup>

Jane Greg also displayed a degree of sympathy with radical feminism that can be traced in her response to the more conservative female writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Upon meeting Hannah More and her sister in Bath, Greg declared to Martha that, 'their minds were crippled to an astonishing degree on some objects.'<sup>155</sup>

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1797.

<sup>151</sup> TCD, Dublin, Madden Papers, 873/150. Mary Anne McCracken to Henry Joy McCracken, 16 March 1797.

<sup>152</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 5 January 1793, in Jean Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 459.

<sup>153</sup> Unfortunately this has not survived, but it can be imagined how the chorus of 'Rule Britannia' might have been altered to express Wollstonecraft's views on women's enslavement. Martha McTier to William Drennan, 24 October 1794, in Agnew (ed.) *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 105.

<sup>154</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 11 April 1798, in Agnew (ed.) *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 387.

<sup>155</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 19 March 1798, in Agnew (ed.) *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 377.

Similarly, whilst Greg admired Elizabeth Hamilton's *Letters on the Elementary Principles of Education* (1801-1802) and her *Memoirs of the Life of Agrippina* (1804), she was unimpressed by Hamilton's satire on Godwinian philosophy, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), and predicted it would soon be 'sunk in oblivion', though she acknowledged that it had earned Hamilton her literary reputation 'supported by the prejudice of the day'.<sup>156</sup> One of the chief protagonists of *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* is the unkempt and insensitive Bridgetina Botherim, a parody of radical feminists, who throughout the work mindlessly parrots extracts from Godwin's works. Martha was clearly struck by the character and in a spirit of self mockery attended a masquerade ball as a 'bold Orange girl, by the name of Bet Botherim.'<sup>157</sup> However, unlike Mary Anne McCracken, Martha McTier does not seem to have made any claim for women's inclusion within the United Irishmen's reform programme, nor to have seen the potential link between their revolutionary agenda and female emancipation.

The difference between the responses of Mary Anne McCracken and Martha McTier to the feminist demands of the 1790s may be traced to their different positionings within the United Irish movement. As noted above, Mary Anne McCracken was associated with the most radical members of the United Irishmen, who had been galvanized by the revolutionary rights based ideology expressed in the work of Thomas Paine and in French revolutionary doctrine.<sup>158</sup> Martha McTier was also an admirer of Paine's *Rights of Man*, but apart from being a generation older than Mary Anne, she was also the product of an earlier tradition of Presbyterian political thought. Rosemarie Zagarri has explored, in the context of the early American republic, the differing implications for women of Lockean-based natural rights discourses and Scottish Enlightenment theories of natural rights. Whilst Lockean-derived conceptions of natural rights, such as that expounded by Thomas Paine, stressed equality and the expansion of personal freedoms, Scottish rights discourse rejected social contract theory and instead maintained that rights were dependent on the performance of duties. According to Zagarri, in America a bifurcation in rights discourses occurred, whereby men were accorded Lockean

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<sup>156</sup> Jane Greg to Martha McTier, 30 October 1804, in Agnew (ed.) *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 3, p. 278.

<sup>157</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 30 March 1801, in Agnew (ed.) *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 687.

<sup>158</sup> On the McCrackens' involvement in the social-radical dimension of the United Irish movement, see

individual rights, whilst women's rights were interpreted as duties and privileges conferred by God, thereby legitimating their exclusion from full citizenship.<sup>159</sup> The influence of Scottish moral philosophy on William Drennan, and in particular the influence of Francis Hutcheson, has been identified in his recurring emphasis upon moral responsibility and the self-government of the citizen.<sup>160</sup> This influence is also apparent in Martha McTier's political conceptions, as she became increasingly disillusioned with revolutionary politics she reflected:

Surely if all religion and order must be subverted for an experiment of what can only be a doubtful improvement at a bloody cost, it would be a wise moderation to hope from time and circumstances rather than wrest the occasion, and for every real patriot to practise for a time those virtuous independent principles in a private station which ... would educate them for more brilliant efforts and render them deserving and fit to be trusted with Liberty.<sup>161</sup>

It is perhaps in this context that Martha's more muted feminism may be understood. Her emphasis on the exercise of virtue and independence in a private situation as a precondition of political reform is also apparent in her response to Mary Wollstonecraft, and her conclusion that 'virtue and prudence' were always necessary to independence. In both these cases she privileges moral independence over legal independence, and individual reform over political reform. Moreover, her belief that patriotism was best practised in a 'private station' does not necessarily mean that she thought it should be restricted to the personal or the domestic, but rather implies an understanding of 'the private' as co-terminous with civil society.<sup>162</sup> Martha's practice of private patriotism can be read in her small gestures of independence. Following the death of her husband, she refused a pension from the Lord Lieutenant, despite the fact that she had not been

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Smyth, *The Men of No Property*.

<sup>159</sup> Rosemarie Zagari, 'The Rights of Man and Woman in Post-Revolutionary America', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 55 (1998), pp. 203-230.

<sup>160</sup> Ian McBride, 'William Drennan and the Dissenting Tradition', in Dickson, Whelan and Keogh (eds.), *The United Irishmen*, pp. 49-61.

<sup>161</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, November 1800, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 643.

<sup>162</sup> This, of course, is very close to Habermas' concept of the eighteenth-century public sphere as a 'public within the private'. Martha McTier's usage of the term 'private' here indicates both the slipperiness of eighteenth-century notions of public and private, and also the possible pitfalls of Amanda Vickery's proposal that the boundaries between the two spheres should be traced through the collation of contemporary uses of these terms. Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of Women's History', in Robert Shoemaker and Mary Vincent, *Gender and*

provided for in her husband's will.<sup>163</sup> It was also demonstrated in her educational and philanthropic initiatives, and in her refusal to allow rumour or government surveillance to curb her pen, or prevent her from freely articulating her political principles. Indeed, Martha's rigorous adherence to her principles, and her combination of political independence and public duty, was a source of admiration and some envy on the part of William Drennan. As he bemoaned his own inability to reconcile his political independence and professional success, he anticipated Martha's response to his lamentations:

You will say, 'Look at me struggling with the world and rising above it ... proud in my penury, social in my loneliness – the cement of humane societies – the mental mother of neglected children – a female democrat respected alike by Bristow and Bruce, who can alike attract the visits of Samuel Neilson and Lady Harriet Skeffington'... This is all true. But this only makes you as much my contrast in society as you are in yours.<sup>164</sup>

## VII

It is largely by virtue of their relationship with influential United Irishmen that the correspondence of Martha McTier and Mary Anne McCracken has survived. Yet their political radicalism may not be altogether exceptional. As I have suggested, within the social, religious and economic context of late eighteenth-century Belfast there were several factors that facilitated female political engagement. While material on the United Irishwomen societies is frustratingly slight, the participation of Belfast women from outside the McCracken-McTier circles in these organizations suggests a possible hinterland of female political activity. The case of Martha McTier points to how female radicalism might be channelled into less explicitly political activity. Her activities during the 1790s suggest a process of negotiation between gender and politics, rather than a direct challenge of the gendered boundaries of political participation. Hence, she was able to interpolate her philanthropic activity within a broader framework of

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*History in Western Europe* (Oxford and New York, 1998), p. 218.

<sup>163</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 19 August 1795, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p.595.

<sup>164</sup> William Drennan felt, with some reason, that his prominence as a United Irishmen had adversely affected his medical practice. William Drennan to Martha McTier, 14 March 1796, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 210.

political reform. In addition, her politically oriented correspondence with William and Jane Greg allowed her to claim citizenship of the oppositional 'republic of letters', her refusal to curb her pen or restrain her criticisms of the administration despite government intimidation illustrating the importance that she attached to her self-identification as a member of the critically-debating public. Though Martha McTier's radicalism may have been expressed within a 'private station', this does not necessarily mean that these activities were not political, neither does it mean that she equated the 'private' with the domestic and personal. Rather it suggests that she came to view revolutionary politics with a degree of caution, and located the motor for social and political progress more firmly in the 'private' sphere of civil society. This gradualist approach to political change can account for her more muted feminism. In contrast, Mary Anne McCracken's revolutionary fervour injected a degree of urgency into her demands for female emancipation, leading to her optimistic belief that it would fall to the Irish nation to 'strike out something new' on behalf of the 'Female part of creation'.

## Chapter Four: 'The enthusiasm of the females': Catholic Women and Popular Politics

Then a figure rose above us, 'twas a girl's fragile frame,  
And among the fallen soldiers there she walked with eyes aflame,  
And her voice rang o'er the clamour, like a trumpet o'er the sea,  
'Who so dares to die for Ireland let him come and follow me'.  
'Mary Doyle, Heroine of Ross'<sup>1</sup>

This image of Mary Doyle, striding through the battlefield of New Ross, urging on the Wexford rebels, is certainly a romanticized portrait of female patriotism. Whilst the nineteenth-century popular ballad which celebrated Doyle's heroism transformed her into an Irish Joan of Arc, the United Irish rebel Thomas Cloney gave a less romantic, but equally admiring account of this wood-cutter's daughter's participation in the Battle of New Ross, recording how she reclaimed ammunition from the bodies of dead Dragoons, and refused to abandon a captured enemy cannon.<sup>2</sup> The involvement of women such as Mary Doyle as combatants in the 1798 rebellion presents an immediate contrast with the experiences of elite and middle-class women described in the previous two chapters, none of whom, not even the most radicalized, set foot on a battlefield during the rebellion. Yet, the very visibility of Catholic plebeian women during the rebellion belies their comparative invisibility within the historical record, and the absence of any substantial material that details their experiences and responses to radical politics in the 1790s. Of course, the dearth of such sources is a standard feature of 'subaltern studies', but in the case of Irish Catholic women this paucity of source material extends across the social spectrum, as few letters or personal testimonies by women of higher social rank have survived. In this respect, eighteenth-century Irish Catholic women may be understood as the most marginalized members of the 'hidden Ireland'.

The term 'hidden Ireland' was originally coined by Daniel Corkery, in his 1924 study of Gaelic poets in Munster, to describe Catholic Ireland in the eighteenth century. Since

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<sup>1</sup> 'Mary Doyle, Heroine of Ross', in Danny Doyle and Terence Folan (eds), *The Gold Sun of Irish Freedom: 1798 in Song and Story* (Cork and Dublin, 1998), p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Cloney, *A Personal Narrative of those Transactions in the Country Wexford, in which the Author was Engaged, during the Awful Period of 1798* (Dublin, 1832), pp. 38-41.



its publication Corkery's portrayal of the Catholic experience under the penal laws as one of unmitigated religious persecution and servitude has been subject to much revision and modification, as the impact of the penal code on Irish Catholics has been more rigorously investigated.<sup>3</sup> However, the concept of a hidden Ireland may retain some analytical utility. Joep Leersen has recently reclaimed the term as a useful categorization of Catholic Ireland prior to emancipation.<sup>4</sup> Drawing on Habermas' formulation, he argues that what characterized the hidden Ireland under the penal laws was the complete absence of a public sphere.<sup>5</sup>

The absence of a Catholic public sphere does not necessarily mean that Catholics did not engage in the eighteenth-century public sphere. As previously noted, Catholics participated as members of masonic lodges, and intervened in the public sphere as both writers and publishers.<sup>6</sup> However, before the nineteenth century there was no distinctively Catholic print culture or public sphere specifically articulating the interests of that community. This inevitably poses some problems for the historian given the comparatively limited source material for the Irish Catholic community, a dearth which is even more pronounced when considering the experiences of women.<sup>7</sup> Recent

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland. A Study of Gaelic Munster in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin, 1924). S. J. Connolly has described the penal laws as 'a rag bag of measures enacted piecemeal over half a century and only partially enforced'. Louis Cullen has indicated the various means by which propertied Irish Catholic families circumvented penal legislation to retain their estates, and Kevin Whelan has pointed to the persistence of an 'underground' Catholic gentry comprised of Catholic leaseholders or 'middlemen'. S. J. Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power: The Making of Protestant Ireland, 1660-1760* (Oxford, 1992), p. 263; Louis Cullen, 'Catholic Social Classes under the Penal Laws', in Thomas P. Power and Kevin Whelan (eds), *Endurance and Emergence: Catholics in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin, 1990), pp. 57-84; Kevin Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty: Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of Irish Identity, 1760-1830* (Cork, 1996), pp. 3-56; David J. Dickson, 'Catholics and Trade in Eighteenth-Century Ireland: an Old Debate Revisited', in Power and Whelan (eds), *Endurance and Emergence*, pp. 85-100; and Maureen Wall, *Catholic Ireland in the Eighteenth Century: Collected Essays of Maureen Wall*, Gerard O'Brien (ed.) (Dublin, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> Joep Leersen, *Hidden Ireland, Public Sphere* (Dublin, 2002), p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> Leersen, *Hidden Ireland*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>6</sup> On Catholic involvement in the eighteenth-century press see Douglas Simes, 'Ireland, 1760-1820s', in Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows (eds), *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760-1820* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 117, 119. *Finn's Leinster Journal*, published from 1766 by the Catholic Finn family based in Kilkenny, is one such example. Following her husband's death in 1777, Catherine Finn assumed responsibility for the family's bookshop and printing office, and continued to publish the paper until at least 1800. Máire Kennedy, 'Women and Reading in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', in Bernadette Cunningham and Máire Kennedy (eds), *The Experience of Reading: Irish Historical Perspectives* (Dublin, 1999), p. 79.

<sup>7</sup> Siobhán Kilfeather has noted that before the 1770s there is almost no Anglophone writing by Catholic women, but that from the 1770s Catholic women begin to publish works in English. Siobhán Kilfeather, 'The Profession of Letters, 1700-1810', in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, vol. 4, p. 773. Kilfeather does not however, identify any of these Catholic writers

research, such as Karen Harvey's account of the Bellew family, has helped to reconstruct the activities and experiences of Catholic gentry families in the eighteenth century, but sources relating to the female members of such families are scarce.<sup>8</sup> Though individuals such as Theresa Mulally and Nano Nagle feature in the historical record because of their religious work, the lives and voices of women from the Catholic gentry and merchant classes remain largely inaccessible.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, the relevance of the Habermasian bourgeois public sphere to popular politics is questionable.<sup>10</sup> It is perhaps more useful to think in terms of a competing subaltern plebeian public whose physicality and orality distinguishes it from the literate rationality of the bourgeois public.<sup>11</sup> Largely excluded from the bourgeois reading and writing public, it is as figures in the political crowd, or as militant participants in the rebellion, that Catholic plebeian women become visible during the 1790s.

While the previous two chapters have sought to establish Protestant women's relationship to the public sphere, such an approach is clearly more problematic in the case of a marginalized Catholic society. During the 1790s the United Irishmen sought to politicize the Catholic plebeian classes through the intensive dissemination of print

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and I have found it difficult to identify literature, particularly politically-oriented works, by Catholic women from this period. An exception is Mrs F. C. Patrick's novel, *The Irish Heiress* (1797). Although it is impossible to identify conclusively the religion of the author, the content of the novel, which deals with issues including Catholic emancipation, Irish nationalism and the French Revolution, suggests that Patrick was Catholic. This work is considered in greater detail in chapter five.

<sup>8</sup> Karen Harvey, *The Bellews of Mount Bellew: A Catholic Gentry Family in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, 1998). Amongst the papers of the Bellew family there are only a handful of letters from the female members, dealing mainly with familial and financial matters. NLI, Dublin, Bellew papers, MS 27,104; 27,147 and 27,152.

<sup>9</sup> Theresa Mullally (1728-1803) founded the first Catholic school for poor girls in Dublin in 1766, and an orphanage in 1771. See Roland Burke Savage, *A Valiant Dublin Woman, the Story of George's Hill, 1766-1940* (Dublin, 1940). The daughter of a Catholic gentry family, Nano Nagle (1718-84) was educated in France. She opened her first school in Cork around 1755, and in 1775 founded the Sisters of Charitable Instruction, later the Presentation Order. See T. J. Walsh, *Nano Nagle and the Presentation Sisters* (Dublin, 1959); Rosemary Raughter, 'A Discreet Benevolence: Female Philanthropy and the Catholic Resurgence in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', *Women's History Review*, 4 (1997), pp. 465-487; Mary Peckham Magray, *The Transforming Power of the Nuns: Women, Religion and Cultural Change in Ireland, 1750-1900* (Oxford, 1998); and Maria Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Cambridge, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> Habermas clearly distinguishes between the liberal model of the bourgeois public sphere and the plebeian public sphere: 'Formally they have certain traits in common; but each differs in its own way from the literary character of a public sphere constituted by private people putting reason to use - one is illiterate, the other, after a fashion, post-literate'. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Thomas Burger trans. (Cambridge, 1992), p. xviii.

<sup>11</sup> See Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actual Existing Democracy', in Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge MA, 1992), pp. 109-

media and the fusion of Catholic grievances with democratic rhetoric. This can be understood as an attempt to incorporate previously excluded groups into the critically-debating public sphere, and the politicization theme has been a dominant strand in recent historiography. However, the degree to which revolutionary ideology supplanted pre-established grievances and sectarian impulses, particularly in those areas in which the rebellion was concentrated, remains a contested issue.<sup>12</sup> Recognizing that even the more radicalized Catholic political constituency of the 1790s retained structural and ideological links with the underground political protest culture of 'native' Ireland, this chapter will begin with an overview of Irish popular protest from the 1760s, examining the use of sexual symbolism in Irish agrarian agitation, and the significance of female figuration and sexual inversion in Gaelic culture. Such symbolic representations could act as an important means of imagining and subverting structures of power in vernacular discourse. Though women did not actively participate in protest groups such as the Whiteboys, they could assume a public and political role through the waking and lamenting traditions. The shift in popular politics in the 1790s is the subject of the following section, and will explore women's involvement in the political crowd, the Defender movement and the United Irishmen. Although there is evidence of plebeian women's political participation during the 1790s, it is much more difficult to ascertain the degree to which they absorbed the United Irishmen's radical ideology. The anti-clerical character of revolutionary politics in the 1790s might be expected to have presented a particular obstacle to Catholic women's engagement with revolutionary politics, given women's traditional association with religious piety.<sup>13</sup> Yet there appears to have been little tension between women's religious convictions and their involvement

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<sup>12</sup> The politicization thesis has become the dominant framework for understanding plebeian politics during the 1790s. See 'Introduction', p. 11. However, while there is a degree of consensus that the United Irishmen were relatively successful in the dissemination of radical ideology, the depiction of the 1798 rebellion, particularly in Wexford, as an ideologically motivated revolution, an interpretation most closely associated with Kevin Whelan, remains controversial. Critics of Whelan have noted the relative weakness of the United Irish organisation in Wexford prior to the rebellion and have pointed to the importance of local and sectarian animosities in shaping the character of the Wexford insurgency. See James S. Donnelly, Jr, 'Sectarianism in 1798 and in Catholic nationalist memory', in Laurence M. Geary (ed.), *Rebellion and Remembrance in Modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 15-37; and Tom Dunne, *Rebellions: Memoir, Memory and 1798* (Dublin, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Accounts of the French Revolution have noted that the majority of French women rejected the revolution's secular republicanism and continued to adhere to both the Catholic Church and the monarchy, playing a significant role in the counter-revolution. See Olwen Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution* (Toronto, 1989), p. 130; and Dorinda Outram, 'Le Langage Mâle de la Vertu: Women and the Discourse of the French Revolution', in Peter Burke and Roy Porter (eds),

with radical politics, an absence that points to the conflation of religious and political beliefs in popular politics. The concluding section considers female experiences during the rebellion, indicating how women perceived the rebellion as a dramatic reversal of both the religious and the social order, and outlining the roles assumed by women during and after the rising.

## I

Without a public sphere in which to coordinate the Catholic interest on a national level, political protest in the hidden Ireland remained localized and focused on immediate grievances rather than broader political and national concerns. In the predominantly peasant economy of Catholic Ireland this protest manifested itself as agrarian agitation directed against alterations in land usage and payment of tithes. Whilst there were outbreaks of peasant disturbance throughout the eighteenth century, the 1760s witnessed the development of major peasant movements. In the winter of 1761-1762 a loose collection of agrarian insurgents collectively known as Whiteboys appeared in counties Tipperary, Cork, Limerick and Waterford. By the end of the century Whiteboyism had spread to nearly every county outside Ulster and had become the dominant mode of Irish rural protest. The movement appears to have been immediately provoked by the enclosure of land by graziers in the Munster region, which denied the peasantry the use of land deemed communal for tillage. Other grievances included unfair rent levels and the payment of tithes to the Protestant Church of Ireland, although the Catholic clergy also came under attack for charging excessive dues. The actions of the Whiteboys ranged from the levelling of ditches, hedges, walls, and fences to more violent attacks upon tithe-farmers and proctors.<sup>14</sup>

One feature that distinguished the Whiteboys from earlier agrarian insurgents was their use of a system of oaths to bind their members together. The original Whiteboy oaths involved swearing allegiance to a mythical female sovereign known as Queen Sive

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*The Social History of Language* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 129-130.

<sup>14</sup> Specifically the Whiteboys were an agrarian society that operated in the 1760s and 1770s. However, Whiteboyism is also used as an umbrella term to describe rural secret societies in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Ireland. Michael Beames, *Peasants and Power: The Whiteboy Movements and their Control in pre-Famine Ireland* (Sussex, 1983), pp. 1-41; and James Donnelly, 'The Whiteboy Movement, 1761-5', *Irish Historical Studies*, 81 (1978), pp. 20-54.

Oulagh and sometimes Shevane Meskill. A contemporary account of the movement related how the Whiteboy councils met to consider 'everything relative to her Majesty Queen Sive's interests' and 'issued orders in her Majesty's name'.<sup>15</sup> The importance of symbolic female figures to the movement was also suggested by their tendency to adopt female apparel when undertaking missions. For the Whiteboys this meant the wearing of white dresses from which they derived their name.<sup>16</sup> This tradition of political transvestism persisted into the nineteenth century amongst agrarian protest groups such as the Molly Maguires and the Lady Rocks.<sup>17</sup> Both these symbolic practices derived from traditional gender tropes in Irish political culture: the female personification of sovereignty and the theme of sexual inversion.

Female personification of land and sovereignty in the Irish literary and political tradition stretches back into the early medieval period and possibly before; the Whiteboys' occasional representations of Queen Sive as a one-eyed hag living at the foot of the mountains can be identified in pre-Christian Celtic traditions.<sup>18</sup> According to this gendered political symbolism, the relationship between a legitimate ruler and his people is configured in terms of a sexual union between an actual historical male and a mythological female, variously addressed as Banba or Fodla, or as the wife of one of the legendary kings of Irish tradition.<sup>19</sup> In eighteenth-century Gaelic *aisling* poems female representations of Ireland became intimately connected with the Jacobite cause, the poems describing a dream or vision of a beautiful, weeping young woman awaiting the return of her rightful partner, an allusion to the exiled Stuart dynasty.<sup>20</sup>

The sexual inversion trope, though not as dominant as that of female personification, also features in eighteenth-century Gaelic literature and can be understood as a politically significant literary device. The theme of Domhnall Ó Colmain's 'Parliament

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<sup>15</sup> 'A short narrative of some disturbances which happened in the counties of Limerick, Cork, Tipperary and Waterford, from the month of November 1761 to the month of April 1762' [1762] reprinted in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, vol. 4 (Cork, 2002), p. 287.

<sup>16</sup> W. E. H. Lecky, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 2 (London, 1913 [1902]), p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Beames, *Peasants and Power*, p. 98.

<sup>18</sup> Beames, *Peasants and Power*, p. 100.

<sup>19</sup> Máirín Nic Eoin, 'Secrets and Disguises? Caitlín Ní Uallacháin and other Female Personages in Eighteenth-Century Irish Political Poetry', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 11 (1996), p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> The *aisling* tradition is most closely associated with the eighteenth-century bardic poet Aogán Ó Rathaille. On the connection between *aisling* poetry and Jacobite politics see Éamonn Ó Ciardha, *Ireland and the Jacobite Cause, 1685-1766: A Fatal Attachment* (Dublin, 2002), pp. 158-161.

na mBan' (The Parliament of Women c.1703) is the convening of a parliament at Glanmire, County Cork, to consider the role of women in society and consists of 32 speeches delivered by the assembled women. The first nine of these are a translation into Irish from Latin of Erasmus' 'The Council of Women'.<sup>21</sup> Brian Merriman's 'Cúirt an Mheán Oíche' (The Midnight Court c. 1780) similarly features an inversion of the social order in the form of a court ruled by women. In a parody of the *aisling* mode the poet dreams of a monstrous 'vision woman' who leads him to the court presided over by Aoibheall, the queen of the fairies. The assembly of women has gathered to judge bachelors like the poet, whom they blame for the falling marriage rate.<sup>22</sup> The poem concludes with the court sentencing Merriman to be flayed on account of his refusal to marry. Bawdy and sexually frank, the poem's characters argue for an end to clerical celibacy, the legitimization of bastardy and the rejection of marriage in favour of uninhibited sexual relations.<sup>23</sup>

Declan Kiberd has discerned in both these works a proto-feminist agenda. He contends that these visions of courts or parliaments ruled by women drew on the enhanced status enjoyed by Irish women in Gaelic law and society. According to this reading, the unrepressed articulation of female desire in 'The Midnight Court' derived from a liberalism evident in earlier Gaelic traditions and which had been suppressed by Anglicization.<sup>24</sup> This is perhaps an overly literal interpretation that ignores the purpose, rarely feminist, traditionally attributed to tropes of sexual inversion in European culture. Seán Ó Tuama identifies 'The Midnight Court' as drawing on the medieval European tradition of 'The Court of Love', yet an even earlier literary precursor for both 'The Midnight Court' and 'The Parliament of Women' is the Greek dramatist Aristophanes' comedy, *The Assemblywomen* (c. 391-393 B.C.).<sup>25</sup> As in 'The Parliament of Women',

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<sup>21</sup> Three versions of the text were produced, the third probably written for a woman. In this version the women's names were drawn from the surnames of well known aristocratic Munster families such as the Fitzgibbons. Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Eve and her Sisters', in *The Field Day Anthology*, vol. 4, p. 160.

<sup>22</sup> In fact from the 1770s onwards Ireland witnessed a population explosion. The women also complain that men are reluctant to marry when they are young although the Irish peasantry had one of the youngest marriage rates in Europe. See Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Gormlaith and her Sisters, c. 750-1800', in *The Field Day Anthology*, vol. 4, p. 243.

<sup>23</sup> 'Down with marriage! It's out of date;/ It exhausts the stock and cripples the state ... Let lovers in every lane extended/Struggle and strain as God intended/ And locked in frenzy bring to birth/ The morning glory of the earth'. Brian Merriman, 'The Midnight Court' trans. Frank O'Connor, in Brendan Kennelly (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Irish Verse* (Harmondsworth, 1981), p. 107.

<sup>24</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (Dublin, 2000), p. 193.

<sup>25</sup> Seán Ó Tuama, *Repossessions: Selected Essays on the Irish Literary Heritage* (Cork, 1995), p. 64.

the play centres on the Athenian women's decision to assume control of the city's assembly, and like the 'The Midnight Court', once in power they issue new laws to govern sexual relations, proposing that wives and children be held in common.<sup>26</sup> Given this broader European heritage it seems implausible that these works refer to a distinctively Irish pre-plantation system of gender relations. The role played by gender reversal in pre-modern European carnivalesque and festive rituals has been explained as both a means of reinforcing the existing social order, clarifying the structure by the process of reversing it, or as a more subversive act and form of protest. Natalie Zemon Davis suggests that the connection between women and the disorderly meant that the adoption of female dress by men acted as a sanction for violence and disobedience. Men drew on the unruliness of women, which was often invoked in festivals and fertility rites, as a means of defending the community and criticizing an unjust social order.<sup>27</sup> Michael Beames has pointed to the links between the Whiteboys' uniforms and Irish peasant custom and ceremony, male transvestism being associated with November and May Eve, folk drama and the Wren Hunt.<sup>28</sup>

However, it is possible that in the Irish context the use of sexual inversion in popular protest had deeper political significance. Discussing the role of the *aisling* in Catholic political culture Kevin Whelan has noted that:

The power of its voice in Gaelic Ireland ... lay not in its elegiac cadences and dream-world mistiness but in its allegorical and prophetic intent, which could easily shade into a radical rhetoric of the reversal of the 'ins' and 'outs' of Irish society – English/Irish, Protestant/Catholic, Hanoverian/Jacobite'.<sup>29</sup>

Eighteenth-century Catholic ideology was premised on a view of the current social order as a world turned upside down, in which rightful rulers were dispossessed and the majority religion outlawed. In 'The Parliament of Women', the first version of which was written in the 1690s following the Jacobite defeat, the idea of a parliament of

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<sup>26</sup> Aristophanes, 'The Assemblywomen', trans. David Barrett and Alan H. Sommerstein, *The Birds and Other Plays* (London, 1978), pp. 221-264.

<sup>27</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Women on Top', in Robert Shoemaker and Mary Vincent (eds) *Gender and History in Western Europe* (London, 1998), p. 301.

<sup>28</sup> Beames, *Peasants and Power*, p. 99. The wren hunt was held on 26 December. After capturing and killing a wren the male participants paraded through the town wearing masks and women's clothing.

<sup>29</sup> Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty*, p. 11.

women may be understood as underlining the unnaturalness of this political reversal. Similarly, Merriman's court of women is supposedly instituted as an alternative to the English courts and English law. In his discussion of female figuration and allegory in Irish vernacular political discourse, Luke Gibbons suggests that there is an instability of reference within Irish allegory, to the point where 'it is not at all clear where the figural ends, and the literal begins'. According to Gibbons under a colonial system in which the entire native population, male and female shares the condition of women in the metropolitan center, 'the recourse to female imagery in poetry and popular protest turns the colonial stereotype against itself, positing an alternative 'feminized' public sphere ... against the official patriarchal order of the state'.<sup>30</sup>

This is a somewhat problematic assertion, both because it assumes that those involved in movements such as the Whiteboys would have been familiar with the feminization trope used in English discourse about Ireland, but also because it suggests that the 'feminization' of the Irish public sphere translates into an enhanced public role for women in political protest. Yet, as the name indicates, the participants in the Whiteboy movement were predominantly young men and there is no evidence of women taking part in their activities. However, Gibbons' suggestion that the blurring of the boundaries between the personal and the political, and the inscription of the physicality of the body in public space, can enable women's political engagement, is perhaps more persuasive, particularly when considering women's role in Irish mortuary rituals.<sup>31</sup> Women only become visible in accounts of the Whiteboy movement at the execution of their husbands, brothers and sons. Their presence at these moments drew on an established female role which could be construed as political. One of the most notorious cases of political persecution, in Munster in the 1760s, centred on Fr. Nicholas Sheehy, a priest sympathetic to the Whiteboys' grievances, and the victim of a judicial murder in Clonmel in 1766. His head was placed on a spike outside Clonmel gaol where it stayed for twenty years until restored to his sister Catherine Burke, possibly the same sister who during Sheehy's funeral procession smeared the doorposts of the parish priest's house with her brother's fresh blood, on account of his refusal to

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<sup>30</sup> Luke Gibbons, 'Introduction', in *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork, 1996), pp. 20-21.

<sup>31</sup> Gibbons, 'Introduction', p. 21



defend Sheehy in court.<sup>32</sup> When Sheehy's cousin was executed in the same year a woman was responsible for snatching his severed head from the soldiers, and carrying it off in her apron. She later met Edmund Sheehy's funeral procession where the head was added to his coffin to be interred with the body.<sup>33</sup> In Kilkenny in 1765 six Whiteboys were found guilty of murder and during their execution the hanged men were cut down, their breasts scored and their heads struck off in full view of the assembled crowd. The wife of one of the men, John Brennan, seized his severed head and carried it through the streets and shops of Kilkenny collecting money for his funeral.<sup>34</sup>

This emphasis on the preservation of the body and the proper enactment of funeral rituals, is part of what Gibbons has described as an Irish 'dramaturgy of death', in which mourning and stage-managed funerals acted as weapons of political resistance and 'both physical and symbolic control of the corpse became a political struggle, as if the dead lived beyond the grave in the popular imagination'.<sup>35</sup> Women assumed a central role in Irish mortuary ritual, most notably in the form of the *bean chaointe* or 'keening woman'. These women, often elderly, were hired by bereaved relatives to cry over the body and compose extempore verses in praise of the deceased. Sometimes they would compete with each other, trying to outdo the others in their compositions, and cursing their rivals. Their lamenting would continue throughout the wake and during the funeral procession, the keeners accompanying the coffin to the grave. If the community experienced the loss of one of its members through a natural death from old age a 'merry wake' was more likely to take place, led by a male 'borekeen' who was responsible for organizing games and amusements in a carnivalesque spirit. In contrast, *bean chaointe* were associated with untimely deaths, such as that of the young mother in childbirth, the child who fell ill, or potentially the execution of a young man.<sup>36</sup>

Whilst the professional keeners were likely to be from the lower classes, there are

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<sup>32</sup> Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics and the Colonial Sublime* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 37.

<sup>33</sup> R. R. Madden, *The United Irishmen their Lives and Times*, (New York, 1916 [1842-46]), vol. 1, p. 130.

<sup>34</sup> James Donnelly, 'The Whiteboy Movement', p. 50.

<sup>35</sup> Gibbons, *Burke and Ireland*, p. 36.

<sup>36</sup> Gearóid Ó Cruaíoch, 'The Merry Wake', in James S. Donnelly and Kerby A. Miller (eds), *Irish Popular Culture, 1650-1850* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 182-183, 196.

several laments in Gaelic literature attributed to women of higher social status. As many of these have only survived in oral form it is often difficult to identify conclusively the author, but the fact that the verses were attributed to female relations of the dead men is in itself significant. The most famous eighteenth-century example of this tradition is *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* (The Lament for Art O'Leary c. 1774) attributed to Eileen O'Connell, the aunt of Daniel O'Connell. The composition is a lament for Eileen's husband Art O'Leary. A member of one of the few propertied Catholic families in West Cork, O'Leary was shot and killed in 1773 at the end of a long conflict with a local Protestant magistrate Abraham Morris. Louis Cullen has persuasively argued that the background to the lament must be understood not as an isolated instance of the enforcement of the penal laws, nor as a local conflict between two men, but as emerging from an intensely political context. The Townshend Lord-Lieutenancy (1766-1772) had witnessed a more lenient attitude towards Catholics and a more relaxed interpretation of the penal laws. In reaction, magistrates such as Morris sought to reassert Protestant authority through the enforcement of legislation which had largely fallen into desuetude, such as the article relating to Catholic ownership of a horse. In this context the lament can be understood as having deep political resonance for the Catholic population of Munster, and as forming part of corpus of commentaries on the political situation in the province, which included a lament on Nicholas Sheehy attributed to his sister, Catherine, and an earlier lament for the executed Jacobite James Cotter.<sup>37</sup>

The verses follow the formal conventions of the lament, relating Art's distinguished lineage, describing his impressive bearing and fine clothes, and heaping calumny upon those who murdered him, whom Eileen identifies generally as the English: 'The English lowered their head before you/ Not out of love for you/But hate and fear/ For, sweetheart of my soul/ The English killed you'.<sup>38</sup> She also extols Art's qualities as a husband, hailing him both as her lover and her friend, and praising his ability as a provider of material comforts:

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<sup>37</sup> Louis Cullen, 'The Contemporary and Later Politics of *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoire*', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 17 (1993), pp. 7-38. See also Ó Tuama, *Repossessions*, pp. 78-100.

<sup>38</sup> Eileen O'Leary, 'The Lament for Art O'Leary' trans. Frank O'Connor in Kennelly (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Irish Verse*, p. 79. For an account of the traditional conventions of the lament see Angela Bourke, 'The Irish Traditional Lament and the Grieving Process', *Women's Studies International Forum*,

You gave me everything.  
There were parlours whitened for me,  
Bedrooms painted for me,  
Ovens reddened for me,  
Loaves baked for me,  
Joints spitted for me,  
Beds made for me  
To take my ease on flock  
Until the milking time  
And later if I pleased.<sup>39</sup>

She vows to avenge her husband by pursuing Morris through the courts, travelling to England if necessary: 'I'll go overseas/ To plead before the King,/ And if the King be deaf/ I'll settle things alone/ With the black-blooded rogue/ That killed my man on me.'<sup>40</sup>

Angela Bourke has identified a 'feminist' potential within the lamenting tradition to the extent that it enabled women 'to speak loudly and without inhibition'.<sup>41</sup> She also notes the aspect of female collaboration in the keening process whereby women collaborated both synchronically – taking turns to weep over the same dead body and forming a chorus – and diachronically – remembering and quoting each other's laments often over several generations.<sup>42</sup> Indeed 'The Lament for Art O'Leary' was first transcribed from the Cork *bean chaointe*, Norrie Singleton (Nora Ní Shindíle) in the nineteenth century.<sup>43</sup> The lament can also be understood as facilitating the translation of personal grief into a political context. The feminization of this form both privileged women's role in the commemoration process, and allowed for a distinctively female interpretation of the qualities of the deceased, which foregrounded the private virtues of the husband and father. It is an approach that differs significantly from the marginalization and suppression of women's grief in the classical republican tradition, a theme that will be

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4 (1988), p. 288.

<sup>39</sup> O'Leary, 'The Lament for Art O'Leary', p. 79. Commenting on the portrayal of Irish Gaelic gender relations within the poem, Declan Kiberd contends that not only does Eileen celebrate Art's manliness throughout the poem, but she also suggests that he is so secure in his masculinity that he can explore his 'feminine' side, a feature that distinguishes him from the male Protestant planters and which earns him the admiration of the local Protestant women. Kiberd, *Irish Classics*, p. 174.

<sup>40</sup> O'Leary, 'The Lament for Art O'Leary', p. 86.

<sup>41</sup> Angela Bourke, 'Lamenting the Dead', *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. 4, p. 1366.

<sup>42</sup> Bourke, 'Lamenting the Dead', p. 1366.

<sup>43</sup> Cullen, 'The Contemporary and Later Politics of *Caoineadh Art Uí Laoire*', p. 29.

explored in greater detail in chapter seven.<sup>44</sup>

## II

Eighteenth-century agrarian protest groups such as the Whiteboys can be understood as operating within a 'moral economy'; that is their objectives were largely limited to specific socio-economic grievances and did not explicitly encompass the overthrow of the ruling order.<sup>45</sup> In the context of the potato economy the peasant groups' forcible claim to land for the cultivation of potatoes has been identified as essentially analogous to the 'food riot' which in pre-revolutionary Europe constituted the primary vehicle for the articulation of social grievances by the plebeian classes.<sup>46</sup> A distinctive feature of the food riot was the relatively frequent participation of women, who often played a key role in leading and inciting riots, a role that may be understood as a form of proto-citizenship.<sup>47</sup> The comparatively much lower incidence of food riots in Ireland has been commented on, although E. P. Thompson has pointed to evidence of such riots during the eighteenth century and the participation of women in a Wexford riot in 1757. This, Thompson concludes, indicates that Ireland had some tradition of the food riot but that this tradition weakened as the century progressed.<sup>48</sup> Whilst they may be considered within the context of the moral economy, the activities of the agrarian secret societies were much more likely to exclude women than the food riot, involving, as we have seen a more formal oath-bound system of organization, more explicitly violent methods and furtive night-time operations. The adoption of female dress however, may suggest

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<sup>44</sup> For a discussion of the republican gendering of grief and mourning during the French Revolution see Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca and London, 1988), pp. 152-168.

<sup>45</sup> Beames, *Peasants and Power*, p. 28.

<sup>46</sup> Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly Jr (eds), 'Introduction: The Tradition of Violence' in S. Clark and J.S. Donnelly Jr (eds), *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780-1914* (Manchester, 1983), p. 27.

<sup>47</sup> Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley, 1995), pp. 151, 158; John Bohstedt, 'The Myth of the Feminine Food Riot: Women as Proto-Citizens in English Community Politics, 1790-1810,' in Harriet B. Applewhite and Darline G. Levy (eds), *Women and Politics in the Age of the Democratic Revolution* (Michigan, 1990), pp. 21-60.

<sup>48</sup> George Rudé, *Protest and Punishment: The Story of the Social and Political Protesters Transported to Australia 1788-1868* (Oxford, 1978), p. 57; E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy Reviewed' in *Customs in Common* (London, 1991), pp. 295-296. Roger Wells has pointed to evidence of women's participation in the food plundering in Ennis during the Irish famine 1799-1801. Roger Wells, 'The Irish Famine of 1799-1801: Market Culture, Moral Economies and Social Protest', in Adrian Randall and Andrew Charlesworth (eds), *Markets, Market Culture and Popular Protest in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Liverpool, 1996), p. 181.

some awareness of an association between women and riotous behaviour as detailed by Zemon Davis. The absence of a strong food riot tradition thus cut off a possible channel for Catholic plebeian women's political involvement, although there were other forms of crowd politics in which women could participate and which became increasingly radicalized over the course of the 1790s.

Thomas Bartlett has identified the anti-militia disturbances of 1793 as marking the end of the moral economy in Ireland. The raising of an Irish militia involved the balloting of Catholics into county regiments that were to be stationed solely in Ireland, although rumours circulated that regiments would be sent abroad to fight in the imminent war with France.<sup>49</sup> The militia riots also had an important gender dimension, having been partly provoked by the failure to include a provision for the wives and children of balloted men in the 1793 militia act.<sup>50</sup> What distinguished the militia riots from previous disturbances was the dramatic increase in levels of violence and the more 'anti-state' mentality of the Catholic peasantry who had abandoned their former deference to Protestant landlords and the Catholic clergy.<sup>51</sup> This shift in the political behaviour of the Catholic masses was largely a result of the intensive politicization process that had accompanied the campaign for Catholic relief between 1791 and 1793. Following the split between the radicalized middle-class members of the Catholic Committee and their quiescent aristocratic colleagues in 1791, the advanced Dublin leadership of the Committee, which included several United Irishmen, initiated a programme of mass mobilization. The campaign began with the collection of signatures for a petition demanding Catholic enfranchisement, and the election of delegates from throughout Ireland to the Catholic Convention held in Dublin in December 1792. Having secured the reluctant cooperation of the Catholic clergy, the Committee was able to mobilize popular support in the furthest outreaches of the country.<sup>52</sup> As James

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<sup>49</sup> Thomas Bartlett, 'An End to Moral Economy: The Irish Militia Disturbances of 1793', *Past and Present*, 99 (1983), pp. 41-64.

<sup>50</sup> During riots in Carlow in May 1793 among colliery and quarry workers the catch call was that the militia act would deprive families of their fathers. Henry McAnally, *The Irish Militia, 1793-1816: A Social and Military Study* (Dublin, 1949), pp. 40, 265-267; Mary O'Dowd, 'The Political Writings and Public Voices of Women, c. 1500-1800', in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. 4, p. 11.

<sup>51</sup> Bartlett, 'An End to Moral Economy', pp. 41-64.

<sup>52</sup> On the Catholic Committee's mobilization of mass popular support between 1791-1792 see Jim Smyth, *The Men of No Property: Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the Late Eighteenth-Century* (London, 1992), pp. 52-78; and Dáire Keogh, *The French Disease: The Catholic Church and Irish Radicalism, 1790-1800* (Dublin, 1993), pp. 47-67.

Smyth observes: 'None – except perhaps women – were considered too humble to add their signatures or marks to petitions or to cast their vote for delegates to the convention'.<sup>53</sup>

Although Catholic women were not involved in the signing of petitions and election of delegates they did participate in more spontaneous political protests. Major riots occurred in Dublin in 1793 and 1795 both of which involved women. The series of riots in 1793 were in response to economic depression, exacerbated by the war with France, which had caused mass unemployment and price inflation. Economic hardship would have been particularly felt by female workers, especially weavers, who were also threatened by male journeymen weavers hostile to women's participation in the workforce.<sup>54</sup> On 8 May 1793 thousands of Liberty weavers rose up and looted bakers and butchers' shops, destroying English cloth goods. Reporting on the upheaval William Drennan wrote: 'The Liberty weavers in the silk, worsted and cotton lines are in great ferment and the women are in a rage'.<sup>55</sup> Earl Fitzwilliam's recall in 1795 provoked a full-scale and more specifically political riot on the arrival of Lord Camden in March of that year, as it became clear that hopes for complete Catholic emancipation would not be realized. Smyth has even queried the interpretation of the 1795 riots as a spontaneous crowd action, suggesting that they might be more accurately described as a 'popular, revolutionary or republican movement'. The United Irishmen seem to have been the instigators, and some of the rioters were reported as wearing green cockades emblazoned with the motto, 'Liberty, Equality and no lord lieutenant'.<sup>56</sup> The chancellor, John Fitzgibbon, Lord Clare, was singled out by the crowd for particular wrath as he

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<sup>53</sup> Smyth, *The Men of No Property*, p. 52.

<sup>54</sup> Smyth, *The Men of No Property*, p. 144. This hostility to women's participation in the workforce was not new. In 1782 a Dublin worsted manufacturer gave evidence to the Common's Grand Committee of Trade that male journeyman felt 'the women had not a right to work at men's work, it was their inheritance'. Cited in Imelda Brophy, 'Women in the Workforce', in David Dickson (ed.) *The Gorgeous Mask: Dublin 1700-1850* (Dublin, 1987), p. 57.

<sup>55</sup> William Drennan to Samuel McTier, 8 August 1793 in Jean Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 1, p. 542. The textile industry was strongly represented within the United Irishmen and the movement sought to link its programme with the economic grievances of the textile workers. The society issued a declaration advocating the non-consumption of English goods and Wolfe Tone produced a pamphlet *To the Manufacturers of Dublin, by a Liberty Weaver* (1793). In the pamphlet he blamed the current depression on the war with France and asked 'how a poor man, like one of us, will be able to keep his family at all', an indication that he clearly imagined his audience as male. Theobald Wolfe Tone, 'To the manufacturers of Dublin, by a Liberty Weaver' [1793], in T. W. Moody, R. B. McDowell and C. J. Woods (eds), *The Writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone, 1763-1798*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1998), p. 419.

<sup>56</sup> Smyth, *The Men of No Property*, p. 149.

was identified with the anti-Catholic interest. They pursued Clare's carriage through Dublin hurling stones, and continued the attack when he arrived at this residence. Clare's sister, Lady Arabella Jeffreys, who was more favourably inclined to the Catholic cause than her brother, described the crowd that surrounded Fitzgibbon's house:

... a ferocious mob of no less than 6,000 men and several hundred women, assembled together in College Green, and all along the avenue leading to my brother's house ... The male part of the insurgents were armed with pistols, cutlasses, sledges, saws, crowbars, and every other weapon necessary to break open my brother's house; and the women were all of them armed with their aprons full of paving stones.<sup>57</sup>

Catholic women's involvement in violent confrontations is also apparent in the early stages of the Defender movement that emerged from the sectarian disturbances in Armagh in the 1780s. A contemporary account of the development of the Defenders relates a skirmish in 1788 between the Catholic group and the Armagh Volunteers, recently raised to control the increasingly violent encounters between the Defenders and the Protestant Peep-o-Day boys, recording that 'the women in a collective body attacked the volunteers, and set the dogs at them; and the Defenders sent them a challenge, that they were ready to fight them.'<sup>58</sup> In a subsequent encounter with the Volunteers women again took a leading role in inciting violence. According to John Byrne, the women of Drumbee, following a brief altercation between the Benburb Volunteers and local Catholics, gathered to abuse the soldiers, 'gave the volunteers a broad-side of tongue weapons, and called them a pack of Peep-o-Day boys, that armed to destroy their neighbours, with other very strong language'.<sup>59</sup> Vowing vengeance for the 'insults that were offered to their wounded feelings' the Volunteer company engaged the local Catholics in the so called 'Battle of Drumbee' in which two men were killed. The adoption by women of such a provocative role correlates with patterns of plebeian women's political behaviour in revolutionary France, where incitements to action were a recurrent female activity in the revolutionary movement. In her study of the women

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<sup>57</sup> Lady Arabella Jeffreys quoted in Constantia Maxwell, *Dublin under the Georges, 1714-1830* (London, 1956), p. 38.

<sup>58</sup> John Byrne, 'An impartial account of the late disturbances in the county of Armagh ... since the year 1784, down to the year 1791' [1792] in David W. Miller (ed.), *Peep O'Day Boys and Defenders. Selected Documents on the County Armagh Disturbances, 1784-1796* (Belfast, 1990), p. 57.

<sup>59</sup> John Byrne, 'An impartial account', p. 60.

of revolutionary Paris, Dominique Godineau has also pointed to the importance of women's insults to this process, as women assumed the role of 'firebrands, those who use words to incite action'.<sup>60</sup> This suggests the public and performative roles that women could assume within a largely oral political culture, where verbal skill was often identified as a particularly female attribute.<sup>61</sup>

Whilst these examples demonstrate the involvement of women in the early stages of the Defender movement, it is more difficult to trace women's participation in the movement as it developed into a more structured organization and spread from Armagh through the rest of the country. A merger between the Defenders and the United Irishmen was negotiated between 1795-1796, though there may have been links between the two groups as early as 1792, and it appears that by 1797-1798 the Defenders had ceased to be active as a separate organization. One of the key architects of the United Irish-Defender merger, Charles Hamilton Teeling, related that in the aftermath of the Fitzwilliam recall the United Irish cause spread rapidly through the country, animating both men and women of the middle and lower classes. According to Teeling:

A green velvet stock, or a silk robe, with a shamrock device, were the emblems of national feeling; and the former was not unfrequently presented to the youthful patriot by the fair daughter of Erin, as the pledge of a more tender regard. The enthusiasm of the females even exceeded the ardour of the men, ... and in all the rustic festivities, *that* youth met a cold and forbidding reception from the partner of his choice, who, either from apathy or timidity, had not yet subscribed to the test of union.<sup>62</sup>

As the United Irishmen developed into a genuinely mass movement from 1797 there was much greater recruitment from amongst the lower orders, and this was accompanied by the incorporation of women into the society. By April 1797 the government informer Francis Higgins was reporting that 'women are equally sworn

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<sup>60</sup> Dominique Godineau, 'Masculine and Feminine Political Practice during the French Revolution', in Applewhite and Levy (eds), *Women and Politics in the Age of the Democratic Revolution*, p. 75.

<sup>61</sup> On the intimate connection between women and oral political forms amongst the French popular classes see Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern* (New Jersey, 2001), pp. 29.

<sup>62</sup> Charles Hamilton Teeling, *History of the Irish Rebellion of 1798 and Sequel to the History of the Irish Rebellion of 1798* (Shannon, 1972 [1828]), p. 10.



with men'.<sup>63</sup> However, it remains unclear whether women entered the society on equal terms with men. In his study of the infamous Wicklow rebel turned informer, Bridget 'Croppy' Dolan, Ruan O' Donnell concludes that it is unlikely that Dolan would have been inducted into the organization's basic twelve 'man' cell, or that she would have taken the 'military' oath binding members to obey orders issued by their superiors and to turn out to support their French allies. It is more probable that she would have been administered the 'oath of secrecy' that merely bound the taker not to reveal the activities of the organization, and which was the initial step towards full membership.<sup>64</sup> During the trial of William Byrne, Dolan testified that she had attended the nocturnal meetings which had been held by the United Irishmen in Wicklow over the winter of 1797-1798, and she related that at a meeting in the townland of Tombreen in January 1798 'women as well as men were sworn'.<sup>65</sup> According to the north Wicklow magistrate William Colthurst, every woman from 'Tinahinch bridge to Roundwood was a United Irishman'.<sup>66</sup> Women's position in the movement appears to have become even more important following the imposition of martial law in March 1798, when many prominent United Irishmen were forced into hiding. In his memoirs, Miles Byrne recalled how women were charged with ensuring that the resolve of the community did not flag:

Ned Fennell, Nicholas Murphy and I agreed, the last time we met, previous to the insurrection, that through the means of our female friends, we should do everything in our power to keep the people from desponding, for we had ever reason to hope, that ere long there would be orders received for a general rising from the Directory.<sup>67</sup>

The question of the extent and depth of popular politicization during the 1790s remains a complex issue, even more so when women's politicization is considered. While it is evident that Catholic women participated in the United Irish movement it is more difficult to ascertain whether they understood the movement's aims in terms of radical-

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<sup>63</sup> NAI, Dublin, Rebellion papers, 620/18/14. Francis Higgins, 29 January 1797.

<sup>64</sup> Ruan O'Donnell, 'Bridget 'Croppy Bidy' Dolan: Wicklow's anti-Heroine of 1798', in Keogh and Furlong (eds), *The Women of 1798*, p. 93.

<sup>65</sup> *The Tryal of William Byrne of Ballymanus County of Wicklow, Esq. On Charges of Being a Principal Leader in the late rebellion, and Concerned in Several Murders in the Same ...* (Dublin, 1799), p. 9.

<sup>66</sup> Peter O'Shaughnessy (ed.), *Rebellion in Wicklow. General Joseph Holt's Personal Account of 1798* (Dublin, 1998), p. 38.

<sup>67</sup> Miles Byrne, *Memoirs of Miles Byrne* (Shannon, 1972 [1863]), p. 36.

republican ideology, or whether the radical agenda was subsumed by traditional grievances and religious revivalism. Recent scholarship has revealed the many discontinuities between Defenderism and the agrarian secret societies of the 1760s, 1770s and 1780s. Marianne Elliott's analysis of Defender membership demonstrates that it was a predominantly urban and artisanal movement rather than a peasant insurgency.<sup>68</sup> A distinction has also been drawn between the largely local and immediate grievances of groups like the Whiteboys and the more national and political concerns of the Defenders. As with Protestant radicals and reformers the French Revolution had a significant impact on the Catholic Defenders. Elliott has even suggested that the Defenders had made contact with the French by 1792 and that they were espousing a crude form of republicanism prior to the establishment of the United Irishmen.<sup>69</sup> However, as Smyth observes, popular Catholic enthusiasm for the French Revolution involved a curious fusion of the new radicalism with traditional native politics. As Catholic Ireland's historical ally, France still figured in the popular imagination as the 'deliverer'. Equally, revolutionary doctrines and 'levelling' principles drew on much older Catholic resentments stemming from seventeenth-century dispossessions. Combined with the campaign for Catholic emancipation this resulted in a 'fluid cluster of ideas which tapped the sources of lower-class catholic solidarity: religion and nationality'.<sup>70</sup> This mixture was evident in the Defender catechisms, which combined a religious medium and religious imagery with a revolutionary-republican message.<sup>71</sup>

The association between anti-clericalism and European revolutionary radicalism, may be presumed to have presented a particular obstacle to Catholic women's radicalization. In Olwen Hufton's account of women's experiences during the French Revolution, she contends that French Catholic women's rejection of revolutionary anti-clericalism and their continued adherence to the Catholic Church was a major factor in the failure of the revolution.<sup>72</sup> Certainly the Irish Catholic Church, despite having grudgingly supported

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<sup>68</sup> Marianne Elliott, *Partners in Revolution. The United Irishmen and France* (New Haven, 1982), p. 41.

<sup>69</sup> Marianne Elliott, 'The Origins and Transformations of Early Irish Republicanism', *International Review of Social History*, 22 (1978), p. 420.

<sup>70</sup> Smyth, *The Men of No Property*, p. 67.

<sup>71</sup> For examples of United Irish catechisms see Charles Jackson, *A Narrative of the Sufferings and Escape of Charles Jackson Late Resident at Wexford in Ireland, including an Account ... of Several Barbarous Atrocities Committed, in June 1798* (London, 1798), pp. 17-18.

<sup>72</sup> Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship*, p. 130.

the campaign for Catholic emancipation between 1791-1793, fiercely opposed the spread of revolutionary doctrine amongst its members, horrified by the fate of the Church in revolutionary France. Led by Archbishop Troy, the Church issued numerous pastoral letters condemning illegal organizations and exhorting their flock to loyalty and obedience.<sup>73</sup> The letters had little success, and indeed the Church may have acted as a conduit for popular politicization during the 1790s. Although the role of Catholic priests in disseminating radical ideology was generally exaggerated by Dublin Castle informers, radicals certainly used Church structures to propagate the cause.<sup>74</sup> The chapel gate was a popular venue for public readings of republican newspapers and there is also evidence that religious confraternities were infiltrated by the United Irishmen who used them as a vector for politicization and mobilization. Confraternities were primarily charitable organizations that were often dominated by women, and they may have been a channel through which women were exposed to radicalization and disaffection.<sup>75</sup> At the outbreak of the rebellion in 1798 Archbishop Troy excommunicated the rebels. However, according to the government informer, Leonard McNally, this sanction had little effect on either male or female opinion. He reported to Dublin Castle that, ‘... the recent excommunication by the Holy Catholic Church is received by her sons not merely with indifference, but with contempt. In bulk it is laughed at and ridiculed, *not only by men, but by women*’.<sup>76</sup>

McNally may have deliberately overstated the anti-clericalism of the Catholic popular classes. Although hostility to priestly influence had been a feature of peasant protest groups such as the Whiteboys and Rightboys, there is little evidence to suggest that this had developed into a full-blown secularism by the 1790s. In the case of France, Dorinda Outram suggests that the 1790s laid the foundations for the total separation of the political ideologies of men and women, ‘leaving men to reject the programmes and language of the Church and women to reject the programmes and language of secular republicanism’. According to Outram, the language of Catholicism provided a discourse that was far more adapted for women’s needs as public persons than the male-

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<sup>73</sup> Keogh, *The French Disease*, pp. 89-118.

<sup>74</sup> Keogh, *The French Disease*, pp. 127-135.

<sup>75</sup> Keogh, *The French Disease*, p. 124; Kevin Whelan, ‘The Catholic Community in Eighteenth-Century Wexford’, in Power and Whelan (eds), *Endurance and Emergence*, p. 150; and Raughter, ‘A Discreet Benevolence’, p. 472.

<sup>76</sup> NAI, Dublin, Rebellion papers, 620/10/121/116, ‘J. W.’ 26 June 1798. My italics.

oriented discourse of revolutionary republicanism.<sup>77</sup> However, it is likely that the conflation of religious and revolutionary ideology during 1798 largely minimized any conflict between male and female political allegiances.<sup>78</sup>

Radical catechisms provide a notable example of how religious forms could be infused with revolutionary meaning. They further facilitated popular politicization by transcending the barrier of illiteracy. Alongside these oral forms, the United Irishmen also adapted republican symbolism to folk customs, most notably in their use of Liberty Trees, a republican icon which could be easily grafted on to the May bush tradition, the decorative bush that heralded the summer.<sup>79</sup> As Teeling's allusion to women's presentation of silk robes to their sweethearts suggests, women were vital to the process of infusing the material culture of the lower orders with nationalist-republican symbolism, decorating clothing with harps and shamrocks. However, there remained a significant gulf in Catholic men and women's educational attainment. Ó Ciosáin's data from the 1841 census indicates that there was a much larger gap between male and female levels of reading ability in Leinster and Munster than in the predominantly Protestant counties of Ulster, Antrim, Down and Londonderry. Whilst there were significantly lower literacy rates for both men and women in the counties outside Ulster, the gap between male and female reading levels was 20–25% for those born between 1756 and 1785.<sup>80</sup> Even with the United Irishmen's exploitation of visual and oral culture we can infer that lower literacy rates would have affected the way in which women absorbed and understood radical ideology.

These statistics on literacy refer to ability in English only, though over 50% of the population would have spoken Irish Gaelic as a first language. Tom Dunne has argued that the difficulty in recreating the political outlooks of the Catholic masses during the 1790s partly results from the loss of so much Gaelic material from this period. He

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<sup>77</sup> Outram, 'Le Langage Mâle de la Vertu', p. 131.

<sup>78</sup> The continued salience of sectarian issues during the 1798 rebellion does not necessarily prove the failure of United Irish propaganda in rural communities. As Curtin argues, United Irish propaganda often exploited and exacerbated religious tensions, and she concludes that the movement was largely responsible 'for turning peasant fears into vengeful paranoia'. Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, p. 201.

<sup>79</sup> Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty*, p. 85. In his memoir of the rebellion William Farrell described the rituals associated with May day in Carlow. Young male factions were charged with appropriating maypoles from local gentleman and the May day celebrations were accompanied by music, dancing and bonfires, both men and women wearing white clothes and ribbons. William Farrell, *Carlow in '98: The Autobiography of William Farrell of Carlow*, Roger McHugh (ed.) (Dublin, 1949), pp. 22-23.

contends that an analysis of the little Gaelic poetry which survives can show how a native tradition of Jacobitism could be fused with revolutionary Jacobinism, and points to the radical potential in the *aisling* genre's millennial message of individual and communal liberation.<sup>81</sup> The only recorded Gaelic female poet from this period, Máire Bhúí Ní Laoire (1774-c.1849), belonged to the tradition of 'filí pobail' (poets of the community) and was an illiterate farmer from Cork.<sup>82</sup> Her poem 'Ar Lecain na Gréine' (On the Sunny Slopes, c. 1796), which concerns the failed French landing at Bantry Bay, was preserved in oral form into the nineteenth century. Perhaps surprisingly for a female poet Ní Laoire used the *aisling* form, employing the first person to describe an encounter with a beautiful 'vision woman'. The woman tells the poet of the arrival of the French and bids her to spread the news:

Each one that you see, explain to them the gist of the news  
That in full strength they are coming, well-supplied with bullets and shot –  
Stout-hearted supporters, hastening, Louis, and the Spaniard complying-  
To Banba they are coming, without delay, by the grace of God's son.<sup>83</sup>

The reference to Louis XVI, who was of course dead at this point, illustrates the gulf between the political communication of an illiterate Gaelic-speaking society and a newspaper reading culture. The vision woman's injunction to the poet to tell every one she meets the news of the landing underlines the reliance on oral networks and the potential for a significant delay in the dissemination of news. Moreover, this allusion to the assistance of the French king implies a confused interpretation of the Bantry Bay landing, which sees it in terms of traditional Jacobite narratives of French deliverance. The poet concludes by anticipating the fruits of this French invasion:

Indeed, if your descriptions are true, my stately, gentle maiden,  
We shall have land without rent, without tax or dispute.  
We shall have wheat and butter and salted meat on the table for ourselves.  
And merrymakers will be draining the quarts, and calling for more.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Niall Ó Ciosáin, *Print and Popular Culture in Ireland, 1750-1850* (London, 1997), p. 35.

<sup>81</sup> Tom Dunne, 'Subaltern Voices?: Poetry in Irish, Popular Insurgency and the 1798 Rebellion', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 3 (1998), pp. 31-44.

<sup>82</sup> For further biographical details see Brian Brennan, *Máire Bhui Ni Laoire: A Poet of her People* (Cork, 2000).

<sup>83</sup> Máire Bhúí Ní Laoire 'Ar Leacain na Gréine (On the Sunny Slopes)' transl. Brian Brennan in *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. 4, p. 290.

<sup>84</sup> Ní Laoire, 'Ar Leacain na Gréine', p. 290.

This vision of 'land without rent, without tax or dispute' is in keeping with revolutionary social-radicalism, although again it can be understood as drawing on an earlier discourse of Catholic restoration. The hopes of alimentary abundance reflect a more practical, concrete imagining of the promises of revolution, as distinct from the attainment of abstract ideals such as liberty and equality that probably had little meaning for an illiterate female farmer from Tureenane. However, the poem also reveals the potential importance that a female poet such as Ní Laoire could have within her community as a communicator and interpreter of political events. As with the lamenting tradition, such poetry was necessarily public and performative, and again underlines the public role that women could assume within an oral, Gaelic-speaking culture.

There is evidence to indicate that this emphasis on land ownership was a primary concern of other Catholic women. In his memoirs, the Wexford United Irishman Miles Byrne recalled that in 1796 he had almost enlisted in the yeomen cavalry that was being raised by the Protestant landlord Thomas Knox Grogan. However, his mother refused to consent until she was given an assurance that the lease on the family land would be renewed. According to Byrne, 'she could not forget what she suffered, a few years previous, when leaving Ballylusk, the townland and place where I was born, and which had been in the family for centuries, she could not get the lease of that place renewed, as the landlord J. Doyle wished to come and live on it himself'.<sup>85</sup> Grogan duly renewed the family leaseholding for three lives which satisfied his mother, but Byrne's father furiously declared that 'he would rather see the leases burned and me dead, than ever see me put on a red coat', this response contrasting with his mother's more materialistic considerations.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, Anne Devlin remembered that her mother 'often spoke of the low and degraded state her family was reduced to from a wealthy and respectable ancestry', but was opposed to the rebellion, despite her family's close involvement with both the 1798 and 1803 uprisings.<sup>87</sup> Both of these accounts suggest that these women

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<sup>85</sup> Byrne, *Memoirs*, p. 5

<sup>86</sup> Byrne, *Memoirs*, p. 5.

<sup>87</sup> Anne Devlin is best remembered for her role in Robert Emmet's 1803 rising. She acted as his housekeeper during the preparations for the rising and was engaged in the conspiracy along with other members of her family. She was arrested and imprisoned in Kilmainham but refused to give information against Emmet. This loyalty earned her a reputation as a nationalist heroine. The Wicklow rebel leader Michael Dwyer was Devlin's first cousin and her family was drawn into the 1798 rebellion. Anne visited

were acutely aware of the material aspects of Catholic oppression, but that this sense of disinheritance and dispossession did not necessarily resolve itself into a more explicitly political or rebellious attitude.

### III

The extent to which Catholic women were politicized and radicalized over the course of the 1790s is difficult to ascertain, but there is no doubt that when the rebellion began in May 1798 it was enthusiastically greeted by many women who supported the rebels in a range of roles. Accounts of Catholic women's behaviour during the rebellion can give further insight into their personal understanding and experience of the insurrection. The experience from Wexford, which the rebels held for almost a month, underlines the complex mixture of religious and republican impulses that characterized the conflict. Following the defeat of the Wexford town garrison on 30 May the town was bedecked with nationalist and republican symbols. Green flags, handkerchiefs and tree branches were exhibited at nearly every window and placards declaring 'Liberty' and 'Equality' were plastered across doors.<sup>88</sup> According to Thomas Cloney the townswomen were occupied in making green ribbons for their friends in the rebel army, embroidering them with harps, shamrocks, and slogans such as 'liberty and equality' and 'Erin go Braugh' (Ireland for Ever).<sup>89</sup> The involvement of women in the production and display of political symbols would suggest a very tangible experience of the national and republican dimensions of the rebellion. However, there was also a distinctly religious aspect to these republican rituals, with the Wexford women reputedly dousing the rebel troops with holy water before they went into battle.<sup>90</sup>

A significant problem in representing Catholic women's experiences of the rebellion derives from the fact that many of the most detailed accounts of their behaviour come

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Dwyer and the Wicklow rebels who were hiding in the mountains in the autumn of that year. See Fr. Luke Cullen's transcription of Devlin's oral memoir in John Finnegan (ed.), *Anne Devlin Patriot & Heroine. Her own Story of her Association with Robert Emmet and her Sufferings in Kilmainham Jail* (Dublin, 1992 [1968]), p. 2.

<sup>88</sup> Jackson, *A Narrative of the Sufferings and Escape of Charles Jackson*, p. 28.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas Cloney, *A Personal Narrative of those Transactions in the County Wexford, in which the Author was Engaged, During the Awful Period of 1798* (Dublin, 1832), p. 24; Jackson, *A Narrative of the Sufferings and Escape of Charles Jackson*, p. 33; Byrne, *Memoirs*, p. 95.

<sup>90</sup> 'Account of Isabella Brownrigg' in John Beatty (ed.), *Protestant Women's Narratives of the Irish*

from Protestant narratives.<sup>91</sup> Several of these were used in Sir Richard Musgrave's loyalist account of the rising *Memoirs of the Different Rebellions in Ireland* (1801) to bolster his interpretation of the rising as the culmination of a Catholic plot. Rebel women were frequently portrayed as more religiously zealous than their male counterparts. At the same time, these narratives are remarkably consistent and cannot be dismissed as entirely skewed. One of the most notorious female figures in accounts of the Wexford rebellion is Margaret 'Madge' Dixon the wife of a United Irish captain Thomas Dixon, whose 'thirst for protestant blood', Musgrave declared, 'was insatiable'.<sup>92</sup> The Dixons were heavily implicated in the massacre of Protestant prisoners on Wexford bridge, with Margaret Dixon reputedly urging the rebels to pike the prisoners so as not to waste ammunition.<sup>93</sup> In Musgrave's account the figure of Mrs Dixon, a woman 'remarkable for the ferocity of her disposition', was emblematic of Catholic bigotry and savagery. According to Musgrave, on the approach of the government forces Mrs Dixon attempted to persuade the rebels forces to stay and fight by exclaiming: 'We must conquer. I know we must conquer ... My Saviour tells me we must conquer'.<sup>94</sup> However, there are more sympathetic portraits of Mrs Dixon.<sup>95</sup> The Wexford Protestant Isabella Brownrigg reported that Mrs Dixon had allowed her to shelter in her boat moored in Wexford harbour.<sup>96</sup> The United Irishman, Joseph Holt remembered Margaret Dixon as a fearless rebel who condemned General Edward Roche's equivocation over an encounter with the army at Aughrim, declaring that 'though a weoman [sic], that she would take command of either right or left wing'.<sup>97</sup>

While Margaret Dixon may have represented a particularly extreme example of

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*Rebellion of 1798* (Dublin, 2001), p. 105.

<sup>91</sup> For a discussion of these narratives see John Beatty, 'Protestant Women of County Wexford and their Narratives of the Rebellion of 1798', in Keogh and Furlong (eds), *Women of 1798*, pp. 113-136; and John Beatty, 'Introduction', in Beatty (ed.), *Protestant Women's Narratives*, pp. 9-18. The difficulties and possibilities involved in reconstructing rebel *mentalités* from such sources are discussed by Tom Dunne in Dunne, *Rebellions*, pp. 151-160.

<sup>92</sup> Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the Different Rebellions in Ireland, from the Arrival of the English: Also a Particular Detail of that which Broke out the 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 1798* (Dublin, 1801) p. 470.

<sup>93</sup> 'Account of Isabella Brownrigg', p. 108.

<sup>94</sup> Musgrave, *Memoirs of the Different Rebellions*, p. 502.

<sup>95</sup> In a letter to the Cavan newspaper the *People* during the 1898 commemorations of the rebellion, a Revd. Leach gave a possible explanation for Margaret Dixon's vehemence during the conflict, explaining that she may have been previously raped by a soldier. Anna Kinsella, 'Nineteenth-Century Perspectives: The Women of 1798 in Folk Memory and Ballads', in Keogh and Furlong (eds), *Women of 1798*, p. 190.

<sup>96</sup> 'Account of Isabella Brownrigg', p. 97.

<sup>97</sup> O'Shaughnessy (ed.), *General Joseph Holt's Personal Account of 1798*, p. 41.



Catholic intolerance, Protestant women's narratives repeatedly cited instances of female religious zeal. Alicia Pouden's family found shelter in the local priest's house in Enniscorthy during the rising and recalled that there was a constant stream of women entering the house to abuse them for being Orangewomen.<sup>98</sup> According to Musgrave, when the rebels entered Wexford town, '...the Roman catholick inhabitants frequently exclaimed, particularly the women, "That they would have no heresy amongst them; that they would put an end to hereticks; and that they would have all or none"'.<sup>99</sup> The most compelling evidence of sectarian behaviour by Catholics during the rebellion was the forced conversion of Protestants.<sup>100</sup> Accounts of resistance to such forcible conversion featured prominently in Protestant women's narratives, though the prominence accorded to these 'conversion episodes' must be understood as intersecting with a broader political narrative of Protestant persecution that drew upon the religious narratives of trial and triumph associated with the early Protestant martyrs. It was often Catholic women who were responsible for trying to persuade the Protestant women to conform, and they appear to have been motivated by a mixture of concern and evangelical zeal. In her diary Elizabeth Richards recorded that when a Catholic friend, Mary Byrne warned her that the Protestants were to be massacred, she 'threw her arms around me, kissed off my tears, professed her utmost sincerity, the tenderest regard for me, and entreated that I would only consent to become a Christian'.<sup>101</sup> Jane Adam's faithful Catholic maid servant similarly wept and begged her 'to allow Father O'Connor to christen my master, the young ladies & yourself, it might be the saving of you'.<sup>102</sup>

Intertwined with Catholic women's consciousness of a dramatic religious reversal was an understanding of the rebellion as a revolutionary reversal of the social order. This was partly conceived of in political terms, as the defeat of the loyalist cause and the ascendancy of the 'croppies'. Large bands of women were seen accompanying the

<sup>98</sup> Account of Alicia Pouden in John Beatty (ed.), *Protestant Women's Narratives*, p. 149.

<sup>99</sup> Musgrave, *Memoir of the Different Rebellions*, p. 357.

<sup>100</sup> Louis Cullen concedes that this is one of the most compelling pieces of evidence for a sectarian interpretation of the rebellion but observes that it was not universal. Louis Cullen, 'The United Irishmen in Wexford', in Keogh and Furlong (eds), *The Mighty Wave*, p. 63.

<sup>101</sup> Elizabeth Richards was a member of the liberal Protestant gentry, whose account was written contemporaneously with the events she described. She had several Catholic friends and displays some sympathy towards the fate of the rebel women in the aftermath of the rebellion; her narrative is perhaps more impartial than some others. 'Diary of Elizabeth Richards', 1 June 1798, in Beatty (ed.), *Protestant Women's Narratives*, p. 35.

<sup>102</sup> 'Account of Jane Adams', in Beatty (ed.), *Protestant Women's Narratives*, p. 175.

rebels, 'shouting and huzzaing for the *Croppies*, and crying, "Who now dares say, *Croppies lie down?*"'<sup>103</sup> However, more often it was represented as a reversal in class relations. Elizabeth Richards noted that even her 'friend' Mary Byrne seemed to exult in the Protestant's loss of status, recording after a visit that:

She seemed elated we were dejected, our conversation certainly far from lively, yet once or twice she put her hand to her face I believe to have the appearance of attempting to conceal her exultation. I happened to say something of our servants. She repeated after me with a sneer 'your servants that were your servants – I did not mean that,' she said with some confusion.<sup>104</sup>

Catholic servants' rebellion against their Protestant employers was indeed very common during this period. Jane Barber awoke one morning to find that her servant had run away in the night to join the rebel camp.<sup>105</sup> The servant maid of Colonel Le Hunte commandeered the family's mansion at Atrammel, Co. Wexford during the rebellion. According to Charles Jackson, the maid was 'so certain of being left in possession of the house' that when Mrs Le Hunte returned to Atrammel to beg for use of her own linen, the maid informed her former mistress that "she had a great deal of impudence to expect it; for, what business had she there? Sure she knew that neither the house, or anything in it, was any longer her property"<sup>106</sup> In contrast, Jane Adams' maid servant refused to abandon her mistress and was taunted by the rebels who asked her 'did she think herself still my servant', telling her, 'that she ought to make me change places with her – she had the *right* to command me'.<sup>107</sup>

One of the most vivid representations of this upheaval in class relations was the adoption by lower-class Catholic women of Protestant women's 'finery'. Musgrave ridiculed what he saw as the pretensions of the rebels' wives who, 'often made a fantastick [sic] appearance, with the elegant apparel of the protestant ladies of Wexford over their own homely dress', and who were seen 'mounted on horseback, with

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<sup>103</sup> 'Croppies lie down' was a contemporary loyalist song. Jackson, *A Narrative of the Sufferings and Escape of Charles Jackson*, p. 28.

<sup>104</sup> 'Diary of Elizabeth Richards', 3 June 1798, in Beatty (ed.), *Protestant Women's Narratives*, p. 38.

<sup>105</sup> 'Account of Jane Barber', in Beatty (ed.), *Protestant Women's Narratives*, p. 75.

<sup>106</sup> Jackson, *A Narrative of the Sufferings and Escape of Charles Jackson*, p. 45.

<sup>107</sup> 'Account of Jane Adams', p. 179.

handsome veils, having at the same time pikes in their hands'.<sup>108</sup> Jane Barber was astonished to find the mother of one of their farm hands, who was 'very poor', 'dressed in completely new and excellent clothes, and in particular, a remarkably handsome beaver-hat'. When asked where she had obtained the hat the woman responded angrily, 'Hush! 'tis not for one like you to ask me where I got it'.<sup>109</sup> Elizabeth Richards recorded being sneered at by women 'who looked exultingly at our shabby equipage'.<sup>110</sup> In an echo of the Whiteboy's transvestism Jackson described how the Wexford rebels 'decorated themselves with parts of the apparel of ladies, found in houses which they had plundered', and thus wandered the streets wearing hats, feathers, caps, bonnets, and tippets.<sup>111</sup> Jane Adams similarly found her home being plundered by a man dressed in 'a hat and feathers, a muslin gown trimmed with lace, and a cloak of the same'.<sup>112</sup> This underlines the element of the carnivalesque that pervaded the rising in Wexford, the social and political reversal, finding a tangible, material expression in the exchange of clothing. The spectacle of rebels in female dress similarly reflected a widespread sense of a world turned upside down.<sup>113</sup>

Narratives of the rebellion from the rebel side give very little sense of what may have motivated those women who actively participated in the rebellion, but they do provide some insight into the roles that women assumed in the United Irish campaign. The large numbers of women that accompanied the rebel forces, and in particular the sizeable number of women in the Vinegar Hill encampment, was often commented on by witnesses to the rebellion.<sup>114</sup> Indeed, the visibility of so many women during the rebellion was seized on by loyalists as proof of the savagery of the rebels. In a confession extorted from the rebel James Beaghan during the 'White Terror' that followed the rebellion, he was made to claim that in the rebel forces 'the women were

<sup>108</sup> Musgrave, *Memoir of the Different Rebellions*, p. 454.

<sup>109</sup> 'Account of Jane Barber', p. 81. In a statement given against the Kildare rebel James Magee, Elizabeth Crawford similarly related how Magee had hacked open a box of clothes in her house, and how she subsequently saw her maid servant, Magee's sister, wearing a cap which had been removed from this box. NAI, Dublin, Rebellion Papers, 620/7/74/36, 'Statement of the charges preferr'd against James Magee by Elizabeth Crawford widow of the late George Crawford'.

<sup>110</sup> 'Diary of Elizabeth Richards', 10 June 1798, p. 42.

<sup>111</sup> Jackson, *A Narrative of the Sufferings and Escape of Charles Jackson*, p. 11.

<sup>112</sup> 'Account of Jane Adams', p. 169.

<sup>113</sup> In his account of the Wexford rebellion Tom Dunne similarly stresses the carnivalesque elements, the sense of social reversal, and the pervasive links with traditional forms of agitation. Dunne, *Rebellions*, pp. 190-203.

<sup>114</sup> 'Account of Mrs M', in Beatty (ed.), *Protestant Women's Narratives*, p. 154.

as numerous as the men, and were as bad as the Men'.<sup>115</sup> Musgrave was especially keen to offer examples of female rebels outstripping men in their ferocity and identified several instances where women had been involved in plundering, vandalism and assault. Women, however, were also engaged with the military campaign of the rebel army, often occupying crucial roles. The rebel leader, Joseph Holt described the invaluable services of Suzy Toole, nicknamed, 'The Moving Magazine', who used to peddle bread to farmers wives and who, during the rebellion, used her bread basket to collect ammunition and gunpowder for the rebel forces. Holt supplied her with ginger bread and fruit to act as a disguise as she moved through the military camps, gathering intelligence and ammunition with the help of disaffected soldiers.<sup>116</sup> As already noted, the exploits of Mary Doyle during the Battle of New Ross were recorded by Thomas Cloney and remembered in the nineteenth-century popular ballad, 'Mary Doyle, the Heroine of Ross'. Similarly Teresa Malone's participation in the rebellion was preserved in the ballad 'The Battle of Kilcumney' which describes her on horseback, armed with a gun, relaying messages to the men in the field.<sup>117</sup>

The active engagement by women in the military aspects of the rebellion suggests some interesting possibilities for women's inclusion in the putative Irish 'republic'. The rebel army was accompanied by troops of women dressed in white decorated with green ribbons and carrying pikes.<sup>118</sup> As Applewhite and Levy have noted in the context of the French Revolution, the pike, due to its universal accessibility and availability to even the poorest citizen, was emblematic of independence and equality under arms.<sup>119</sup> By arming themselves with pikes these women could be seen as making a statement for their inclusion within the arms-bearing citizenry of an Irish republic, a republic that they were demonstrating their willingness to fight for. Whilst they may not have understood their participation as a basis from which to make a claim for equal citizenship, their involvement demonstrates their support for the aims and principles of the rebellion, though as we have seen the aims of the rebellion were diffuse enough to allow multiple

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<sup>115</sup> *An Authentic Account of the Behaviour, Conduct and Confession of James Beaghan, who was Executed on Vinegar Hill, on Saturday the 24<sup>th</sup> day of August, 1799...* (Dublin, 1799).

<sup>116</sup> Joseph Holt in O'Shaughnessy (ed.), *Joseph Holt's Personal Account*, pp. 38, 68.

<sup>117</sup> Mick Kinsella, Edward N. Moran and Conor Murphy, *Kilcumney in '98: Its Origins, Aftermath and Legacy* (Kilkenny, 1998), pp. 215, 376-377.

<sup>118</sup> 'Account of Mary Leadbeater', in Beatty (ed.), *Protestant Women's Narratives*, p. 207.

<sup>119</sup> Darline G. Levy and Harriet B. Applewhite, 'Women, Radicalization and the Fall of the French

interpretations: republican, nationalist, social-radical or religious.

With an estimated 20,000 dead on the rebel side, the aftermath of the rebellion was a period of mourning for many Catholic women.<sup>120</sup> However, the entire funeral process itself became fraught with political implications. Anne Devlin observed that 'sympathy for the dead at this time was an offence not to be forgotten'.<sup>121</sup> She remembered her mother stopping at a rebel's execution to ensure that the body was not ill-treated, afterwards conveying the body to a friend's house, an act which Anne believed marked her out for government persecution. In Wexford those convicted of being ringleaders were executed on the bridge and their bodies thrown into the water. Cloney recalled the widows' nocturnal vigils by the riverside, waiting to retrieve their husbands' bodies. Having recovered the body, many had to pass through the town begging for the price of a shroud and coffin. Cloney writes that, 'the inhabitants were, during part of this time, in such terror, that they actually dreaded opening their doors to hear a tale of woe from any of those afflicted females'.<sup>122</sup> According to folklore tradition, women from Wexford, whose husbands had fallen in Co. Carlow, came with asses and carts to reclaim their bodies 'as it was too dangerous for the menfolk to appear in the area for quite some time'. Another tradition from Kilcumney relates how a woman was forced to wake her husband, who had been killed by the militia, in a ditch by the light of their burning house.<sup>123</sup>

In this tense atmosphere, the funeral ceremonies of fallen, or executed, men had the potential to become political theatre or a 'dramaturgy of death' in which women played a leading role. Early in 1799 eleven members of the rebel remnant led by Michael Dwyer who had been hiding in the Wicklow mountains were executed. Two of the men were buried in a separate churchyard from the others, and according to Anne Devlin the local people thought 'that men so faithful in life should, if possible, be laid together in

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Monarchy', in Applewhite and Levy, *Women and Politics in the Age of the Democratic Revolution*, p. 88.

<sup>120</sup> This estimate of 'rebellion mortality' in Wexford has been challenged by Louis Cullen, who suggests that the figure should be revised downwards to about 5,600 rather than 20,000. Although, as he also notes, even this reduced figure would indicate the death of one in every six men aged between sixteen and sixty. Louis M. Cullen, 'Rebellion Mortality in Wexford in 1798', *Journal of the Wexford Historical Society*, 17 (1998-99), pp. 7-29.

<sup>121</sup> Anne Devlin's account in Finnegan (ed.), *Anne Devlin Patriot & Heroine*, p. 31.

<sup>122</sup> Cloney, *A Personal Narrative*, p. 144.

<sup>123</sup> Kinsella, Moran and Murphy, *Kilcumney in '98*, pp. 176, 186.

death'.<sup>124</sup> Anne, together with Dwyer's sisters, decided to re-inter the two men with their comrades. They commissioned the local carpenters to make coffins for them, and with some other young women volunteers, set out with a horse and dray to retrieve the bodies, 'for no man dare venture on so perilous a mission without risk of being shot'. Having exhumed the bodies they conveyed them to Kilranagh Churchyard where they re-interred them under the surveillance of the local yeomanry. Devlin recalled that many of the local young people, 'particularly the females' regretted that they had not participated in the reburial. In order to include the others it was proposed that they should lay garlands on the graves in a carefully stage managed ceremony led by the women who:

... vied with each other in sending silks, ribbons, and stuffs of appropriate colours. When the day arrived for placing the garlands on the graves of the fallen brave, the young women of the place assembled and the procession moved off, led by my cousins, each person dressed in white. The rear was brought up by some fearless young men, while the more cautious and sedate availed themselves of some advantageous position to view in silence and unseen the little pageant as it moved along.<sup>125</sup>

As with women's struggles for the bodies of their executed relatives during the suppression of the Whiteboys, and their laments for the fallen in Gaelic literature, women assumed a particular responsibility for the memory of the dead in the aftermath of the rebellion. Anne Devlin's account also suggests that it was only women who dared to make such defiant political gestures during the terror that followed the insurrection.

#### IV

If we view the eighteenth-century Irish Catholic community as constituting a 'hidden Ireland', women are doubly hidden, their voices and experiences obscured by the lack of personal records, and by the general scarcity of Catholic voices in the eighteenth-century Irish public sphere. In political terms, Catholic women appear to have become more active, or at least more visible, over the course of the 1790s. While women

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<sup>124</sup> Finegan (ed.), *Anne Devlin, Patriot & Heroine*, p. 32.

<sup>125</sup> Finegan (ed.), *Anne Devlin, Patriot & Heroine*, pp. 32-33.

featured in a purely symbolic capacity in the imagery of the Whiteboy movement, during the political upheaval of the revolutionary decade Catholic women participated in the political crowd, and the United Irish movement and assumed a prominent and often militant role in the 1798 rebellion. The extent of politicization amongst Catholic women remains difficult to measure. There is no evidence of a Catholic woman articulating a distinctively radical or republican view of the rebellion, but evidence for such views are scarce even for men. However, it does appear that the religious and social dimensions of the rebellion were particularly important to women. Female militancy can be construed as a form of proto-citizenship, but it can also be understood as a function of the chaos and disorder of the revolutionary moment, which galvanized the 'unruliness' of woman, an unruliness previously only invoked by the all-male Whiteboys to give license to their violence. Despite their exclusion from the literate culture of the bourgeois public sphere, women could participate in the oral culture of the 'plebeian-public', hurling insults at loyalist forces, inciting the rebel forces, performing political poetry, and loudly lamenting their dead relatives. One constant theme that emerges from a survey of Irish Catholic protest in the eighteenth century is the gendering of the commemoration process, and the public and often political role accorded to women as bearers of memory through the waking and lamenting traditions. As the traditions of the hidden Ireland were translated into the public sphere during the nineteenth century the link between women, memory and commemoration would also be transferred, a process that will be explored in chapter seven.

## Chapter Five: 'For oft the Muse ... dwells in a female form': Politics and Nation in Irish Women's Literature

How some wise heads would laugh at a girl pretending to give an opinion in politics ... but I know you have been taught to think the welfare of our country is of as much consequence to women as men; and when public affairs are the general topic, to write on them is an agreeable variety, and at least as improving as intrigue or scandal, which the men generously allow us to talk of as much as we please.

*The Triumph of Prudence over Passion: or, the History of Miss Mortimer and Miss Fitzgerald* (1781).<sup>1</sup>

One of the most persuasive challenges to conventional accounts of women's exclusion from the eighteenth-century public sphere has involved the re-examination of women's writing from this period. As literary historians have argued, claims that women are absent from the public sphere become untenable when one looks at the sheer range of literary publications produced by women in the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> While women's participation in the literary public sphere is recognized by Habermas, he also suggests that there was a demarcation within the public sphere between its literary and political components, so that while women participated in the literary sphere as readers and writers of novels, they were absent from its political counterpart.<sup>3</sup> Habermas' observation is relevant to late eighteenth-century practice to some extent, since it was unusual for women to contribute to more masculine genres such as newspapers, periodicals and political pamphlets. However, it would be misleading to suggest that women's writing was concerned only with the domestic and the subjective. Analyses of women's poetry and fiction from this period have demonstrated the extent to which women engaged in the discursive public sphere, intervening directly and indirectly in contemporary political debates. Following the French Revolution, British women writers participated in public debate to an unprecedented extent, and some began to use traditionally masculine genres in order to express their political opinions.<sup>4</sup> The debate

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<sup>1</sup> *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion: or, The History of Miss Mortimer and Miss Fitzgerald*. By the Authoress of *Emmeline* (Dublin, 1781), vol. 1, p. 150.

<sup>2</sup> On women's writing and the eighteenth-century public sphere see Anne K. Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830* (Bloomington IN, 2000); Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning and Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago, 2000); and Elizabeth Eger and others (eds), *Women and the Public Sphere: Writing and Representation, 1660-1800* (Cambridge, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, 1992), p. 56.

<sup>4</sup> For example both Mary Wollstonecraft and Catherine Macaulay published political pamphlets in response to Burke's *Reflections* and Helen Maria Williams published a multi-volume history of



on the revolution did not prompt an equivalent incursion by Irish women writers into the masculine domain of political polemic, and there was no Irish equivalent of the British 'war of ideas', in which the contest over radical philosophy and revolutionary politics was played out in literary genres such as the novel. At the same time, Irish women's literature from the late eighteenth century responded to developments in Irish politics, using their writing to explore issues of national, cultural and political identity.

As previously noted, the production and dissemination of printed material was a key element in the United Irishmen's programme of mass politicization and mobilization. Although women certainly participated in this expansion of the public sphere as consumers of radical literature, it is more difficult to ascertain their role in its production. Given the anonymous authorship of much of the movement's propaganda, women may have been involved in the composition of radical propaganda, but apart from a handful of letters and political poetry in the United Irish press, I have been unable to identify any further contributions by women.<sup>5</sup> An exception is the work of the radical poet and satirist Henrietta Battier, who published several pieces of republican propaganda during the 1790s. As this chapter shows, the overtly political content of Battier's poetry was not entirely exceptional. Irish women were also to engage more obliquely with questions of political and national identity, interweaving these themes with traditionally 'feminine' concerns and narratives.

The first section of this chapter examines two works by female writers from the 1780s: the epistolary novel, *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion* and the Gaelic translations of Charlotte Brooke. While both works reflect the Protestant Patriotism of the 1770s

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revolutionary France. For discussions of British women's responses to the French Revolution see Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (2nd edn, Oxford, 1990); Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution, 1790-1827* (Oxford, 1993); Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokke (eds), *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution* (New York, 2001); and Anne K. Mellor, 'English Women Writers and the French Revolution', in Sara E. Melzer and Leslie W. Rabine (eds), *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution* (New York, 1992), pp. 255-272.

<sup>5</sup> Janet Todd suggests that Margaret, Lady Mount Cashell wrote pamphlets for the United Irish cause, but she does not provide any further evidence. As will be discussed in the following chapter, there are several pamphlets on the union debate attributed to Lady Mount Cashell, but I have been unable to find any earlier pamphlets. Janet Todd, *Rebel Daughters: Ireland in 1798* (London, 2003), p. 187. Todd also identifies Mary Anne Emmet, sister of Thomas Addis Emmet and Robert Emmet, as 'a pamphleteer and journalist'. Todd, *Rebel Daughters*, p. 159. Although Todd again does not give any references to support this assertion, she may be alluding to Dr Thomas Addis Emmet's claim in his history of the Emmet family that he possessed several political pamphlets by Mary Anne Emmet, a claim which is cited in Helena Concannon, *Women of '98* (Dublin, 1919), p. 243. Again the only political tract by Mary Anne

and 1780s, they also represent two quite different understandings of the nation and of female patriotism. The *Triumph* makes a compelling case for Irish women's inclusion in the Protestant political nation, adapting Irish Patriot discourse to feminist ends, and invoking classical models of female patriotism. In contrast, it is the cultural and historical nation that is the subject of Brooke's *Reliques of Irish Poetry*. Foregrounding the literary basis of national identity, Brooke proposes an alternative model of Celtic 'bardic' patriotism, which highlights women's role as educators, conciliators and custodians of tradition.<sup>6</sup> The following section considers the political poetry of Mary O'Brien and Henrietta Battier, demonstrating how both writers employed the conventionally 'masculine' style of satirical poetry to comment upon contemporary political events in the 1790s. As a republican propagandist Battier engaged in one of the defining activities of the United Irish movement, although her work did not actively challenge the gendered basis of republican political practice. The final section of the chapter focuses on Irish women's novels from the 1790s. While British female-authored novels from this period engaged with the debates on the French Revolution through the literary 'war of ideas', Irish women novelists do not appear to have participated in the Jacobin/ anti-Jacobin debate to the same extent, with one notable exception, *The Irish Heiress* by Mrs F. C. Patrick, which provides an unusual Catholic perspective on the French Revolution. However, following the bardic model elaborated by Charlotte Brooke, Irish women did begin in this period to reflect upon the cultural and historical aspects of Irish identity through the historical novel and the proto-national tale. Focusing in particular on Regina Maria Roche's *Children of the Abbey*, I will suggest how Roche used the Gothic mode to underline Ireland's Celtic identity and cultural separateness and proposed a feminization of national culture in response to the gender exclusive model of the political nation expounded by the United Irishmen.

## I

In her survey of Irish women's writing in the eighteenth century, Siobhán Kilfeather notes that in Ireland, as in France, England and North America, there was a rapid

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Emmet that I have been able to identify was produced during the debate on the Act of Union.

<sup>6</sup> The term 'bardic nationalism' is drawn from Katie Trumpener's work on the emergence of new literary forms of national identity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (New Jersey, 1997).

expansion in women's published writing following a moment of revolutionary upheaval. In the case of Ireland it was the Glorious Revolution and the subsequent war that inaugurated Irish women's first published writing in English.<sup>7</sup> There were several notable Irish female writers during the eighteenth century, including the poet Mary Barber (1685-1755), a member of Jonathan Swift's literary circle, and Frances Sheridan (1724-1766), the mother of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and author of the popular novel, *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761). However, according to Kilfeather it was during the campaign for legislative independence in the 1770s and 1780s, and in the following two decades, that the most explicitly political writings by Irish women were produced, the debates over the nature of patriotism and national independence offering Irish women an opportunity for direct political engagement, and national identification that had previously been denied to them.<sup>8</sup>

Published anonymously, 'by a Lady' in 1781, *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion: or, The History of Miss Mortimer and Miss Fitzgerald*, reflects this politicization of Irish women's literature, and is one of the most overtly political female-authored novels published during this period.<sup>9</sup> The novel takes the form of an epistolary discussion between Louisa Mortimer and Eliza Fitzgerald. By the 1770s and 1780s the novel-in-letters had become one of the most popular novelistic formats, and over 40 per cent of novels published in the British Isles during this period were in letter form.<sup>10</sup> However, as noted in chapter three, the epistolary novel, from its origins in the sentimental fiction of Samuel Richardson and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, was conventionally used as a vehicle for exploring private intrigue and passions, and the interior world and subjective experience of the female letter-writer.<sup>11</sup> Nicola Watson has suggested that during the

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<sup>7</sup> Kilfeather observes that the historical moments associated with women's entry into print in France, England and North America were, respectively: the period of the Fronde, the Restoration, the first experiences of colonization and later the American Revolution. Siobhán Kilfeather, 'The Profession of Letters, 1700-1810', in Angela Bourke and others (eds), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Women's Writing: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions* (Cork, 2002), vol. 5, p. 772.

<sup>8</sup> Siobhán Kilfeather, "'Strangers at Home': Political Fictions by Women in Eighteenth-Century Ireland' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Princeton, 1989), pp. 332-335.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of this novel in the context of political fiction by Irish women during the eighteenth century see Kilfeather, 'Strangers at Home', pp. 335-355.

<sup>10</sup> James Raven, 'Historical Introduction: The Novel Comes of Age', in Peter Garside, James Raven and Rainer Schöwerling (eds), *The English Novel, 1770-1829: A Bibliographic Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles* (Oxford, 2000), vol. 1, p. 31.

<sup>11</sup> See Carolyn Steedman, 'A Woman Writing a Letter', in Rebecca Earle (ed.), *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945* (Aldershot, 1999), pp. 116-121; and Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, *Epistolary Bodies: Gender and Genre in the Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters* (Stanford, 1996).

1790s the traditional narrative of the epistolary novel, with its victimized and eroticized heroines of sensibility, was radically rewritten by female writers, such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Helen Maria Williams, who adapted the plot of Rousseau's *Julie: ou, La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) to radical, and often feminist ends.<sup>12</sup> While the plot and content of the *Triumph* has little in common with Rousseau's *Héloïse*, the novel offers an earlier example of a reworking of the epistolary genre as a medium for female political expression. Set against the background of the Irish Patriot movement's campaign for parliamentary independence, the letters between Louisa Mortimer and Eliza Fitzgerald interweave the language of polite classical republicanism with reflections on female patriotism, marriage, national character and, as the title suggests, the conflict between reason and sensibility. As with Martha McTier's epistolary practice, the recurring political discussion in the correspondence asserts Irish women's capacity to function as citizen-critics within the 'republic of letters'.<sup>13</sup>

The novel opens, significantly, on 4 November 1779, the date on which one of the most imposing assemblies of the Irish Volunteers was held in Dublin. Writing from Dublin, Louisa Mortimer reproaches her friend for having missed this 'glorious sight', which she proceeds to describe:

A large body of our Volunteers assembled, to honour the memory of King William, who made a very fine appearance, and fired several vollies ... Every one looked delighted except some few, who want to be thought friends to the Government, but for me who am an enthusiast in the cause of Liberty and my country, I was wonderfully delighted to see our men of the first rank and property, as well as our most eminent citizens, voluntarily arming in defence of both.<sup>14</sup>

Louisa's enthusiasm for the Volunteers and her identification with 'the cause of Liberty' and Ireland, serves as a starting point for a discussion of women's capacity for patriotism. Eliza responds by expressing her regret at missing the Volunteers' assembly, adding:

You know I am as public spirited as any Roman Matron, in the most

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<sup>12</sup> Nicola J. Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel, 1790-1825: Intercepted Letters, Interrupted Seductions* (Oxford, 1994), p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> See chapter three.

<sup>14</sup> *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion*, vol. 1, p. 5.

virtuous ages of the commonwealth, I mean; for I would not chuse to compare myself to a Roman after they were governed by the Emperors, because that Government was the cause of their being degenerated and sunk in luxury and corruption.<sup>15</sup>

The figure of the Roman matron, as Harriet Guest observes, provided an important model for female literary patriotism during the late eighteenth century, a model that could have both positive and more problematic connotations for women writers, because of contemporary accounts that linked the decline and degeneration of Roman civilization to the prominence of women in imperial Rome.<sup>16</sup> By stressing that she does not wish to compare herself with the Roman matrons under the Emperors, Eliza indicates her acquaintance with such contemporary narratives. However, her comments make it clear that she attributes this decline to the form of government rather than the influence of women. In her response, Louisa adds to this vindication of female patriotism by inverting the argument that women's inability to bear arms excludes them from upholding the public welfare, rather, she suggests, it is precisely because of women's vulnerability that they should be concerned with politics: 'For surely if tyranny and oppression are established in a country they are more liable to suffer from it, both in their persons and properties than men ... it therefore, concerns them much to use all their influence in opposing it'. She concludes by invoking once more the women of classical antiquity as a model for female patriotism: 'What a pity you and I were not born in ancient Greece! We should have made a noble figure in History, as Spartan wives or mothers'.<sup>17</sup>

*The Triumph* not only invokes the public-spirited ladies of ancient Greece and Rome, but also deftly appropriates the language of commercial liberalism and the free trade arguments of the Irish Patriots to argue for women's rationality. Wishing that men would be convinced that 'women are rational creatures as well as themselves', Louisa continues:

I really think the generality of young women have more solid sense than the young men; at least it is so in the circle of my acquaintance. But this is ENTRE NOUS: for should it be known I thought so, the whole Male Sex would be up in arms against me at once, because good sense is one

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<sup>15</sup> *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion*, vol. 1, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Guest, *Small Change*, pp. 220-251.

<sup>17</sup> *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion*, vol. 1, p. 15.

of the things they would willingly make us believe they have an exclusive patent for. But I, who hate monopolies, cannot help putting in a claim to a share of the commodity for self and Co., to speak in the trading style.<sup>18</sup>

The 'feminist' possibilities of Irish Patriot discourse are further explored in the novel's treatment of marriage, which draws on both the female personification of Ireland, and the use of the marriage allegory to describe the Anglo-Irish relationship. Discussing a mutual friend's loveless marriage to a cruel husband, Louisa declares, 'I cannot with any degree of patience reflect on her being sacrificed to man ... just because his estate and her father's were contiguous'.<sup>19</sup> The novel concludes, 'like most other novels, with the ferocious catastrophe, matrimony', as Louisa describes the marriage between Charles and Eliza.<sup>20</sup> Louisa herself chooses to remain unmarried, a symbolic assertion of Ireland's independence from England, which is here made synonymous with female independence. Happily embracing her own future as an 'old maid', Louisa bristles during the wedding ceremony as the clergyman enjoins the bride to obedience: 'He espoused the cause of his sex, so far as to insist on her pronouncing the word obey, pretty audibly: now had I been in her place, that of all words never should have passed my lips'.<sup>21</sup>

In its London edition the *Triumph* was subtitled 'An Hibernian Novel'. However, in a review of the novel published in 1783, Samuel Baddock queried this designation. 'Why an "*Hibernian* novel?"', he asked, 'We know not, unless it hath this distinction given it for the sake of two or three Irish names that chiefly figure in it. We have no discriminating representations of Hibernian manners, or Hibernian scenes'.<sup>22</sup> Certainly there is none of the 'local colour' or descriptions of picturesque folkways that would feature in later Anglo-Irish novels. The Ireland of the *Triumph* is the political nation of the Protestant Ascendancy, not the Ireland of the Gaelic and Catholic community. The Anglo-Irish society that the novel depicted was not, as Baddock observed, substantially different to that of the English upper classes. As previously noted, the Irish Patriot movement was accompanied by an enhanced interest on the part of the Anglo-Irish in

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<sup>18</sup> *Triumph of Prudence over Passion*, vol. 1, p. 24.

<sup>19</sup> *Triumph of Prudence over Passion*, vol. 1, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> *Triumph of Prudence over Passion*, vol. 2, p. 187.

<sup>21</sup> *Triumph of Prudence over Passion*, vol. 2, p. 188.

<sup>22</sup> Samuel Baddock, *Monthly Review*, May 1783, cited in Garside, Raven and Schöwerling (eds), *The English Novel, 1770-1829*, p. 302.

Gaelic culture and antiquity, but there is little evidence of such interest in the *Triumph*, in which the only historical allusions are to Greco-Roman civilization. However, towards the end of the decade a more distinctively Irish form of female patriotic identity was elaborated by Charlotte Brooke (d. 1793), in her collected translations of oral Gaelic verses published as *Reliques of Irish Poetry* in 1789.

Charlotte Brooke was born into the minor Protestant gentry and her father, Henry Brooke, was both a prominent literary and political figure. Although he wrote in defence of the Protestant Ascendancy during the 1740s, engaging in a pamphlet debate on Catholic rights with Charles O'Connor of Belanagare, Brooke would later advocate the relaxation of the penal laws. His novel *The Fool of Quality*, published between 1764 and 1770, was an important contribution to the culture of sensibility and was adapted by John Wesley as a moral novel for Methodists.<sup>23</sup> In addition to the influence of her father, Charlotte Brooke was also acquainted with the antiquarian Joseph Cooper Walker, contributing three translations of Irish songs to his *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards* (1786). Her interest in Irish culture and patriotic politics was further developed through her relationship with Lady Moira, whom she first met in 1786, and who provided some of the antiquarian material used in the *Reliques*.<sup>24</sup>

Although *Reliques* consists primarily of translations, Brooke interspersed these with glosses and expositions on Irish culture and history, and as the *Critical Review* observed in 1790: 'Miss Brooke's poetico-patriotic spirit flames forth in every advertisement prefixed to the different species of poetry she has translated'.<sup>25</sup> The *Reliques* is studded with footnotes and references to the works of the eighteenth-century Irish antiquarians Charles O'Connor, Sylvester O'Halloran and Charles Vallancey, and Brooke's translations can be understood as part of their project to vindicate ancient Ireland's claims to civility. She continually emphasizes the high degree of civilization evinced by early Irish poetry, finding in her translations evidence to support Ireland's claims to an

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<sup>23</sup> Both Charlotte Brooke and her mother were Methodists. For further biographical details see A. C. Seymour, 'Memoir of the Life and Writings of Miss Brooke', prefixed to Charlotte Brooke, *Reliques of Irish Poetry: Consisting of Heroic Poems, Odes, Elegies, and Songs, Translated into English Verse* (Dublin, 1816). On Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality* and the culture of sensibility see G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, 1992), p. 149.

<sup>24</sup> Seymour, 'Memoir of the Life and Writings of Miss Brooke', p. cxxiii.

<sup>25</sup> Cited in Seymour, 'Memoir of the Life and Writings of Miss Brooke', p. xliv.

extensive commercial culture, a cultivated appreciation of arts and sciences and an ancient chivalric order. Drawing on eighteenth-century narratives of civilization, Brooke alludes to the equation between national civility and the status of women, citing the oath whereby members of the Fianna pledged themselves to act as the protectors of all women: 'According to them, no danger or difficulty was to deter an hero from the assistance of a distressed female, and her request was to be law'.<sup>26</sup> For Brooke the most compelling evidence for ancient Irish refinement is the degree of sentiment conveyed by the bardic fragments. She frequently footnotes a particular stanza of verse simply to comment on the beauty of its expression: '... those delicate strokes of nature and sentiment, that pass so directly to the heart, and so powerfully awaken the feelings!'<sup>27</sup>

Brooke paints a romantic picture of the early Irish, but she sets aside her usual diffident tone to challenge her friend and fellow antiquarian Joseph Cooper Walker's assertion that the melancholy tendency of Irish music was a result of 'the remarkable susceptibility of the Irish to the passion of love'. She counters that 'the heroic poetry of our countrymen was designed for the noblest purpose; - love indeed was still its object; - but it was the sublime love of country that those compositions inspired'.<sup>28</sup> Her desire to stress the 'disinterested patriotism' of the bards demonstrates the extent to which Brooke's work intersected with a nationalist programme. However, Brooke's nationalism involves a negotiation between the martial, classical republican model of Patriotism expounded by the Volunteer movement, and later the United Irishmen, and a more conciliatory model based on cultural celebration. Stressing her wish to prove Ireland's claim to 'scientific as well as to military fame', Brooke makes a clear distinction between martial and literary patriotism:

My feeble hand aspires only (like the ladies of ancient Rome) to strew flowers in the paths of these laurelled champions of my country. The flowers of earth, the *terrestrial* offspring of Phoebus, were scattered before the steps of victorious War; but for triumphant GENIUS are reserved the *coelestial* children of his beams, the unfading flowers of the Muse. To pluck, and thus to bestow them, is mine and I hold myself honoured in the task.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Brooke, *Reliques of Irish Poetry*, p. 41.

<sup>27</sup> Brooke, *Reliques of Irish Poetry*, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> Brooke, *Reliques of Irish Poetry*, p. 239.



While Brooke invokes the most familiar and available model of female patriotism, the Roman matron, she is also engaged in forging a new figure for female emulation, the bard. In the only completely original composition by Brooke included in the *Reliques*, she describes a vision in which Crastine ‘a celebrated Irish bard’ appears before her, urging her to overcome fear of critical scorn, and to no longer delay the completion of her translations:

For oft the Muse a gentle guest,  
Dwells in a female form;  
And patriot fire, a female breast,  
May sure unquestion'd warm.

... Long her neglected harp unstrung,  
With gloom encircl'd round;  
Long o'er its silent form she hung,  
Nor gave her soul to sound

Rous'd from her trance, again to reign,  
And reassert her fame,  
She comes, and deigns thy humble strain  
The herald of her claim.<sup>30</sup>

Here Brooke identifies herself as the successor to the bard, charged by the feminine poetic muse with the reproduction and promulgation of Irish artistic achievement. The concept of a female bard was not without precedent in Irish history. In his *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards*, Joseph Cooper Walker had identified a tradition of patriotic female poets in ancient Ireland. While noting that women were not admitted to bardic orders, he suggested that they ‘cultivated music and poetry, whose divine powers they often employed in softening the manners of a people rendered ferocious by domestic hostilities’. In addition to describing women’s conciliatory role, Walker also related how women would encourage their menfolk prior to battle, ‘animating the soldiery with suitable war-songs’, and hailing their heroes with harp music and songs upon their return.<sup>31</sup> Though Brooke observes that the Irish bard often accompanied chiefs into battle, she privileges the alternative role of the bard, as a peacemaker, and quotes approvingly from Walker’s account of the legend of ‘brugham beag na halmhuine’, a

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<sup>29</sup> Brooke, *Reliques of Irish Poetry*, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Brooke, *Reliques of Irish Poetry*, p. 328.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph Cooper Walker, *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards. Interspersed with Anecdotes of, and Occasional Observations on the Music of Ireland ...* (London, 1786), pp. 20-22.

battle for pre-eminence between Finn and Gaul:

The attending Bards observing the engagement to grow very sharp, were apprehensive of the consequences, and determined, if possible to cause a cessation of hostilities. To effect this, they shook 'The Chain of Silence', and flung themselves along the ranks, extolling the sweets of peace, and the achievements of the combatants' ancestors. Immediately both parties, laying down their arms, listened with mute attention, to the harmonious lays of the Bards, and in the end rewarded them with precious gifts.<sup>32</sup>

This passage can be read as an argument for the conciliating influence of cultural nationalism, and suggests Brooke's personal understanding of her bardic function; rather than inspiring acts of martial valour, the bard, by recording and relating historical and cultural achievement, could become an agent of reconciliation.

In her account of the emergence and development of 'bardic nationalism', Katie Trumpener argues that this strand of nationalism emerged in Ireland and Scotland during the late eighteenth century in opposition to Enlightenment discourses of national improvement and economic progress.<sup>33</sup> In the case of Brooke this opposition is not so readily apparent. As noted in chapter one, Irish antiquarians' vindication of ancient Gaelic civility was closely allied to the Irish Patriot movement's vision of Irish national and commercial development, a programme which Brooke implicitly endorses by stressing early Irish cultural, commercial and scientific achievement. However, despite the many similarities between Brooke's work and that of other Irish antiquarians, *Reliques* presents a subtly different approach to the work of cultural and historical recovery, which challenges the subordinate relationship of culture to politics. As Trumpener notes the figure of the bard, which Brooke adopts, is a unifying emblem that 'symbolizes the central role of literature in defining national identity'.<sup>34</sup> Acting as educator, conciliator and repository of culture and sensibility, the bard provides an alternative model of both female patriotism and national identity. In contrast to the rational political patriotism invoked by the author of the *Triumph*, Brooke deploys the conciliatory language of sensibility and affect. She further assumes the role of an

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<sup>32</sup> Brooke, *Reliques of Irish Poetry*, p. 163.

<sup>33</sup> Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, p. 27.

<sup>34</sup> Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, p. 2.

educator, popularizing the more elitist works of male antiquarians.<sup>35</sup> While *Reliques* is undoubtedly a patriotic work, it also transcends political division, shifting the basis of the nation from the political and the parliamentary to the cultural and historical.

Despite this conciliatory message, Brooke was, nevertheless, posthumously recruited to the United Irish cause. Several of her poems were reprinted in *Bolg an tSolair: or the Gaelic Magazine* (1795), a short-lived Irish language periodical published by the office of the *Northern Star*. The editors, Thomas Russell and Patrick Lynch, urged their readers to 'behold with pleasing wonder, with what becoming dignity the ancient bard appears in modern dress, decked and ornamented with skill and taste, by the fair hand of Miss BROOKE'.<sup>36</sup> Though the ostensible purpose of the *Gaelic Magazine* was to 'recommend the Irish language to the notice of Irishmen', the glossary of Gaelic vocabulary appended to the publication signalled the extent to which Irish culture was subordinated to the United Irishmen's revolutionary political agenda. Listed under the headings 'Of Government', 'Military Terms' and 'Of the People', were the Irish Gaelic terms for: monarchy, aristocracy, democracy, slavery, persecution, violence, goading, a gallows, the common people, tumult, misery, want, distress, grumbling, equality, liberty, rebellion and treason.<sup>37</sup> In Trumpener's account the 1790s constitute an hiatus in the development of bardic nationalism, during which time it was subsumed by revolutionary nationalism.<sup>38</sup> However, as the concluding section of this chapter indicates bardic nationalism would continue to be developed by Irish women novelists during this period, in reaction to the United Irishmen's appropriation of culture for political purposes.

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<sup>35</sup> Brooke's interest in education is also evident in her didactic work for children, *The School for Christians, in Dialogues for the Use of Children* (1791). In her analysis of subscriptions to works by Irishwomen published in the eighteenth century, Máire Kennedy notes that *The School for Christians* had the highest percentage of female subscribers of all the publications in her survey, with 61.1% of subscriptions coming from women, indicating that it was oriented towards a female readership. Máire Kennedy, 'Women and Reading in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', in Bernadette Cunningham and Máire Kennedy (eds), *The Experience of Reading: Irish Historical Perspectives* (Dublin, 1999), p. 88.

<sup>36</sup> *Bolg an tSolair: or, Gaelic Magazine* (Belfast, 1999 [1795]), p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> *Gaelic Magazine*, pp. 49-51.

<sup>38</sup> Though Trumpener does note that the Belfast Harpist Festival of 1792 marked a brief conjuncture between bardic and revolutionary nationalism. Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, p. 10.

## II

In June 1790 the *Dublin Evening Post* published a notice of the death of Mrs Mary O'Brien author 'of several poetical pieces that have been universally applauded'. 'Her masculine understanding', wrote the obituarist, 'was refined and polished by those delicate sentiments and sensibilities that form the first charm of the female character'.<sup>39</sup> The identification of O'Brien's understanding as 'masculine' alluded to the fact that O'Brien wrote political poetry in a satirical Swiftian mode that owed little to the languages of sentiment or sensibility.<sup>40</sup> In her study of English women's political writing between 1780 and 1830, Anne K. Mellor distinguishes between the 'female poetess' and the 'female poet'. According to Mellor, the 'poetess' during the Romantic period, celebrated the domestic affections and stressed the primacy of love to woman's happiness, drawing on a discourse that implicitly endorsed the ideology of 'separate spheres'. In contrast, Mellor argues, the female poet 'self-consciously and insistently occupies the public sphere', often writing in response to specific political events and seeking to mould and shape public opinion.<sup>41</sup>

Mary O'Brien would certainly fit the pattern of 'female poets' outlined by Mellor. Her most well-known work was a slim volume of poetry published in 1790 entitled *The Political Monitor, or Regent's Friend*. The poems were written in response to the Regency crisis of 1788-1789, and the Irish Patriots' attempt to exploit the crisis to their own ends.<sup>42</sup> O'Brien clearly aligned herself with the Irish opposition, and the collection is dedicated to the commissioners of the Irish parliament who, in February 1789, had been appointed to travel to London to ask the Prince of Wales to assume the regency of Ireland. George III recovered before the party reached London, much to the embarrassment of the Irish Patriots, and the *Political Monitor* was published following this political reversal. While O'Brien acknowledges that: 'The event which called forth your interposition has, much, to joy of every loyal subject, passed away', she also

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<sup>39</sup> *Dublin Evening Post*, 19 June 1790.

<sup>40</sup> For a brief discussion of Mary O'Brien see Gregory A. Schirmer, *Out of What Began: A History of Irish Poetry in English* (Ithaca and London, 1998), p. 56.

<sup>41</sup> Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, p. 70.

<sup>42</sup> During the incapacity of King George III, the Prince of Wales' efforts to assume power with the assistance of his Foxite friends had been thwarted by William Pitt's prevarication over the Regency Bill. However, the Irish opposition argued that the transfer of power could be effected by royal fiat, and without the consent of the British parliament, a line of argument that stressed Ireland's status as a separate

maintains that 'the principles to which it gave birth remain'.<sup>43</sup>

The poems collected in the *Political Monitor* thus celebrated the liberal and patriotic spirit of the Irish opposition, alternately praising the Prince of Wales and his Irish supporters, and excoriating William Pitt for his usurpation of executive power. Throughout O'Brien displays her own enthusiastic patriotism. In 'Paddy's Opinion an Irish Ballad', O'Brien challenges the English stereotype of the blundering Irish Paddy. Adopting the Irish vernacular brogue she warns William Pitt: 'Arrah, then, my dear Billy,/ It might prove in the pull,/ Paddy's not quite so silly/ As your Jacky Bull'.<sup>44</sup> Though O'Brien draws on the masculine persona of Paddy in several of the poems, she also obliquely identifies herself with the martial figure of the Greek goddess of wisdom Pallas Athena, who she imagines leading the Irish Patriots' embassy to London: 'What form is yon, that meets mine eye askance,/ Whose high plum'd helmet marshal traits display?/ The glist'ning shield, and highly polish'd lance,/ Bespeak the mighty Pallas on her way.'<sup>45</sup> She further draws on the language of polite republicanism and political virtue in her tribute to the Earl of Charlemont, leader of the Irish Volunteers, connecting his public spirit to the martial virtue of the American revolutionaries: 'Next Charlemont, for whom Hibernians rear/ The guardian standard of their sacred laws,/ His nursling heroes distant coasts revere/ For their bold triumph in their country's cause'.<sup>46</sup>

This strain of satirical, patriotic verse would be continued in a more radicalized mode by Henrietta Battier (1751-1813). Battier is the only female writer to have publicly

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and coequal power under the Crown.

<sup>43</sup> Mary O'Brien, *The Political Monitor, or Regent's Friend. Being a Collection of Poems Published in England during the Agitation of the Regency: Consisting of Curious, Interesting, Satyrical and Political Effusions of Poetry* (Dublin, 1790), p. iv.

<sup>44</sup> O'Brien, *The Political Monitor*, p. 32.

<sup>45</sup> O'Brien, *The Political Monitor*, p. 21. An additional example of female-authored political poetry from this period is the work of Mary Birkett (1774-1817). Her *Poem on the African Slave Trade Addressed to her Own Sex* (1792), like Hannah More's poem *Slavery* (1788) draws on the language of religion, sensibility and the domestic affections to dramatize the plight of African slaves. The abolitionist campaigns of the late eighteenth century are widely recognized as an important means through which women, both liberal and conservative, exerted their public influence. However, as this is a distinctive tradition of political activity, which is not directly concerned with Irish politics, I have decided not to include Birkett's poem in this survey. For further information relating to Birkett and women's anti-slavery activity in Britain and Ireland see Mary Birkett, *Poem on the African Slave Trade Addressed to Her Own Sex* (Dublin, 1792); Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (London and New York, 1992); and Nini Rodgers, 'Two Quakers and a Utilitarian: The Reaction of Three Irish Women Writers to the Problem of Slavery 1789-1807', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 100 (2000), pp. 137-157.

<sup>46</sup> O'Brien, *The Political Monitor*, p. 21.

identified herself with the United Irish movement and she produced numerous satirical verses during the decade celebrating the republican cause. Her poems were published in both the United Irish press and as individual pamphlets, and R. R. Madden would later dub her the ‘Sappho of the United Irishmen’, noting that her writings were ‘very popular in the heigh-day [sic] of republican fervour’. According to Madden: ‘She was possessed of excellent talents, an ardent love of liberty, a keen perception of all that was ridiculous in the absurdly-insolent pretensions of Protestant ascendancy, and a strong hatred of intolerance and injustice’.<sup>47</sup> Although Battier would eventually become the scourge of the ruling ascendancy’s placemen and peers, her first collection of poetry, *The Protected Fugitives* (1791), adopted a more deferential stance.<sup>48</sup> The volume was a miscellaneous collection that gathered together sentimental verse, songs written for the Freemasons, and several panegyrics addressed to members of the Irish administration, clearly written in the hope of securing their patronage. The biting satire which characterized her later work is largely absent. Indeed, two figures that appear in her subscription list, John Fitzgibbon, Earl of Clare and the Reverend Walter Blake Kirwan, would subsequently feel the full force of her sarcastic pen in her poems *The Gibbonade* (1793) and *The Kirwanade* (1791). The reasons behind her transition from aspiring panegyrist to the Irish administration to United Irish propagandist are unclear, but it is possible that her failure to find favour with the higher ranks of the government ultimately led her to direct her writings towards the United Irish movement.

In the preface to *Protected Fugitives*, Battier assumed the diffident tone which female writers often used to justify their ventures into the public sphere. Seeking to reassure those who ‘may deem Poetry an unfit employment for the mother of a family’, she continued:

... the composition of a poem, never drew me one half hour from the concerns of my husband and children, being, I bless Providence a better housewife than a poet. Nor should the little work have obtruded itself on

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<sup>47</sup> R. R. Madden, *Literary Remains of the United Irishmen of 1798* (Dublin, 1887), p. 76.

<sup>48</sup> The collection had an illustrious subscription list, which included the United Irishmen William Drennan and Thomas Addis Emmet, alongside several luminaries of the Dublin public scene: the Countess of Westmoreland, Henry Grattan, the Earl of Charlemont, and Lady Moira. Battier had secured the support of Samuel Johnson for her publication, and with his assistance managed to gather an equally impressive list of English subscribers, including the anatomist William Hunter, the artists Sir Joshua Reynolds and George Stubbs, and the actor Charles Macklin. Henrietta Battier, *The Protected Fugitives. A Collection of Miscellaneous Poems. The Genuine Productions of a Lady* (Dublin, 1791).

the Public, had not I considered its publication in the light of a domestic duty.<sup>49</sup>

By presenting her literary work as a 'domestic duty', Battier was indicating that her intrusion into the public sphere was motivated by financial necessity, rather than a masculine desire for literary fame.<sup>50</sup> Certainly, she seems to have lived in straitened circumstances. In his recollections of Battier, her friend and fellow poet, Thomas Moore identified her as 'the widow of a Captain Battier, who, with two daughters, and very small means ... acquired a good deal of reputation, besides adding a little to her small resources, by several satirical pieces of verse'.<sup>51</sup> Her literary productions, however, did not bring significant financial reward, and Madden noted that she died 'totally neglected, in very unfortunate circumstances'.<sup>52</sup> Though Battier may have expressed a suitably feminine diffidence in her debut production, the subject and style of her poetry failed to conform to contemporary conceptions of 'feminine poetry'. Battier adopted the masculine pseudonym Patt Pindar, an Hibernicized version of the English satirist John Wolcott's pen name Peter Pindar, but she did not attempt to conceal her identity as a woman writer.<sup>53</sup> In a response to Battier's satire on the fashionable Dublin preacher, Walter Blake Kirwan, the author of *An Answer to the Kirwanade* (1791) urged her to reveal her sex, suggesting that topical squibs were an unsuitable form for a woman:

Dear Pat - or Patty - if you be a woman,  
Or man effeminiz'd, High Church or Roman,  
What e'er you be, from hence confine your pen  
To women's matter, and leave men to men.<sup>54</sup>

Battier responded to this challenge in the second part of the *Kirwanade*, declaring: 'I wear no petticoats except my own;/ I am no mannish, het'rogenous creature,/ But truly

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<sup>49</sup> Battier, *The Protected Fugitives*, p. xvii.

<sup>50</sup> Eighteenth-century female writers often appended self-effacing prefatory comments to their works in the hope of shielding themselves from criticism. Women's claims that they were compelled to publish in order to earn a living were often true, writing being one of the few means by which relatively genteel women could support themselves. Most famously, the English novelist and poet, Charlotte Smith began writing to support her family following the bankruptcies of her merchant husband. See Raven, 'The Novel Comes of Age', pp. 49-56.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Moore, *Memoirs, Journal and Correspondence of Thomas Moore*, Lord John Russell (ed.) (London, 1853), vol. 1, p. 40.

<sup>52</sup> Madden, *Literary Remains*, p. 77.

<sup>53</sup> The name Pindar also referred back to the classical Greek poet Pindar (c.552-443 BC). Margaret Drabble (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 792, 1109.

<sup>54</sup> *An Answer to the Kirwanade* (Dublin, 1791), pp. 18-19.

feminine in limb and feature'.<sup>55</sup>

Kirwan was a high profile convert to Protestantism, having originally been educated at the Jesuit College in St. Omer, and Battier relentlessly mocked his religious reversal and that of other prominent converts to Protestantism.<sup>56</sup> Her impatience with religious and political hypocrisy found a prime target in her jeremiad against John Fitzgibbon, Lord Chancellor of Ireland from 1789 to 1801, *The Gibbonade* (1793). The son of a convert to Catholicism, Fitzgibbon became a steadfast opponent of Catholic emancipation in the 1790s. Battier skillfully exploited the satirical potential of Fitzgibbon's humble origins, observing that the architect of reaction was the grandson of a Limerick butter-milk seller and a wet nurse.<sup>57</sup> Although Battier was a Protestant, she vigorously defended Catholic claims to political rights, and forcefully attacked the Anglican monopoly of political power.<sup>58</sup> Throughout the *Gibbonade* Battier assailed the corruption of the administration's 'mean placemen' and 'puppy peers', whom she unfavourably compared with the public spirited and patriotic United Irishmen, 'whose bosoms beat, with native honour as with native heat'.<sup>59</sup>

Between 1797 and 1798 Battier became involved in a poetical battle with John Giffard. The proprietor of the conservative *Faulkener's Dublin Journal*, Giffard is traditionally believed to have coined the term 'Protestant Ascendancy', and was one of the ascendancy's most vocal advocates, acting as a government agent during the 1790s.<sup>60</sup> In 1797 Giffard published *Orange: A Political Rhapsody*, which denounced the United Irishmen's support for the French Revolution and Catholic emancipation, and stressed the threat which they posed to the Protestant nation.<sup>61</sup> Battier responded with *The Lemon*, a robust critique of Giffard's anti-Catholic sentiments:

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<sup>55</sup> Henrietta Battier, *Number II. The Kirwanade: or, Poetical Epistle. Humbly Addressed to the Modern Apostle!* (Dublin, 1791), p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Constantia Maxwell, *Dublin Under the Georges, 1714-1830* (London, 1956), p. 47.

<sup>57</sup> Henrietta Battier, *The Gibbonade* (Dublin, 1793), p. 7.

<sup>58</sup> See R. R. Madden's brief biography of Battier, TCD, Dublin, Madden papers, 873/284. 'Summary Notice of Persons Mentioned in *The Lives and Times of the United Irishmen*'.

<sup>59</sup> Battier, *Gibbonade*, p. 9.

<sup>60</sup> See Brian Inglis, *The Freedom of the Press in Ireland, 1784-1841* (London, 1954), pp. 57-62.

<sup>61</sup> Although the English Short Title Catalogue attributes this poem to John Giffard, it has also been attributed to Robert Fowler, Archdeacon of Dublin. This may explain references to the Rev. Dr Bobadil in Battier's response. John Giffard, *Orange: A Political Rhapsody, Canto I* (Dublin, 1797).



Thou wretched rhapsodist, whose vapid strains,  
Tho' my pen answers, my whole soul disdains,  
How have the Catholics, in any age  
Provok'd that black unprecedented rage,  
That burns throughout thy despicable rage.<sup>62</sup>

Attributing the growing sectarian violence that wracked the country to the Orange Order, Battier contrasted the Orangemen with the virtuous United Irishmen:

Let then Ierne's nobler champions wield,  
Decisive weapons in an ampler field,  
And leave to us, poor petticoated things,  
The mock sublimities of lords and kings,  
While the bold *Orange* and his boasted dyes,  
The acrid force of his pale neighbour tries.<sup>63</sup>

It is not clear whether Battier is here subverting the United Irishmen's chivalric model of gender relations, or whether she really believes that the homage formerly paid to 'lords and kings' should now only be extended to 'us poor petticoated things'. Yet, the strident and often incendiary tone of Battier's verses suggest that she was far from conforming to the model of female passivity implicit in chivalric models of femininity.

While Battier modestly presented her writing career as an extension of her 'domestic duties', during the 1790s she assumed a more formal public role as 'Countess of Laurel', poet laureate to the 'Kingdom of Dalkey'. This institution had been founded by a Dublin club, which appears to have been linked to the United Irishmen, and comprised, according to Moore, 'most of the gay fellows of the middle and *liberal* class'.<sup>64</sup> They declared the Dublin suburb a kingdom and in a carnivalesque parody of state functions held annual coronation ceremonies on Dalkey island, where humorous titles and accolades were distributed. Battier's responsibilities as poet laureate included composing coronation odes for the King of Dalkey, which contrasted the egalitarian and democratic character of this alternative kingdom with the corruption and tyranny of the Irish state:

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<sup>62</sup> Henrietta Battier, *The Lemon, a Poem by Patt Pindar; in Answer to a Scandalous Libel, Entitled the Orange; Written, (tho' Anonymous) by the Rev. Dr Bobadil* (Dublin, 1797), p. 14.

<sup>63</sup> Battier, *The Lemon*, p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> Moore, *Memoirs*, p. 50. On the link between the 'Kingdom of Dalkey' and the United Irishmen see

Happy state! Where worth alone  
Gains admission to the throne;  
Where our king's his people's choice,  
And speaks but thro his people's voice;  
Where election is the test  
Of public virtue in the breast;  
And where electors and elect  
Their sacred trust alike respect.<sup>65</sup>

As Battier was an amateur actress, who had performed at Drury Lane whilst living in London in the 1780s, it is likely that she performed these verses at the annual assembly of the kingdom of Dalkey. Her role as poetical-propagandist thus led her to engage in the subversive activity of Dublin radicals in a very public fashion, undermining her own claims to be an essentially 'domestic' woman. Battier clearly positioned herself, and her writing, within the oppositional republic of letters, but her case also suggests the limits of female participation within the public sphere. As a woman, she could act as poet laureate to the radical counter-kingdom, but she could not participate in its elections, or be elected to its offices of state. Nevertheless, as a satirical poet and propagandist Battier engaged in one of the defining activities of the United Irish movement. As Mary Helen Thuente observes, United Irish satires, 'by exemplifying the subversive impulse implicit in satiric humour ... contributed to the popular political consciousness and the mass-politicisation that made the rebellion of 1798 possible'.<sup>66</sup>

### III

By the end of the eighteenth century the novel had come to be considered a female genre in terms of both authorship and readership.<sup>67</sup> As the Belfast Reading Society's

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TCD, Dublin, Madden Papers, MS 873/251.

<sup>65</sup> 'Ode Performed at the Coronation of Stephen III King of Dalkey in the year 1797', appended to Henrietta Battier, *An Address on the Subject of the Projected Union, to the Illustrious Stephen III King of Dalkey, by Patt Pindar* (Dublin, 1799), p. 14.

<sup>66</sup> Mary Helen Thuente, ' "The Belfast Laugh": The Context and Significance of United Irish Satires', in Jim Smyth (ed.), *Revolution, Counter-Revolution and Union: Ireland in the 1790s* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 68.

<sup>67</sup> Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution*, p. 12. Although James Raven's analysis of novels published between 1770 and 1799 suggests that there was in fact no significant gulf between the proportion of novels produced by male and female writers in the British Isles during this period. During the 1770s male authors outnumbered female by two to one, although there was a notable shift from the late 1780s, and by the end of the eighteenth century female authors had come to predominate. However, these statistics relate only to those cases in which authorship can be identified. A significant proportion of novels were published anonymously, comprising 40% of all titles published in the 1780s, and 29% of those published in the 1790s. Raven, 'The Novel Comes of Age', p. 48-49.

determination to exclude novels and other 'books of trivial amusement' from its collection suggests, the novel, partly because of its association with women, was often perceived as an inferior literary form.<sup>68</sup> Though institutions such as the Belfast Reading Society may have drawn a distinction between philosophical, literary and political works, and the 'trivial' subject matter of the novel, the genre could, as the *Triumph of Prudence over Passion* demonstrates, be used to explore both political and philosophical issues. In her pioneering work on the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century novel, Marilyn Butler examined how British novelists engaged both directly, and indirectly, with radical philosophy and revolutionary politics in the age of the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars. Butler demonstrated how the novels of an ostensibly apolitical author such as Jane Austen could be fruitfully read in the context of the debate on the French Revolution and the literary 'war of ideas' between Jacobin and anti-Jacobin British writers.<sup>69</sup>

Building on Butler's work, literary historians have proceeded to highlight the wide range of female novelists' intervention in the Jacobin/anti-Jacobin debate from the 1790s. These political interventions ranged from the overt, to the more subtle, often drawing on a set of identifiable narrative techniques and psychological theories. Typically, the Jacobin novel demonstrated its affinity with radical philosophy by pitting the novel's protagonist against a corrupt world, and by elevating the individual's moral judgment over the tyranny of custom and prejudice. In female-authored works this could be combined with a feminist critique of social and sexual relations, as in Mary Hays' *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), and Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman* (1798). A more explicit engagement with debates on revolutionary politics could be signalled by the subject matter and setting of such novels. As Adriana Craciun notes, female novelists were more likely than their male counterparts to set their novels in revolutionary France. Writers such as Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson and Helen Craik all wrote novels set in contemporary France, which, to varying degrees presented a sympathetic view of the revolution and radical ideology.<sup>70</sup> Women writers, such as

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<sup>68</sup> See chapter three.

<sup>69</sup> It was conservative British writers who first used the term 'Jacobin' to describe their literary and ideological opponents, a term which Butler notes was used against even the most politically innocent authors, as well as the more vocal supporters of the French Revolution such as the Godwin circle. Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>70</sup> Adriana Craciun, 'The New Cordays: Helen Craik and British Representations of Charlotte Corday,

Elizabeth Hamilton, Jane West and most famously Jane Austen, also featured prominently in the anti-Jacobin literary movement. Their novels challenged what they perceived as the rampant individualism and radical sensibility of the 'Jacobins', by portraying virtuous heroes and heroines who subordinated their personal passions and desires to the dictates of reason and society.<sup>71</sup> Conservative novels often caricatured the main proponents of radical philosophy, a notable example being Elizabeth Hamilton's, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), which features the radical philosopher Mr Myope, a parody of William Godwin, and Bridgetina Botherim, a caricature of Mary Hays.<sup>72</sup>

In the context of Irish literature, both the works of Maria Edgeworth and Sydney Owenson can be related to the 'war of ideas'. Edgeworth is generally, though not unproblematically, aligned with anti-Jacobin writers such as Elizabeth Hamilton, with whom she was acquainted, whilst Owenson's work may be understood as closer to the radical sensibility of authors such as Mary Hays.<sup>73</sup> However, apart from Edgeworth's *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795) neither author published major works prior to 1800. Although not directly concerned with politics or Ireland, it is worth briefly considering Maria Edgeworth's *Letters for Literary Ladies* here, as it is the only text by an Irish female writer published during the 1790s that directly addresses the issue of female intellectual emancipation. The first part of the *Letters* is based on a correspondence between Maria Edgeworth's father Richard Lovell Edgeworth, and his friend the educationalist Thomas Day, on the subject of female education. The opening letter articulates Day's conservative views of female inferiority and his suspicion of female influence.<sup>74</sup> As Cliona Ó Gallachoir observes, the *Letters* evince the influence of the

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1793-1800', in Craciun and Lokke (eds), *Rebellious Hearts*, p. 195. For a discussion of Charlotte Smith's 'revolutionary' novels see Judith Davis Miller, 'The Politics of Truth and Deception: Charlotte Smith and the French Revolution', in Craciun and Lokke (eds), *Rebellious Hearts*, pp. 337-363; and Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, pp. 103-121.

<sup>71</sup> On counter-revolutionary writers see Butler, *The War of Ideas*, pp. 88-123; Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution*, pp. 126-161; M. O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 2001).

<sup>72</sup> Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution*, p. 149. Maria Edgeworth's novel *Belinda* (1801) similarly parodies radical feminism through the character Harriet Freke.

<sup>73</sup> As Butler notes Edgeworth's fiction draws on many of the elements used by 'Jacobin' writers, and is more 'bi-partisan' than other writers of the period. Butler, *The War of Ideas*, p. 124. Similarly Owenson, who did not publish during the 1790s, has not been explicitly identified with either side, although the fact that her first novel, *St Clair; or, The Heiress of Desmond* (1802) was a reworking of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, would identify her with the Jacobin tradition.

<sup>74</sup> Although Thomas Day was part of the progressive intellectual circle centred round the Birmingham

French Revolution debates through Edgeworth's fictionalization of Day as a proponent of Burkean conservatism, a conservatism that shapes his ideas on women's education. Hence the first letter argues that women's intellectual inferiority is 'natural' and their exclusion from education in accordance with custom and precedent. The response, which clearly expresses Edgeworth's own views on female education, is interesting in so far as it counters this Burkean emphasis on custom by employing Enlightenment narratives of civilization to argue for women's rational equality. Drawing on the Scottish Enlightenment philosophy that had formed a significant component of her education, as well as Condorcet's *Esquisse des Progrès de l'Esprit Humain* (1793), Edgeworth welcomes the replacement of the chivalric model of gender relations with a more rational and egalitarian relationship between men and women: 'The days of chivalry are no more: the knight no longer sallies forth in ponderous armour, mounted upon "a steed as invulnerable as himself" ... and from being the champions and masters of the fair sex, we are now become their friends and companions'.<sup>75</sup> Edgeworth's argument for female education is thus similar in several respects to the progressive views of William Drennan and Arthur O'Connor. However, in keeping with her cautious approach to revolutionary politics, she eschews any 'metaphysical discussion' of the rights of woman, and suggests that both men and women should be more properly concerned with their duties within the private sphere.<sup>76</sup>

Despite, or perhaps because of the dominance of militant radical-republicanism in Ireland during this decade, there was no literary 'war of ideas' comparable to that in Britain. As noted in chapter three, Martha McTier and Mary Anne McCracken both read political fiction by Mary Hays, Mary Wollstonecraft and Elizabeth Hamilton during the 1790s. However, I have been able to identify only one novel by an Irish woman writer published during this period that directly addresses the political issues generated by the French Revolution, *The Irish Heiress* (1797) by Mrs F. C. Patrick. In

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Lunar Society, he had notoriously conservative views on female education. He went so far as to put Rousseau's plan of restricted female education, as expounded in *Emile*, into action, raising two foundling girls in isolation in the hopes of creating his very own pliable 'Sophie'. Cliona Ó Gallachoir, "The Whole Fabric must be Perfect": Maria Edgeworth's *Literary Ladies* and the Representation of Ireland', in Margaret Kelleher and James H. Murphy (eds), *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Ireland: Public and Private Spheres* (Dublin, 1997), p. 112.

<sup>75</sup> Maria Edgeworth, *Letters for Literary Ladies to which is Added An Essay on the Noble Science of Self-Justification*, Claire Connolly (ed.) (London, 1993 [1795]), p. 29. As Claire Connolly notes, in the original text of the *Letters* this passage footnoted Condorcet's *Esquisse de Progrès de l'Esprit Humain*.

<sup>76</sup> Edgeworth, *Letters for Literary Ladies*, p. 29.

the preface to a later novel, Patrick identified herself as the wife of an officer, but there are no further biographical details.<sup>77</sup> The content of *The Irish Heiress* suggests that she was Catholic, and the novel provides a distinctly Irish Catholic perspective on the French Revolution, combining an anti-Jacobin critique of the revolution with an insistent claim for Catholic rights, and an impassioned nationalism.

The novel centres on the fortunes of Augusta O'Flaherty, the heiress of the title. The daughter of a wealthy Irish landowner and convert to Protestantism and his aristocratic English wife, Augusta is born in Ireland but is soon abandoned by her parents, who return to England on account of her mother's irrational prejudices against the Irish 'savages': 'their hospitality was disgusting, their professions hypocrisy, and their accent killed her'.<sup>78</sup> Nursed out to a local farmer's wife, Augusta acquires both the accent and demeanour of 'a little peasant', further estranging her from her mother, who favours Augusta's anglicized sister. In response to this estrangement from her family, Augusta turns to her grandfather's Catholic confessor, who becomes her adviser and mentor. Under his tutelage Augusta becomes drawn to Catholicism, finally deciding to convert, to the horror of her parents. Having converted, the novel translates Catholic experiences under the penal laws into a domestic drama, as Augusta resists her parents' efforts to force her to recant. The parallels between the plight of Augusta and the situation of Irish Catholics are further highlighted when Augusta's brother dies, and she becomes heiress to the family's fortune. Augusta's mother is appalled at the thought of her 'papist' daughter inheriting the family estates, fearing that if her husband should die the heiress 'would turn her mother and sister out of door for heretics, and take in a whole strain of ragamuffin priests'.<sup>79</sup> Augusta, who professes to have no such intentions, is deeply hurt by her mother's insinuations, which here stand for conservative Protestantism's fears of Catholic usurpation and domination.

Patrick's vindication of the virtuous character and intentions of Irish Catholics is combined with a sympathetic account of the Irish peasantry whom she describes as: 'an industrious, brave, oppressed nation, who work hard, denying themselves every comfort

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<sup>77</sup> Mrs F. C. Patrick, *More Ghosts! By the Wife of an Officer, Author of the Irish Heiress* (London, 1798), p. vi.

<sup>78</sup> Mrs F. C. Patrick, *The Irish Heiress, A Novel in Three Volumes* (London, 1797), vol. 1, p. 20.

<sup>79</sup> Patrick, *The Irish Heiress*, vol. 1, p. 169.

... to pay the heavy rent imposed by a landlord who spends the accumulated sums ... in another country'.<sup>80</sup> Despite wishing that the Irish peasantry could acquire the independent bearing of their English counterparts, 'without their surliness', she stops short of endorsing any revolutionary solution, only noting that, 'this is a change that depends in some measure on the Government, and I do not meddle with politics'.<sup>81</sup> Drawing on her own experiences as an army wife, Patrick stresses English ingratitude towards the many Irishman who 'fight all the battles for *les braves Anglois* without reaping either honor or emolument', and questions why a nation should:

... affect to despise a people who were particularly blessed by Providence before the English so politely visited them under Henry the second, and considering the bad opinion they have always professed to entertain of them, have rather prolonged their stay beyond what might have been expected.<sup>82</sup>

While the first half of the novel comprises a radical critique of Catholic oppression, Ascendancy mismanagement, and English colonial intervention, that echoes in several respects the United Irish programme, the second half of the novel, which is set in revolutionary France, clearly rejects the movement's radical-republicanism and revolutionary alliance with France. In its appraisal of the *Irish Heiress*, the *Critical Review* commended the section set in Ireland as a 'narrative that bore many marks of reality ... a plain tale, in which the writer and heroine appeared to be one and the same'. However, they were less approving of that part of the novel set in France, observing that in this section 'we ... find the grossest fiction blended with real events'.<sup>83</sup> As the reviewer insinuated, it is unlikely that Patrick would have had first hand experience of contemporary France. It is probable that her novel drew on factual and fictional accounts of the Revolution published by British female writers during the 1790s. Helen Maria Williams' multi-volume 'history' of the French Revolution provided a detailed eye-witness account of the personalities and progress of the French republic. Registering her own initial enthusiasm for the Revolution and her disillusionment with its Jacobin phase, Williams' letters, which were published throughout the 1790s, traced the course of the Revolution in terms of its social and human impact, as she combined

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<sup>80</sup> Patrick, *The Irish Heiress*, vol. 1, p. 186.

<sup>81</sup> Patrick, *The Irish Heiress*, vol. 2, p. 16.

<sup>82</sup> Patrick, *The Irish Heiress*, vol. 2, p. 18.

<sup>83</sup> *Critical Review* cited in Garside, Raven and Schöwerling (eds), *The English Novel, 1770-1829*, p. 724.

portraits of quotidian life under the Revolution with sketches of its more prominent figures.<sup>84</sup> The first instalment of Williams' account of the Revolution was printed in Dublin in 1791 by nine different publishers, including the United Irishman Patrick Byrne, with two editions of her *Letters Containing a Sketch of the Politics of France, from the Thirty-First of May 1793, till the Twenty-Eighth of July 1794* being published between 1795 and 1796 by the United Irish publisher John Chambers.<sup>85</sup> Extracts from the letters were also published in *Walker's Hibernian Magazine* throughout the 1790s.<sup>86</sup> Williams' letters would have provided Patrick with a valuable source on the culture and events of the Revolution. At the same time, Patrick's portrayal of émigré radicals in Paris indicate that she had little sympathy for revolutionary enthusiasts such as Williams.

In the second volume of the *Irish Heiress*, Augusta is dispatched from the family home at her mother's insistence and sent to France on the eve of the revolution, accompanied by Lady Anne Daly and her two daughters. In Paris the Irish party attend the radical salons of Madame Roland and visit the court of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, before becoming embroiled in the turmoil of the revolution, during which Augusta is imprisoned, almost guillotined, and forced to flee the country in disguise. Augusta's increasing horror at the violence of the revolution is contrasted with her travelling companion, Miss Daly's enthusiasm for republican ideas. Patrick demonstrates her critical attitude towards English female 'Jacobins', such as Mary Wollstonecraft, through her unflattering portrait of Miss Daly, 'a young lady of too much sense ever to change her opinions for the sake of any reasoning', having 'already formed her own opinion from Miss W\_\_ and other democratic ladies'.<sup>87</sup> Like Wollstonecraft, and several other émigré radicals, Miss Daly is eager to stay in 'an interesting spot, likely to become still more so, to both the Historian and philosopher', and persuades her mother to remain in Paris, despite the increasingly violence of the revolution.<sup>88</sup> Intoxicated by

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<sup>84</sup> For an analysis of Helen Maria Williams' *Letters from France* see Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution*, pp. 30-79.

<sup>85</sup> Helen Maria Williams, *Letters Written in France, in the Summer 1790, to a Friend in England; Containing, Various Anecdotes Relative to the French Revolution* (Dublin, 1791); *Letters Containing a Sketch of the Politics of France, from the Thirty-First of May 1793, till the Twenty-Eights of July 1794* (Dublin, 1795). See works published in Ireland on the electronic database of the English Short-Title Catalogue.

<sup>86</sup> *Walker's Hibernian Magazine*, August 1792, November 1792, September 1795 and October 1795.

<sup>87</sup> Patrick, *The Irish Heiress*, p. 70.

<sup>88</sup> Patrick, *The Irish Heiress*, p. 72.



the excitement of the political upheaval, Miss Daly is delighted to be admitted into the circles of the republican women she so admires, and who Patrick identifies as Madame Roland, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams and Madame de Genlis.<sup>89</sup>

The political choices facing the Irish Catholic nation are vividly dramatized in the novel as a competition for Augusta's body between the lascivious revolutionary Monsieur D\_\_ O\_\_ and the Irish Protestant landowner Terence Connor, who has pursued Augusta to Paris. The character of Monsieur D\_\_ O\_\_ is undoubtedly a thinly veiled representation of the revolutionary leader Philippe (Egalité) Duc d'Orleans. Popularly believed to be the father of Pamela Fitzgerald, the figure of Orleans instantly suggests the links between the United Irishmen and revolutionary France.<sup>90</sup> He proposes that Augusta become his mistress, hinting that she could become 'the greatest woman in France', 'only', the heroine bitterly records, 'at the small expence of my own and my friends' happiness - my peace of conscience - my country'.<sup>91</sup> In contrast, Terence Connor is a distinctly Burkean figure, violently opposed to the French Revolution. In a demonstration of his chivalric loyalty to the French royal family, he is almost killed whilst repulsing the revolutionary mob's attack on the Tuileries palace during the August revolution of 1792.<sup>92</sup> While Augusta finds Connor's fulsome flattery and exaggerated gallantry distasteful, her father urges her to marry to him. In an act of filial obedience Augusta agrees, though she never professes to love Connor. Thus while rejecting revolutionary republicanism in the form of Orleans, the alternative alliance with Burkean conservatism, is also deemed unsatisfactory. The novel concludes with Connor's execution and Augusta's return to Ireland, where she assumes control of her deceased father's estates and resolves to be an exemplary landlord. Determining to remain single, Augusta draws up a deed which will transfer her estates to her son in the case of her marriage, thus securing herself against the unwanted advances of mercenary suitors eager to claim her fortune. As in *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion*, Patrick's novel ends with a symbolic assertion of Irish independence, represented by the heroine's determination to remain unmarried. Yet, reflecting the political shifts in the intervening decade and half, this time it is the Irish Catholic community rather than the

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<sup>89</sup> Patrick, *The Irish Heiress*, p. 80.

<sup>90</sup> See chapter two.

<sup>91</sup> Patrick, *The Irish Heiress*, vol. 2, p. 84.

<sup>92</sup> Patrick, *The Irish Heiress*, vol. 2, p. 210.

Protestant nation whose political independence is asserted.

While the novel can be read as a critique of an aggressive masculinist politics that competes for access to the sexualized body of the female nation, Augusta's determination to divest herself of control of her estate also suggests a critical attitude towards patriarchal systems of inheritance, in which women function merely as ciphers through which men secure access to property. In her account of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century 'domestic novel', Nancy Armstrong argues that the narratives of courtship and marriage upon which the novel comes to centre, are essentially political, in so far as they support middle-class claims to cultural and political hegemony, by contesting 'the reigning notion of kinship relations that attached most power and privilege to certain family lines'.<sup>93</sup> By representing love and desire as universal emotions that are independent of political history, middle-class novelists rejected the explicitly political and economic practices of aristocratic marriage and dynastic alliance, instead carving out an idealized 'domestic' space of love and familial relationships that was supposedly apolitical. According to Armstrong, romance plots in the English novel thus seek to conceal, and erase, the political dimensions of marriage. As the above reading of *The Irish Heiress* suggests, while the novel may challenge the economic basis of aristocratic marriage, the marriage plot continues to function as a powerful way of allegorizing and exploring political relationships. I would suggest that because of the political valency attached to the female figure as a personification of Ireland, the marriage plot in Irish women's fiction remains more thoroughly and self-consciously politicized than its English equivalent.

Though *The Irish Heiress* employs sexual relations between men and women as a means of commenting on the political alliances available to Ireland in the 1790s, the marriage plot was most frequently used as a vehicle for reflecting upon Anglo-Irish relations. In Anna Millikin's *Eva: An Old Irish Story* (1795), it is the history of the foundational Anglo-Irish union between Aoife, daughter of the King of Leinster, Dermot Mac Murrrough, and the Anglo-Norman Earl of Pembroke, Strongbow, which is

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<sup>93</sup> Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford, 1987), p. 5. For a similar argument respecting the function of romantic love within bourgeois ideology see Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago and London, 1984), p. 236.

the subject of the novel.<sup>94</sup> The historical novel, a genre that would become immensely successful in the nineteenth century through the works of Walter Scott, was still an emerging literary form in the late eighteenth century. In the 1780s the Irish writer Anne Fuller produced two works of historical fiction, *Alan Fitz-Osborne, an Historical Tale* (1787) and *The Son of Ethelwolf, An Historical Tale*, both of which were set in England.<sup>95</sup> However, *Eva* is one of the first historical novels by an Irish women writer to be set entirely in Ireland. Repackaging the contents of more elite historiography for a fiction reading audience, the historical novel enabled women to intervene in the traditionally masculine domain of historiography, and as with Charlotte Brooke's poetical translations, the genre helped to blur the distinctions between elite and popular, and male and female discursive domains. Eighteenth-century historical novels tended to be located in English medieval settings, allowing their readers to indulge in a romantic nostalgia for the age of chivalry, and to engage with events safely located in the distant past.<sup>96</sup> However, as the moment at which the problematic Anglo-Irish relationship began, the events of the twelfth century that are the subject of Millikin's novel remained both controversial and politically charged.<sup>97</sup>

Combining actual historical figures with fictional characters, *Eva* dramatizes the events leading to Dermot Mac Murrough's decision to enlist the assistance of Henry II in his bid for the high kingship of Ireland. An implicit parallel is drawn between twelfth-century Ireland and the contemporary political landscape, as Millikin describes a country torn by 'intestine broils', 'where faction rages, and the bonds of society are rent'.<sup>98</sup> While the narrative is relatively faithful to the historical record, Millikin applies

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<sup>94</sup> The subscription list to *Eva* identifies Anne Millikin as a resident of Castlemartyr, Co. Cork, but I have been unable to find any further biographical details. Anna Millikin, *Eva: an Old Irish Story. By the Authoress of Corfe Castle* (Cork, 1795). An earlier work by Millikin, *Corfe Castle: Or Historic Tracts. A Novel in Two Volumes* (1793) was commended in *Anthologia Hibernica*, which praised Millikin's 'refined and cultivated understanding', and declared it to be 'very different from the fashionable nursery novels'. *Anthologia Hibernica*, November 1793, p. 366.

<sup>95</sup> Although Kilfeather suggests that the *Son of Ethelwolf*, which deals with the Saxon King Alfred's efforts to repulse the Danes, can be read as allegorical of eighteenth-century Ireland. Kilfeather, 'The Profession of Letters, 1700-1810', p. 812.

<sup>96</sup> On the development of historical fiction see Anne H. Stevens, 'Tales of Other Times: A Survey of British Historical Fiction, 1770-1812', *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text*, 7 (2001), p. 7. Online: Internet (20/6/2004): <[http://www.cf.ac.uk/encap/corvey/articles/cc07\\_n03.html](http://www.cf.ac.uk/encap/corvey/articles/cc07_n03.html)>.

<sup>97</sup> The original Anglo-Norman settlements were more closely associated with the Protestant Ascendancy's sense of constitutional identity, than their cultural identity, which, as previously noted, increasingly drew on the Gaelic and Celtic past during the eighteenth century. See Colin Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 147.

<sup>98</sup> Anne Millikin, *Eva; an Old Irish Story* (Cork, 1795), p. 16.

some literary licence to Eva's story, inventing a lover named Regan who has a prior claim to her affections. By framing the first half of the novel as a romance between Regan, a poor but noble warrior, and Mac Murrough's daughter, Eva, Millikin adds an additional layer of conflict to the proposed alliance between Eva and Strongbow. On learning of the marriage, Regan is implacable in his opposition, stressing the foreignness of Strongbow, and his own willingness to fight to the death for Eva's hand:

The Earl of Pembroke, - a foreign Lord - by heaven, I would not yield my claim to any of his nation, no not to Henry's self - I love fair Eva with a flame so pure, a Saint might own it; her virgin heart is fraught with equal tenderness for me, and never will I resign her, but with the sword assert my right, that right which she has given me, and in the face of Heaven confirmed with the most solemn vows.<sup>99</sup>

At this point a political reading of the novel appears clear. Eva, a symbolic and historic representation of Ireland, is positioned between her faithful Irish lover, willing to die to defend her, and an alliance which will entail personal and political union with England. However, the final part of the novel appears to undermine this interpretation. Strongbow is presented as a generous and sympathetic character, who has also suffered the consequences of a disappointed love. Regan is killed in combat and with his dying breath entreats Eva to marry Strongbow. Eva duly accepts Strongbow's hand, although it is a rather ambivalent representation of the national romance. By using the anglicized form of Aoife's name, Eva, Milliken invokes comparison with Adam and Eve, and thus reinforces the foundational nature of her alliance with Strongbow, but portrays it as lacking in any affective basis. The concluding line of the novel baldly relates that shortly after the marriage Henry II '... landed and assumed the sovereignty of Ireland'.<sup>100</sup> The conclusion thus underlines the contemporary resonance of this historical moment, implying that the unsettled nature of the Anglo-Irish relationship can be traced to this loveless beginning.

The historical novel was crucial to the development of bardic nationalism in the Romantic era, and *Eva* is populated by characters closely associated with this literary genre: the venerable old warrior, the loyal rustic nurse and the harp-playing bard.<sup>101</sup> The

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<sup>99</sup> Millikin, *Eva*, pp. 113-114.

<sup>100</sup> Millikin, *Eva*, p. 234.

<sup>101</sup> Millikin, *Eva*, p. 196. For a discussion of these characters' place within the historical novel and

evocation of a culturally distinctive and romantic Irish identity is further developed in Regina Maria Roche's *The Children of the Abbey* (1796), which translates the putative bardic nationalism of Millikin's *Eva* into a contemporary setting. Born in Waterford in 1764 and brought up in Dublin, Roche was a prolific and hugely popular author, although she had fallen into literary obscurity by the time of her death in 1845.<sup>102</sup> Her work has been largely neglected by literary historians, though she is remembered as a Gothic novelist in the mode of Anne Radcliffe, and as the author of one of the 'horrid novels' referred to in Jane Austen's Gothic parody, *Northanger Abbey* (1818).<sup>103</sup> As a literary genre, the Gothic is closely related to both the historical novel and the national tale. Although Natalie Schroeder claims that it was not until after the 1820s, and following the success of Maria Edgeworth and Sydney Owenson that Roche began to produce national tales, *Children of the Abbey* can be understood as prefiguring their works, particularly Owenson's, in its romanticized depiction of Irish culture and womanhood.<sup>104</sup> The novel uses several literary tropes associated with the Gothic, including lavish descriptions of picturesque scenery and melancholic medieval ruins, and a quivering heroine of exquisite sensibility. However, whereas contemporary Gothic novels tended to favour Southern European settings, particularly the Alpine regions, *Children of the Abbey* translates the Gothic sublime into a Celtic context.

The novel follows the peripatetic travels of its heroine Amanda Fitzalan, as she journeys back and forth between Wales, Ireland, London, and the Scottish Highlands, accompanied by her Welsh nurse. The daughter of an Irish half-pay officer, whose 'ancient Irish family' lost their fortunes during the Jacobite wars, Amanda's romance with Lord Mortimer, an English aristocrat with Irish estates, forms the central narrative thread.<sup>105</sup> The Celtic romanticism of the work is marked throughout by the dense references to Ossianic poetry. Amanda's brother is named Oscar, and her mother Malvina, after characters from James Macpherson's *Poems of Ossian*. The heroine's affinity with Ossianic romanticism is immediately signalled in the opening chapter.

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national tale see Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, pp. 2-11, 211-212.

<sup>102</sup> For biographical details of Regina Maria Roche see Kilfeather, *The Profession of Letters, 1700-1810*, pp. 831-832.

<sup>103</sup> Coral Ann Howells, *Love, Mystery, and Misery: Feeling in Gothic Fiction* (London, 1978), p. 117.

<sup>104</sup> Natalie Schroeder, 'Regina Maria Roche and the Early Nineteenth Century Irish Novel', *Eire-Ireland*, 19 (1983), pp. 116-130.

<sup>105</sup> The narrator of Sydney Owenson's, *The Wild Irish Girl* is also the son of a lord with Irish estates, who adopts the name Mortimer while in Ireland, suggesting that *Children of the Abbey* may have influenced

When listening to the airs of a blind harper Amanda finds herself:

... sent back to the ages of old, to the days of other years, when bards rehearsed the exploits of heroes, and sang the praises of the dead ... To proceed in the beautiful language of Ossian, "The sound was mournful and low, like the song of the tomb ..."<sup>106</sup>

On first entering Lord Mortimer's Irish castle, a 'gothic pile' surrounded with 'relics of druidical antiquity', Amanda is again transported into a romantic reverie by the ancient armaments which line the entrance hall: 'She wished in the romance of the moment, some gray bard near her, to tell the deeds of other times - of kings renowned in our land - of chiefs we behold no more'.<sup>107</sup>

Throughout the novel the sublime landscapes, rich tradition and virtuous inhabitants of the Celtic peripheries are contrasted with the sordid, philistine and artificial character of London. Amanda is the embodiment of virtuous womanhood, pure sensibility, and Celtic identity. Her figurative function is underlined by continuous comparisons between Amanda and feminine allegories. With her 'floating locks and die-away glances' she is variously compared to a goddess, the figure of Hope reclining on an anchor, and Patience on a monument, and the fact that she plays the harp suggests a further parallel between Amanda and eighteenth-century representations of Hibernia.<sup>108</sup> In the fashionable and depraved circles of London society, however, Amanda's sexual and moral purity is challenged, as she falls prey to the stratagems of the effeminized fop, Mr Freelove, and the scheming Lady Euphraisia, who scornfully describe her as 'an ignorant Irish country girl' taken from the 'wilds of Ireland' and 'forced upon our notice'.<sup>109</sup> They collude with the libertine Colonel Belgrave in his attempt to seduce her. Having survived this assault on her chastity, the novel concludes with Amanda's marriage to Lord Mortimer.

This marriage, the novel suggests, symbolizes both a reconciliation between Celtic culture and metropolitan power, and a national reconciliation between the Protestant

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Owenson's work.

<sup>106</sup> Regina Maria Roche, *The Children of the Abbey* (Philadelphia, n. d. [1796]), p. 8.

<sup>107</sup> Roche, *The Children of the Abbey*, p. 151.

<sup>108</sup> The harp-playing heroine also suggests parallels between Amanda, and the character Glorvina in Sydney Owenson's *Wild Irish Girl*. Roche, *Children of the Abbey*, pp. 183, 189.

Ascendancy and their alienated tenantry. Struck by the wretched state of the peasantry on Mortimer's Irish estates, Amanda is informed by her father that this results from 'the emigration of their landlords' who spend their wealth 'in foreign lands instead of enriching those from whence it was drawn'. Amanda longs to marry Mortimer in order 'to change such scenes; to see the clay-built hovel vanish and a dwelling of neatness and convenience rise in its stead'.<sup>110</sup> Thus marriage is understood as a key vehicle for social and national reform. Within the domestic sphere women can exert their moral influence to bring men to a full sense of their duties, in this case the duties of the absentee landlords to their Irish tenantry. When asking for Amanda's hand, Mortimer stresses the power of female influence, and declares that if women like Amanda were to use 'the resistless power of pleasing' and 'the faculties assigned them by Providence in the cause of virtue', they would 'soon check the dissipation of the times'.<sup>111</sup> Roche here draws upon a discourse of femininity that was becoming increasingly well established in British women's writing during this period, but which had ambivalent implications for women's relationship to both politics and the nation.<sup>112</sup> By thus identifying domesticity as crucial to national wellbeing, female writers at once authorized women's claim to public influence, while at the same time contributing to a discourse of separate sexual spheres.<sup>113</sup>

Locating *Children of the Abbey* within the context of Irish politics, Miranda Burgess argues that Roche's feminization of national culture is a reaction to the political upheaval of the 1790s. According to Burgess, Roche responds 'to the fragmented and fractious debates on Ireland and revolution by translating Ireland's political identity into the naturalized language of culture'.<sup>114</sup> Whereas the United Irish movement sought to exploit culture for political ends, Roche, like Charlotte Brooke, privileges cultural over political identity, and closely associates it with women and the domestic. By casting the novel's heroine of sensibility as an embodiment of national character, Roche accords women an important role in the construction and preservation of national identity, but

<sup>109</sup> Roche, *Children of the Abbey*, pp. 229, 231.

<sup>110</sup> Roche, *Children of the Abbey*, pp. 171-172.

<sup>111</sup> Roche, *Children of the Abbey*, p. 259.

<sup>112</sup> See Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, pp. 142-146; Guest, *Small Change*, pp. 313-339; Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution*, p. 7.

<sup>113</sup> See Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, p. 144.

<sup>114</sup> Miranda Burgess, 'Violent Translations: Allegory, Gender and Cultural Nationalism in Ireland', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 59 (1998), pp. 33-69. Burgess suggests that Roche's attempt to detach

also underwrites a conception of nationality and gender identity that understands national difference and gender difference as apolitical and natural categories of identity. Yet, while bardic nationalism can be understood as ratifying women's exclusion from politics, it can also be seen as a means of resolving women's tenuous relationship with the political sphere. A concept of the nation as a cultural, and historic community, bound together by affective, familial bonds, enables female writers such as Roche to imagine themselves as national subjects, in response to a republican discourse which identifies political and national subjectivity with the figure of the masculine citizen-in-arms.

#### IV

As this survey of late eighteenth-century Irish women's writing demonstrates, women, through the medium of print culture, were able to participate in the public discussion of issues of national and political importance. Although women's writing was largely confined to genres associated with the literary public sphere, poetry and the novel, they innovatively adapted these literary forms to give voice to their political opinions, and to comment upon contemporary events and issues. These contributions covered a wide spectrum of topics which reflected some of the dominant issues in late eighteenth-century Irish political debate: the Anglo-Irish relationship, political corruption, the landlord-tenant relationship, radical politics, the French Revolution, Catholic rights and Irish cultural identity. There was also substantial diversity in the literary genres used by Irish women to intervene in these debates, which included epistolary, anti-Jacobin, historical and Gothic novels, as well as satirical poetry, and Gaelic translations.

The diversity of these contributions makes it difficult to reach any firm conclusions respecting the relationship between gender, politics and nation in Irish women's writing during this period. However, I would like to draw out two main strands of female political and national identification that emerge within Irish women's literature during the 1780s and 1790s. The first of these involves an identification with the Irish political nation, and the rational public sphere, and makes a claim for women's right to function as political subjects either directly, by championing women's capacity for patriotism, as

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culture from politics is not entirely successful.



in *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion*, or indirectly, by adopting masculine modes of address, as in the political poetry of Mary O'Brien and Henrietta Battier. While to a certain extent these writers challenge the gendering of the public sphere, by clearly and insistently asserting women's right to discuss and write upon issues of public importance, they also tacitly endorse women's auxiliary role within the political sphere; female writers can act as enthusiastic supporters of masculine patriotism and political virtue, but more formal political action within the public sphere is denied them. The second strand, which may be categorized as 'bardic nationalist', connects the works of Charlotte Brooke, Regina Roche and Anna Millikin, and is concerned with the cultural and historical aspects of the Irish nation. Focusing on women's roles as educators, conciliators and custodians of culture and tradition, these works subtly challenge the equation of the nation with the martial, masculine politics espoused by the Volunteer movement, and subsequently the United Irishmen. Whereas culture was subordinated to politics by both these movements, bardic nationalism privileges culture over politics, and by extension foregrounds women's role within the nation. This form of national identification would be most fully elaborated by Irish novelists in the aftermath of the Act of Union. However it is important to note that this strand of nationalism is already evident in women's writing prior to 1800. One aspect that connects the female-authored novels of the 1780s and 1790s is the use of the marriage plot as a means of exploring political relationships, in particular the Anglo-Irish relationship. As the following chapter demonstrates, during the debates on the Act of Union the boundaries between this novelistic device and political rhetoric would become increasingly blurred, as the national marriage between Ireland and Britain became the focus of intense political debate.

## Chapter Six: 'Making a capon of our country': Gendering the Act of Union

The Genius of Britain, who long had enjoy'd,  
Supreme, as a keeper, Miss Ireland's charms,  
Mad jealous that Miss with Republicans toy'd,  
And seem'd half inclined to escape from his arms.  
He swore in a rage, he'd surely encage  
His mistress' person, and hold it for life;  
He'd make her his own, his flesh and his bone  
He'd lawfully wed her, and call her his wife.<sup>1</sup>

This broadsheet ballad, issued in 1799, expressed a popular perception of the proposed Act of Union: having provoked British anger through its flirtation with revolutionary republicanism, the wayward Irish nation was to be safely tamed and contained within the bonds of wedlock. This initiative would supposedly resolve the ambiguous familial relationship Britain and Ireland. The Anglo-Irish relationship, which had been variously depicted over the course of the eighteenth century as one between independent sister kingdoms, or between a heartless step-mother and her rebellious children, was now to be finally settled in the form of a national marriage between the two nations. 'Gender', as Joan Wallach Scott argues, 'is a primary way of signifying relationships of power', and the description of the Act of Union as a national marriage between 'feminine' Ireland and 'masculine' Britain provides a vivid example of how an asymmetrical political relationship can be imagined in gendered terms.<sup>2</sup> The allegorization of the union as a marriage, appeared to confirm Ireland's dependent and unequal relationship to Britain, but Irish responses to the union would, in various ways, challenge the assumptions of inequality and inferiority that underpinned this marital analogy.

Following a brief outline of the political background to the Act of Union, this chapter will examine the sexual and marital allegories that pervaded the pamphlet war on the proposed union. While the representation of the union as a marriage lent a dramatic charge to the political debate over the measure, it also presented a problem to anti-union

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<sup>1</sup> *On the Union. Air 'The Duchess'* (Dublin, 1799), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', in Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, New York, 1999), p. 42.

pamphleteers, for a critique of Ireland's inferior status within the Anglo-Irish political union could also expose the assumptions of female inferiority and dependency that underpinned the relationship between husband and wife. Consequently, opponents of the union avoided presenting the union as a straightforward marriage but argued instead that it was a forced marriage or a rape. As the union implicitly challenged Irish claims to civilization and Irishmen's ability to practice an independent political masculinity, anti-unionists portrayed themselves as the chivalric defenders of the feminized nation, protecting Ireland from the distinctly ungallant advances of the British nation. The imminent loss of political autonomy also made explicit many of the implicit assumptions about the relationship between gender and politics that structured Irish political discourse, as the removal of the parliament was imagined as a castration and an emasculation of Irish manhood. Although the union was presented as a direct assault on Irish masculinity, Irish women were equally, if not more, vociferous in their opposition, and the following section considers women's responses to the measure. The marital analogies used to describe the act drew women into the political debate as they imaginatively identified with the figure of the beleaguered Hibernia, and the debate elicited the only known political pamphlets written by women during the 1790s.

In the decade following the passage of the Act of Union, the implications of Ireland's new status within the United Kingdom would be most fully addressed by two female authors, Sydney Owenson and Maria Edgeworth. Not only did they inaugurate a new literary genre, the national tale, but they also suggested new ways of conceptualizing Irish national identity. The concluding section of this chapter explores the relationship between gender and national identity in Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) and Edgeworth's *Ennui* (1809). The pamphlet debate on the Act of Union freely borrowed tropes and plots from the novel, and in turn both Owenson and Edgeworth would rework these tropes, most notably the union as a national marriage, in their Irish novels. Both writers can be understood as presenting a more empowered version of the female personification of Ireland. However, in Owenson's work there is an identifiable shift towards essentialized concepts of both gender and national identity, which is here understood as part of a broader shift from the rational discourse of the public sphere towards the affective discourse of the 'imagined community'. As will be argued,

women's marginal position within the political public sphere, and their association with the novel, enabled them to adjust more readily to the collapse of both the 'oppositional' and 'official' public spheres, in the post-rebellion, post-union period, and to play an instrumental role in the construction of new forms of literary national identity.

## I

The move towards the enactment of the union between Britain and Ireland is generally agreed as dating from 28 May 1798, when William Pitt, upon hearing of the insurrection in Ireland, wrote to Lord Lieutenant Camden to ask if the termination of the rebellion could be followed by an act appointing commissioners to treat for a legislative union. Although an Anglo-Irish union had been gradually accepted by Pitt over the course of the 1790s as the only means of resolving the problematic relationship between the two kingdoms, an immediate causal link between the rebellion and the introduction of the Act of Union is identifiable.<sup>3</sup> As Jim Smyth points out, 'the scale of violence in 1798, the depth and rancour of sectarian animosity and - critically for the imperial government - French intervention, all infused the unionist project with uniquely powerful urgency'.<sup>4</sup> Rumours of the proposed union first began to circulate in the autumn of 1798, and it soon mobilized some unlikely alliances.<sup>5</sup> While several United Irishmen, including William Drennan and Roger O'Connor, publicly opposed the union, others like Archibald Hamilton Rowan welcomed the demise of the corrupt Irish parliament.<sup>6</sup> Leading members of the Protestant Ascendancy were against the union, and this identification of conservative parliamentarians with the anti-union campaign ultimately dampened radical opposition to the measure. John Foster, Speaker of the Irish House of Commons, and an opponent of Catholic emancipation, became the leader of a loose anti-union parliamentary coalition. The Orange Order remained officially silent on the

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<sup>3</sup> Patrick Geoghegan, *The Irish Act of Union: A Study in High Politics, 1798-1801* (Dublin, 1999), p. 3; and 'The Making of the Union', in Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (eds), *Acts of Union: The Causes, Contexts and Consequences of the Act of Union* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 34-35.

<sup>4</sup> Jim Smyth, 'The Act of Union and "Public Opinion"', in Jim Smyth (ed.), *Revolution, Counter-Revolution and Union: Ireland in the 1790s* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 146.

<sup>5</sup> Commenting on these surprising coalitions in January 1800, William Drennan wrote, 'never was there a stranger conjunction of political planets than now occurs'. William Drennan to Martha McTier, 25 January 1800, in Jean Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters* (Dublin, 1998), vol. 2, p. 500.

<sup>6</sup> Archibald Hamilton Rowan, *The Autobiography of Archibald Hamilton Rowan*, William Hamilton Drummond (ed.) (Shannon, 1972 [1840]), p. 340.

question of union, but many of its members opposed it and resented their leadership's neutral stance.<sup>7</sup> While two of the most vociferous proponents of the union, Sir Richard Musgrave and Patrick Duigenan, came from the loyalist camp, their support was predicated on an understanding that union would not be accompanied by Catholic emancipation. The Catholic response was particularly important to the success of the union, as they were led to believe that full emancipation would follow the passage of the act.<sup>8</sup>

Recent research on the Act of Union has re-evaluated the role of public opinion in securing the passage of the act.<sup>9</sup> W. J. McCormack has identified over 320 printed items relating to the union published between 1797 and 1800, and there is evidence to suggest that many of these productions were widely circulated. William Drennan, for example, sold over a thousand copies of his *Letter to the Right Honourable William Pitt* (1799).<sup>10</sup> Two specialist papers went into production during the period 1798 to 1800, the *Anti-Union* (1798-99) and the *Olio; or Anything-Arian Miscellany* (1800). Although the majority of pamphlets written in 1798 were opposed to the union, by 1799 government-sponsored works outnumbered anti-union pamphlets.<sup>11</sup> As Smyth notes, the allocation of £5,000 of secret service money to hire writers, to pay for the insertion of pro-union addresses in newspapers, and to print and distribute pamphlets, underlines the importance attributed to public opinion by Dublin Castle.<sup>12</sup> The enormous Castle propaganda campaign, which relentlessly challenged the arguments raised by the opposition and exploited their internal divisions has been recognized as a significant factor in determining the success of the legislation in 1800. While the majority of the Irish population may have remained unenthusiastic about the act, the Castle's efforts

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<sup>7</sup> Daniel Mansergh, 'The Union and the Importance of Public Opinion', in Keogh and Whelan (eds), *Acts of Union*, pp. 129, 131, 139.

<sup>8</sup> However, Thomas Bartlett's assertion that the Catholics 'carried the union; the rest is detail', has been questioned. Thomas Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation: The Catholic Question, 1690-1830* (Dublin, 1992), p. 259. See Dáire Keogh, 'Catholic Responses to the Act of Union', in Keogh and Whelan (eds), *Acts of Union*, pp. 159-170.

<sup>9</sup> Mansergh, 'The Union and the Importance of Public Opinion'; and Smyth, 'The Act of Union and "Public Opinion"'.  
<sup>10</sup> W. J. McCormack, *The Pamphlet Debate on the Act of Union, 1797-1800* (Dublin, 1996). For a reference to the popularity of this pamphlet see William Drennan to Martha McTier, 27 February 1799, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 470.

<sup>11</sup> Mansergh, 'The Union and the Importance of Public Opinion', p. 131.

<sup>12</sup> Smyth, 'The Act of Union and "Public Opinion"', pp. 154-155.

ensured that their opponents were unable to monopolize public debate as they had done during the early 1780s.<sup>13</sup> Smyth has identified three rough categories into which the major issue of the union debate can be grouped: imperial necessity, the likely political/cultural consequences, and the economic implications of the union. Linking each of these issues was a powerful metaphor of the union as a national marriage between Britain and Ireland, a metaphor which reveals the gendered assumptions underpinning much of the discourse on national and political independence.

## II

'The parchment union', wrote William Drennan in 1799, 'so far from completing a real one, will be provocative to disaffection among all parties; and the channel will not be frozen in winter, or dried up in summer like the Tweed'.<sup>14</sup> This understanding of the act as a 'parchment union', trying to forge a legislative unity between two nations that were geographically separate, reflects what Claire Connolly has described as the 'fundamentally written and textual basis' of the union.<sup>15</sup> The sheer amount of print generated during the union debates further underlined the textual nature of the event, and raised questions about how the essentially abstract concept of a union between Britain and Ireland could be presented in a more concrete and substantial form. The analogy of the union as a sexual or marital relationship, Connolly suggests, can be understood as resulting from the pamphleteers' desire to 'embody or render incarnate the relationship between the two countries'.<sup>16</sup> Of course, the use of sexual allegories to describe the relationship between Ireland and Britain was not a novel phenomenon in Irish political discourse. In his tract on the 1707 Anglo-Scottish union, *The Story of the Injured Lady* (1746), Jonathan Swift had depicted Ireland as a jilted lover, who had been rejected by England in favour of an alliance with Scotland.<sup>17</sup> The United Irishmen had variously represented Anglo-Irish relations as the competition between virtuous Erin and her artful sister for the love of Irishmen, or as a loveless relationship between

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<sup>13</sup> Mansergh, 'The Union and the Importance of Public Opinion', p. 139.

<sup>14</sup> William Drennan to Martha McTier, 24 December 1799, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 549.

<sup>15</sup> Claire Connolly, 'Writing the Union', in Keogh and Whelan (eds), *Acts of Union*, p. 175.

<sup>16</sup> Connolly, 'Writing the Union', p. 180.

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Swift, *The Story of the Injured Lady. Being a True Picture of Scotch Perfidy, Irish Poverty*.

Grannua and her abusive husband John Bull.<sup>18</sup> And, as noted in chapter five, Irish women novelists frequently used the marriage plot to explore the relationship between the two nations. What is striking about the pamphlet war between 1797 and 1800 is the prevalence of sexual allegories to describe the proposed union, represented as either a rape or a marriage. Such imagery was used predominantly by those opposed to the union, its proponents tended to envisage the arrangement as a contract between equals, which would secure the equality of both parties. Thus the Irish undersecretary, Edward Cooke, argued that ‘an union presupposes that, when it is completed, the contracting states shall be bound together by the same constitution, laws, and government, and by an identity of interests and privileges’.<sup>19</sup> However, as Jane Elizabeth Dougherty argues, critics of the union quickly exposed this ‘disingenuous attempt to disguise a marriage contract as a standard Lockean social contract’.<sup>20</sup> Drawing on Carole Pateman’s analysis of the sexual contract, Dougherty notes the anomalous position of the marriage contract within contractarian theory, which, unlike other social contracts, assumed a fundamental inequality between the contracting parties, the wife’s ability to make contracts in her own right being terminated under the terms of the marriage. Like the doctrine of coverture, which subsumed a wife’s legal identity under that of her husband, the incorporation of Ireland into the British union would end Ireland’s independent legal and political status.

In her analysis of the shifting conceptualization of the marriage contract in seventeenth-century debates between royalists and parliamentarians, Mary Lyndon Shanley demonstrates how such an analogy, initially introduced to support a political argument, can itself become a focus of debate. In this case the concept of a revocable bond between the sovereign and his subjects was refuted by English monarchists, who, drawing an analogy between the social contract and the marriage contract, argued that subjects could no more overthrow their king than a wife could divorce her husband. This proved to be such a potent parallel that it prompted a revision of the marriage

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*and English Partiality. With Letters and Poems Never Before Printed* (London, 1746).

<sup>18</sup> See ‘Erin or the Maid I Love’ and ‘Patrick O’Blunder to John Bull’, *Press*, 30 November 1797 and 18 November 1797.

<sup>19</sup> Edward Cooke, *Arguments For and Against an Union Between Great Britain and Ireland Considered* (Dublin, 1799), p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Jane Elizabeth Dougherty, ‘Mr and Mrs England: The Act of Union as National Marriage’ in Keogh

contract itself by contract theorists, leading John Locke to concede that the marriage contract, like political contracts, might be rescinded.<sup>21</sup> In the context of the debate on the act of union the potential to simultaneously critique both the union and the marital contract was partly exploited in a satirical opposition pamphlet, which opined:

... it is *stoutly* and I confess *plausibly* asserted that “a kingdom which subjects itself to the will of another, from that moment becomes its slave”. Now that is altogether false, I shall prove by the domestic example of man and wife; for the *woman* instead of losing her natural liberty by uniting herself with her fellow creature *man*, immediately participates in the latitude of his demeanour...

The pamphleteer then proceeds to demonstrate the fundamentally coercive basis of this relationship, noting the force used by Edward I in Wales, ‘introductory to *passive obedience* to the will of England’, and further observing that in the case of Scotland, ‘although two *Rebellions* have desolated that country since the *Marriage Knot* was tied, ever man knows ... that no Union can be constituted so entirely felicitous as not to admit of *occasional heart-burnings*’.<sup>22</sup>

However, such implicit recognition of female subjugation within the marriage contract as part of the critique of the union was rare. Most opponents questioned whether the union was a marriage at all, arguing that the achievement of legislative independence in 1782 was the true date of the marriage and that legislative union represented ‘Mr Britton’s’ attempt to divorce ‘Ierne’ and reinstate her as his mistress. According to the *Anti-Union’s* tale of Mr Britton and Ierne, it was after Ierne had successfully showed her fidelity by repelling the advances of a French libertine that Mr Britton decided ‘to obtain a divorce, a *vinculo matrimony* from the amiable partner of his bed’.<sup>23</sup> The majority of pamphleteers who employed sexual allegories focused on the involuntary nature of the union, evident in mock playbills advertising performances such as *A Grand Pantomimical, Serio-Comic Olio, Called the Forced Marriage, and the Rape of Ierne; or Fidelity Betrayed* (1800), in which ‘Mr Bull’ was cast as ‘Tarquinius

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and Whelan (eds), *Acts of Union*, p. 204.

<sup>21</sup> Mary Lyndon Shanley, ‘Marriage Contract and Social Contract in Seventeenth Century English Political Thought’, *Western Political Quarterly*, 32 (1979), pp. 79-91.

<sup>22</sup> *Keep up your Spirits, or Huzza for the Empire!! Being a Fair, Argumentative Defence of an Union, Addressed to the People of Ireland, by a Citizen of the Isle of Man* (Dublin, 1799), p. 12.



Brutus'.<sup>24</sup> In his tract in favour of the union Edward Cooke had pointed to the union of the Sabines and the Romans as an example of the beneficial effects of incorporation.<sup>25</sup> The connotations of this classical model were quickly seized upon by his opponents, the author of *Ireland Sabinized; or, A Case in Point* relating for his readers the events that had preceded this political union:

In the reign of Romulus, the first king of the Romans, they made a feast, and exhibited games and shews to induce the Sabine women to come and see them; this from the contiguity of the Sabine nation to the Roman state had the desired effect, and then the *Romans*, by way of *preface* to their future actions and *intentions* towards the Sabines, seized all the women and ran away with them; this of course brought on a war between the two nations, which, through the interference of the Sabine women, ended in an union, and this is the union which is held up to us for imitation.<sup>26</sup>

Pursuing this theme, another pamphleteer responded to Cooke by declaring that he would 'be grieved even to agony, to find the *ravishing* arguments which overcame the Sabines, applied to my fair, my honoured, my virtuous country-women'.<sup>27</sup> A contemporary parallel between the rape of the Sabine women and the violation of Irish women by British soldiers was noted by Patrick Lattin, who observed that:

From the accounts which the papers give of the gallantry of the British Militia with the fair as well as in the field one would imagine they had read Mr C's pamphlet and were imitating the Romans in setting the preliminaries of union with the Sabines.<sup>28</sup>

By configuring the Anglo-Irish union as a rape, opposition pamphleteers were able to avoid the problematic issues that a critique of the union as a marriage contract might raise. Rather than exposing the assumptions of inequality and inferiority that underpinned both the marriage contract and the national marriage, they rephrased the

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<sup>23</sup> *Anti-Union*, 17 January, 1799, p. 39.

<sup>24</sup> *An Entirely New Change of Amusements, with Several New Performers. At the Royal Circus near College Green. For the Benefit of Mrs Britain. On Wednesday, February 5, will be Performed a Grand Serio-Comic Pastichio Called, the Rape of Ierne; or Fidelity Betrayed* (n. p., 1800).

<sup>25</sup> Cooke, *Arguments For and Against an Union* (Dublin, 1799), p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ireland Sabinized; or A Case in Point* (Dublin, 1799), p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Pemberton Rudd, *An Answer to the Pamphlet, Entitled Arguments For and Against An Union &c. &c. in a Letter Addressed to Edward Cooke Esq. Secretary at War* (Dublin, 1799), p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Patrick Lattin, *The Case of Ireland Reconsidered, in Answer to a Pamphlet Entitled Arguments For and*

question so that it became an issue of Irish masculinity. The pretext on which the union had been introduced, Britain's need to protect Ireland from the imperial advances of France, constituted an implicit indictment of Irish manhood and Irishmen's ability to defend the feminized nation, suggesting that Ireland could only be defended through the protection of 'masculine' Britain. Equating opposition to the union with the defence of the feminized nation, anti-unionists asserted a national chivalric masculinity, which echoed the Burkean model outlined in chapter one. The influence of Burke's model is clearly illustrated in one pamphleteer's assertion that should the British ministers 'attempt the enjoyment of a lawless embrace', they would find that:

... the chastity of the fairest virgin that ever appeared in this sublunary world, will be defended by her brothers, who would willingly die in defence of her honour; yes! they shall find that not only ten thousand, but ten times ten thousand swords, "shall leap from their scabbards to avenge the insult," and learn to their cost that in the defence of virgin innocence, with Irishmen, "the age of chivalry is not gone".<sup>29</sup>

These protestations of Irish manliness, measured by its ability to defend the feminine, intersected with another issue that had been raised by the union debates - the relative levels of civilization of the Irish and British nations. Edward Cooke had argued that as Ireland was inferior to Britain in point of 'civilization, agriculture, commerce, manufactures, morals, manners, establishments', a legislative union, by ensuring greater contact between the two nations, would undoubtedly place Ireland in a 'state of continual emulation and improvement'.<sup>30</sup> As Smyth notes, the unionist argument that Ireland would benefit from contact with a superior civilization was 'an astonishingly maladroit gambit' which 'insulted needlessly the sensibilities of patriotic Irishmen'.<sup>31</sup> However, in the wake of the 1798 rebellion, the stain of barbarity and social inferiority had attached itself more firmly to the Irish nation, one proponent of union claiming that 'many acts of cruelty have been perpetrated among us which would disgrace the

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*Against an Union, Considered* (Dublin, 1799), p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> George Barnes, *The Rights of the Imperial Crown of Ireland Asserted and Maintained Against Edward Cooke, Esq. Reputed Author of a Pamphlet, Entitled, "Arguments For and Against An Union, &c"* (Dublin, 1799), p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Cooke, *Arguments For and Against An Union*, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> Smyth, 'The Act of Union and "Public Opinion"', p. 150.

unlettered Negro in the wilds of Africa itself'.<sup>32</sup>

While these two aspects of the debate - the union as a sexualized relationship and as a civilizing project - are usually treated separately, they are in fact closely intertwined. Underpinning anti-unionists' accounts of the rakish John Bull's ungallant treatment of the fair Ierne was an indictment of England's claim to possess superior morals and manners. The anti-union ballad 'The Proposition' questioned the meliorating effects of Irish contact with England, envisaging that, 'Your daughters and wives he'll instruct in *Crim. con*', and concluding: 'When I seek for good *morals* and *civilization*/ Depend - to *John Bull* I shall not go to school./ As to '*forcing possession*'/ Why - that's *John's profession*; A trade for which he has paid very dear;/ In attempting a *rape*'.<sup>33</sup> There was a frequent slippage in opposition literature between the immorality of the proposed political incorporation, and the perceived sexual immorality of the English, Sir Capel Molyneux urging those who wanted to gain a sense of England's superior virtues to: 'Read the English papers, look under the head of the King's-Bench, or Doctor's Commons, title *crim con*'.<sup>34</sup> Blending narratives of civilization with sexual allegory, England's treatment of Ireland was represented in terms that tapped into Orientalist discourses that held the 'regressive' sexual practices of the 'other' to be symptomatic of their lack of civility. Hence it was argued that the union would reduce Ireland to a state of 'concubinage'.<sup>35</sup> In one of the most striking examples of this interfusion of discourses, an account of the 'Wedding and Bedding' of John Bull and his bride Mrs Erin compared the Anglo-Irish Union, and the 'political suicide' of the Irish parliament, to the practice of *suttee* with Mrs Erin assuming the role of the Indian bride:

Thus, to the orient funeral pyre,  
Perfum'd and deck'd in gay attire,  
The victim fair is urg'd along,  
Amidst the plaudits of the throng:  
By custom doom'd, she yields her charms  
To her dead husband's putrid arms;  
Aspiring flames involve the pair,

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<sup>32</sup> *A Loyal Subject's Thoughts on an Union Between Great Britain and Ireland* (Dublin, 1799), p. 25.

<sup>33</sup> *The Proposition. A New Song on the Union* (n. p., 1799).

<sup>34</sup> Sir Capel Molyneux, *A Reply to the Memoir of Theobald McKenna Esq. on Some Questions Touching on the Projected Union of Great Britain and Ireland* (Dublin, 1799), p. 23.

<sup>35</sup> *Anti-Union*, 17 January 1799, p. 39.

And Ganges flashes with the glare:  
Shrill cymbals clang, loud shots arise,  
And she in seeming triumph dies.<sup>36</sup>

Though the female personification of Ireland had traditionally underscored the political masculinity of her Irish patriots, the act of union, which gendered the Irish nation as female and the British as resolutely male, contained the seeds of the nineteenth-century racial classification of the Celt as essentially feminine in nature and therefore incapable of self-government.<sup>37</sup> The union by annihilating the Irish parliament and its masculine public sphere would reduce the nation to a 'feminized' space. Cooke maintained that the removal of the parliament would not effect the sociability of the Dublin scene, as Dublin would continue to be the site of the Viceregal court, meaning that 'amusements may be cultivated, as there will be less attention to politics'.<sup>38</sup> In effect, Cooke was offering a public sphere of 'pleasure and leisure', identified by Amanda Vickery as part of the feminized public sphere, to mitigate the loss of parliament.<sup>39</sup> Such an inadequate compensatory gesture was angrily dismissed by anti-unionists, Giles Smyth retorting that under the union Dublin castle would become '... a sort of Viceregal mummery - an emasculated cipher of state bombast; the ineffective semblance of vigour, a mere eunuch in power ... Instead of our character as a nation ... we are to be gratified with *amusements*'.<sup>40</sup> According to Smyth, the public sphere once shorn of its political aspect would also lose its masculine character.

The union debates were, as Connolly notes, haunted by the 'uncomfortable proximity' of the alternative usage of 'union' which had so recently dominated Irish politics.<sup>41</sup> The fraternal union of Irishmen of all creeds and classes, in which the claim to political

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<sup>36</sup> T. Canning, *The Wedding and Bedding: or, John Bull and his Bride Fast Asleep. A Satirical Poem Containing, an History of the Happy Pair, from their Infancy to the Present Period. With Reasons for, and Means Used to Accomplish their Union* (London, 1800), p. 55.

<sup>37</sup> A theory elaborated most notably by Matthew Arnold. C. L. Innes, *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society, 1880-1935* (Athens GA, 1993), p. 9.

<sup>38</sup> Cooke, *Arguments For and Against an Union*, p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> As part of her critique of the use of a rigid concept of 'separate spheres' in women's history, Vickery argues that eighteenth-century women understood the public sphere as encompassing sites such as the theatre, the pleasure garden and assemblies. Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology in English Women's History', in Robert Shoemaker and Mary Vincent (eds), *Gender and History in Western Europe* (London, 1998), p. 218.

<sup>40</sup> Giles Smyth, *First Letter to a Noble Lord, on the Subject of the Union* (Dublin, 1799), p. 25.

<sup>41</sup> Connolly, 'Writing the Union', p. 173.

power was based on a shared masculinity, differed notably from the depoliticized and feminized nation that opponents argued would be the result of the Anglo-Irish union. As the original proponent of the idea of the United Irishmen as political 'brotherhood', William Drennan felt acutely the emasculating implications of the union settlement. In his *Letter to the Right Honourable William Pitt*, he condemned the union as 'an insidious and impudent proposal, to swell the loins of the country at the expence of its virility'.<sup>42</sup> Drennan equated the union with the castration of the Irish nation; an operation that would make 'a capon of our country - an Eunuch of Ireland', and which the British erroneously believed would 'in five minutes, set us free, for ever, from the prominent instigation to riot and rebellion'.<sup>43</sup> Although, as noted in chapter one, Drennan had relatively progressive views on women's participation in the public sphere, here, faced with political annihilation, the identification of political power with masculinity was articulated in the strongest terms. However, while Drennan viewed the union as a direct blow to Irish masculinity, the measure generated an equally vigorous response from Irish women.

### III

In his *Letter to the Right Honourable William Pitt*, Drennan observed that the use of marital allegories during the pamphlet war was likely to elicit the interest of women, commenting that: 'there is a sportive analogy in the term Union, which may even make it a subject interesting to the fair'.<sup>44</sup> Certainly, there is substantial evidence to indicate that women did avidly follow the union debates. According to Jonah Barrington, during the 1799 parliamentary debates on the act 'immense numbers of ladies of distinction crowded at an early hour into the galleries, and by their presence and their gesture animated that patriotic spirit, upon the prompt energy of which alone depended the fate of Ireland'.<sup>45</sup> Martha McTier reported the eager perusal of the union pamphlets by her

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<sup>42</sup> William Drennan, *A Letter to the Right Honourable William Pitt* (Dublin, 1799), p. 33.

<sup>43</sup> Drennan, *A Letter to the Right Honourable William Pitt*, p. 33.

<sup>44</sup> Drennan, *A Letter to the Right Honourable William Pitt*, p. 32.

<sup>45</sup> Jonah Barrington, *Historical Memoirs of Ireland: Comprising Secret Records of the National Convention, the Rebellion and the Union; With the Delineation of the Principal Characters Connected with those Transactions* (London, 1835), vol. 2, pp. 311-312.

female acquaintances.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, there was a general perception that women, as a group, were more vocal in their opposition to the union than men. The former Prime Serjeant James Fitzgerald alluded to this female opposition during the 1799 debates in the House of Commons, claiming that 'the Women' had 'denounced such vengeance upon its [the Act of Union's] authors as I should be sorry to see inflicted upon the Noble Lord'.<sup>47</sup> Those women who supported the union proposals were viewed as belonging to a minority, a correspondent of Lady Anne Roden congratulating her on 'being one of the few Men among the Ladies whom Sir Boyle Roach allows to be friends to the Union'.<sup>48</sup>

As detailed in chapter five, marital allegories provided a particularly effective means through which Irish women writers could intervene in public debate, freighting the conventional novelistic narratives of courtship and marriage with political significance. During the union debates the generic boundaries between literary fiction and political rhetoric became increasingly blurred as those opposed to the union incorporated novelistic devices into their political polemic. The crossing of the generic boundary between 'domestic fiction' and political argument was signalled in the *Anti-Union*, which introduced 'The History of Mr. Britton and Ierne ... A True Story' with an explicit reference to its use of novelistic techniques:

If it not be inconsistent with your plan, to occasionally relax the severity of more serious discussion by a short ESSAY not of a political nature, I shall request your attention to an attempt at that most interesting species of writing, the ENGLISH NOVEL. This Tale is founded upon facts, and tho' of a domestic character, may, perhaps, reconcile itself to your general system, by shewing, that in private, as well as public transactions, THE WANT OF PRINCIPLE IS ALWAYS FATAL.<sup>49</sup>

Arguments against the union were thus presented in a language and style that was

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<sup>46</sup> See Martha McTier to William Drennan, 6 March 1799 and 30 April 1799 in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 477, 493.

<sup>47</sup> House of Commons, 22 January 1799, *The Proceedings of the Parliament of Ireland 1799* (Dublin, 1799), p. 35.

<sup>48</sup> PRONI, Belfast, Roden papers, MIC/147/10. Frederick Northly to Lady Anne Roden, undated.

<sup>49</sup> *Anti-Union*, 17 January 1799, p. 37. In an earlier issue the *Anti-Union* similarly prefaced its account of the pursuit of 'Sheelagh' by 'Mr Bull' with an acknowledgement that the story, 'may, perhaps appear to be rather the detail of a domestic Grievance, than a Matter connected with the Design of this Paper; yet as it represents the Distresses of a Female and an Irishwoman, we could not refuse it admission'. *Anti-Union*, 1 January 1799, p. 1.

familiar and accessible to a novel-reading female audience, enabling Irishwomen to sympathetically engage with the political debates. Even Martha McTier, who, as we have seen, was well read in political philosophy and generally critical of romantic novels, preferred the marriage allegory to her brother's representation of the union as an assault on Irish masculinity. She believed that 'indelicate' images such as 'capon, eunuch, virility, rape' unnecessarily alienated female readers, and urged him to write instead 'on the courtship of Erin, and settlements, temper, consequences, etc. etc.'<sup>50</sup> Writing to her brother, the pro-union MP Maurice Fitzgerald in 1800, Mary Fitzgerald confessed that 'when the great measure of the Union was brought forward, I with the great generality of Ladies in Ireland felt inclined very much against it for what reason I could not exactly tell'.<sup>51</sup> This instinctive rejection of the union described by Fitzgerald suggests how the presentation of the measure as a forced marriage may have had a particular emotional resonance for Irishwomen, who imaginatively identified with the plight of the beleaguered nation.<sup>52</sup> Whilst male opposition pamphleteers avoided drawing any parallels between Ireland's fate within the union and women's unequal position within the marriage contract, the feminist potential of this analogy was readily seized upon by Mary Anne McCracken, who pointedly observed the similarities between Ireland's position and women's subjection to arbitrary masculine power:

What a wonderful clamour is now raised at the name of Union, when in reality has always been such an Union betwixt England & this Country, as there is betwixt husband & wife by which, tho' the former has the power to oppress the latter if he has the inclination, yet if he is a Man of Justice & humanity, she will almost forget she is a slave, but if on the contrary he is cruel & tyrannical she will then taste all the bitterness of slavery.<sup>53</sup>

Although political pamphlets and periodicals generally personified Ireland as a passive

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<sup>50</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 13 December 1798 and 22 January 1799 in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 436, 459.

<sup>51</sup> PRONI, Belfast, Fitzgerald Papers, MIC/639/2, Mary Fitzgerald to Maurice Fitzgerald, 25 January 1800.

<sup>52</sup> Speculating as to how women may have responded to the use of female allegory during the French Revolution, Madelyn Gutwirth similarly suggests that at one level it 'must have stimulated women's imaginations simply to have become, overnight as it were, so central and powerful a factor in the symbolic code of the new national identity'. Madelyn Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era* (Brunswick NJ, 1992), p. 257.

<sup>53</sup> TCD, Dublin, Madden papers, 873/101. Mary Anne McCracken to Griselda Joy, undated.

and defenceless woman in need of male protection, visual representations of the union often presented a more dynamic image of the feminized nation. In contemporary political cartoons Erin was variously depicted pleading her case in a Jacobin court before a gallery of sympathetic ladies, defiantly facing the bayonet of a British soldier and challenging William Pitt to a boxing match.<sup>54</sup> Maria Edgeworth was struck by a print depicting Ireland defending herself against the union with a brace of pistols, and Willa Murphy has suggested that Edgeworth's fiction reveals 'a certain sympathy with the reluctant virgin of the political cartoon, and articulates a shared dread of identity in any union of unequal partners'.<sup>55</sup> The possibility of physically embodying this defiant and assertive version of Erin proved attractive to Martha McTier, who considered attending a Belfast masquerade dressed as Ireland:

I never will represent a union, though I would be of a group as Erin - but if I wore an orange lily I would stick it in my b\_m. I believe I shall go, and have my eye on an officer, and Englishman to personate Albion, and a lady for Scotia. They can both sing, I would listen to Irish airs from some of my own attendants. I would be chained to Albion and frequently turning my back to indulge the humour of my country. My dress should be green ... I would be crowned with shamrocks, necklace and bracelets of strung potatoes, and if I am allowed to slip my chain will dance a reel with my sisters merrily.<sup>56</sup>

Martha ultimately decided not to attend the masquerade believing, 'if I was known, I would be attacked', but the physical display of anti-union sentiments through the ornamentation of their dress was pursued by other women.<sup>57</sup> Rebecca Leslie, the Scottish wife of Colonel David Leslie of the Loyal Tay Fencibles, described her appearance at a Carrickfergus Party:

... with Mr Foster pinned on my Turban. He is saying 'I have fought a Good Fight' and at the bottom is 'Erin's Friend' and in great capitals 'No Union' on a scroll in his right hand, but I am describing what must be

<sup>54</sup> See Nicholas Robinson, 'Marriage against Inclination: The Union and Caricature', in Keogh and Whelan (eds), *Acts of Union*, pp. 140-158. See also a print entitled 'A Grand Battle Between THE IRISH HEN, and the English BANTAM', in *Walker's Hibernian Magazine*, April 1799.

<sup>55</sup> Murphy, 'A Queen of Hearts or an Old Maid', in Keogh and Whelan (eds), *Acts of Union*, p. 188.

<sup>56</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 13 December 1799, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 455.

<sup>57</sup> Martha McTier to William Drennan, 18 December 1798, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 439.



quite familiar to you as the Ribband came from Dublin. They are selling in great quantities at Belfast and are very popular.<sup>58</sup>

The marriage allegories used to describe the union drew women into the debate on the measure, but it would be overly reductive to claim, as William Drennan did, that women were only interested in the debates because of this aspect. Griselda Joy's opposition to the union was based on a combination of national sentiment and a dread of the likely economic consequences. 'My pride as an Irish woman would lead me to detest it', she wrote to her cousin Mary Anne McCracken, 'even if I were not, as I am, convinced that it will be destructive to the interests of Ireland, our manufactures it will annihilate and our taxes will be increased'.<sup>59</sup> Opposition pamphleteers may have identified the loss of the Irish parliament with an attack on Irish masculinity, but the exclusive 'maleness' of the Irish political-public sphere was itself questionable. In the eyes of radicals one of the few positive aspects of the union was the reform of the Irish political system that it would entail. By abolishing many of the closed boroughs and by diminishing the influence of Dublin Castle, the union would remove some of the worst aspects of 'the old corruption' that blighted Irish politics. However, these reforms can also be viewed as reducing the power that elite women wielded through their property and in the informal social-political networks centred on the Castle. As noted in chapter two, several women acted as borough patrons, or exerted a considerable influence over the selection of candidates for boroughs during the late eighteenth century. The terms of the union would reduce the number of boroughs returning members from 117 to only 33. Though Lady Moira declared that 'as to the Union I am not a Partisan for or against it', she viewed the act through the lens of her own aristocratic republicanism.<sup>60</sup> She was particularly indignant at the union's undermining of aristocratic power, and saw in the abolition of boroughs an assault on the inviolable connection between property and political influence. While the borough compensation offered by the British administration under the terms of the 1800 act made it clear that they viewed boroughs as a form of private property, Lady Moira's belief that property conferred both rights and duties led her to repudiate the suggestion that such privileges, which were held in

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<sup>58</sup> PRONI, Belfast, Stewart of Killymoon papers, D/3167/47. Rebecca Leslie to Elizabeth Stewart, 15 February 1799.

<sup>59</sup> TCD, Dublin, Madden papers, 873/98. Griselda (Grizzy) Joy to Mary Anne McCracken (undated).

<sup>60</sup> NLI, Dublin, Scully Papers, 27, 485, (15), Lady Moira to Denys Scully, 13 September 1799.

trust, could be honourably sold off:

I estimate the Irish Parliament as cheaply as any Mortal can - But the present pursuit of bribing underhand the Sale of them and robbing a consequential Minority little inferior to the Majority, not only of their very antient Rights, but a portion of Real Property; is a scandalous procedure in my Opinion.<sup>61</sup>

In contrast, Sarah Tighe supported the union despite the fact that it would result in the disenfranchisement of her own borough of Inistogue. Her son, the MP William Tighe, was a prominent opponent of the union, but Sarah Tighe's self-identification as an English settler combined with her Wesleyean inspired perception of Irish 'fickleness' and English moral superiority led her to welcome the prospect of greater English intervention in Irish affairs. Believing that the chief advantage of union was that 'Englishmen would fill all places of trust', she continued: 'And are not Englishmen more to be trusted? Are they not in general better educated, of course more liberal minded. Are not sincerity and honesty the national characteristics of the English?'<sup>62</sup>

As detailed above women engaged with the union debate in a number of ways, by reading pamphlets, attending parliamentary debates, discussing the issue in their correspondence, and displaying their sentiments through their dress, they also intervened more directly in the pamphlet war, and there are at least five publications that may be attributed to three women, each of whom was closely associated with the United Irish movement. Margaret, Lady Mount Cashell has been identified as the author of three pamphlets. Mary Anne Holmes, the wife of the barrister and anti-union pamphleteer Robert Holmes, and sister of Thomas Addis Emmet and Robert Emmet, has one title attributed to her, and Henrietta Battier also published a satirical poem on the subject of the union.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> NLI, Dublin, Scully Papers, 27, 485 (15), Lady Moira to Denys Scully, 13 September 1799.

<sup>62</sup> PRONI, Belfast, Tighe Papers, D/2685/67, Sarah Tighe to William Tighe, 22 December 1798.

<sup>63</sup> As these pamphlets were published anonymously there is some difficulty in definitively identifying their authors. Janet Todd attributes three union pamphlets to Margaret Moore, Lady Mount Cashell: *A Few Words in Favour of Ireland by Way of a Reply to a Pamphlet Called 'An Impartial View of the Causes leading this Country to the Necessity of an UNION' by No Lawyer* (Dublin, 1799); *A Hint to the Inhabitants of Ireland by a Native* (Dublin, 1800); and *Reply to a Ministerial Pamphlet Intituled 'Considerations upon the State of Public Affairs in the Year 1799, in Ireland'. By a Philanthropist*

In their pamphlets, neither Holmes nor Mount Cashell identified themselves as female and both writers assumed a male audience, addressing their readers as their ‘fellow Countrymen’. In *A Reply to a Ministerial Pamphlet* (1799), Lady Mount Cashell describes herself as an ‘honest Irishman’, and throughout *A Hint to the Inhabitants of Ireland by a Native* (1800), she uses the masculine pronoun, declaring: ‘At a crisis when the everything most dear to Irishmen is at stake ... it becomes the duty of an individual to declare his opinions, and to throw his mite of disapprobation into the national fund’.<sup>64</sup> Holmes similarly adopted a masculine persona, asserting: ‘If I am to bend to the altar of British supremacy, if I am to wear the chains of everlasting slavery, it matters not whether I wear them as an Irishman or a West Briton’.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps surprisingly none of these female-authored contributions to the union debate deploy sexual allegories to describe the union; instead both Holmes and Mount Cashell play on the different registers of the term ‘union’, as used by the United Irishmen and to describe Ireland’s incorporation into the British state. Holmes concludes her pamphlet with an exhortation to her ‘Countrymen’ to ‘awake - look back on your delusion with shame - Unite your hearts - remember that you are men - that you are Irishmen – Embrace’.<sup>66</sup> Mount Cashell similarly declares her preference for the ‘fraternal’ union of Irishman over the corrupt Anglo-Irish union, asserting that in ‘future days, when the clouds of prejudice shall be dispelled ... the United men of Ireland will be judged according to their

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(Dublin, 1799). Janet Todd, *Rebel Daughters. Ireland in Conflict, 1798* (London, 2003), p. 375. Copies of *A Hint* and *Reply to a Ministerial Pamphlet* held by the National Library of Ireland have pencilled notes identifying Lady Mount Cashell as the author. Janet Todd erroneously identifies Mary Anne McCracken as the author of *An Address to the People of Ireland Shewing them why they Ought to Submit to an Union* (Dublin, 1799). Janet Todd, ‘Ascendancy: Lady Mount Cashell, Lady Moira, Mary Wollstonecraft and the Union Pamphlets’, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 18 (2003), p. 104. The copy in the National Library of Ireland is attributed to Mary Anne Holmes, while copies in the British Library and the Bodleian have been attributed to Roger O’Connor. Although it is impossible to state conclusively whether or not the pamphlet was authored by Mary Anne Holmes, R. R. Madden declared that he had no doubt that the pamphlet was written by her, and as Mary Anne Holmes is known to have produced political pamphlets during this period it would seem plausible that she was the author. R. R. Madden, *The United Irishmen their Lives and Times* (New York, 1916 [1842-46]), vol. 5, p. 22. W. J. McCormack includes Henrietta Battier’s *An Address on the Subject of the Projected Union to the Illustrious Stephen III, King of Dalkey ... By Patt Pindar* (Dublin, 1799) in his bibliography but does not acknowledge her as the author. The only contribution to the union debates by a woman that McCormack does recognize is Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* (1800), though as this is not, strictly speaking, a political pamphlet it is not considered here. McCormack, *The Pamphlet Debate on the Union*, pp. 23-24, 46, 75.

<sup>64</sup> Mount Cashell, *Reply to a Ministerial Pamphlet*, p. 5; and *A Hint to the Inhabitants of Ireland*, p. 1.

<sup>65</sup> Holmes, *An Address to the People of Ireland*, p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> Holmes, *An Address to the People of Ireland*, p. 16.

merits'.<sup>67</sup>

While these interventions by women constitute only a tiny proportion of the hundreds of political tracts generated during the debate on the Act of Union, they remain the only identifiable political pamphlets written by women during the 1790s. As such they represent the culmination of female politicization during this period, and a final effort by women to insert themselves into the masculine public sphere. However, Holmes' and Mount Cashell's use of the masculine voice and their refusal to draw on the 'feminized' novelistic trope of the union as marriage, suggests that their venture into print required the deliberate assumption of the masculine persona and style.<sup>68</sup>

In Mount Cashell's pamphlets the central issue is not whether she, as a woman, can claim full membership of the Irish nation, but rather whether her religious and ethnic background precludes such national identification. Her *Reply to a Ministerial Pamphlet* contains a vigorous defence of the Anglo-Irish Protestant Ascendancy's right to consider themselves Irish. 'How many hundred years', she demands, 'is it necessary for a race of people to inhabit a country before they can acquire the appellation of natives?'<sup>69</sup> She proceeds to dismiss the applicability of any ethnic or racial definition of Irishness, observing that the blending of the descendants of the 'various nations which have at various times settled on this island' makes it impossible to determine which has 'most Scythian, which most Spanish, which most Danish, and which most British blood'.<sup>70</sup> According to Mount Cashell, 'the man who has now the best title to the appellation of *Irishman*, is the inhabitant who loves his countrymen, who promotes the prosperity and who respects the *independence of Ireland*'.<sup>71</sup> This definition of Irishness conforms to the model of eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish Patriotism, which, as Joep Leersen notes, generally referred to the nation as a strictly political, economic and

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<sup>67</sup> Mount Cashell, *Reply to a Ministerial Pamphlet*, p. 35.

<sup>68</sup> As argued in chapter three Martha McTier's epistolary practice similarly involved a conscious rejection of 'feminine' style, so that she could construct an identity as a member of the critically-debating public sphere. And as noted in chapter five, although Henrietta Battier revealed her female identity in her poetry she continued to use a masculine pseudonym.

<sup>69</sup> Mount Cashell, *Reply to a Ministerial Pamphlet*, p. 12.

<sup>70</sup> Mount Cashell, *Reply to a Ministerial Pamphlet*, p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> Mount Cashell, *Reply to a Ministerial Pamphlet*, p. 9.

societal concept, rather than as a cultural and historical community.<sup>72</sup> However, Mount Cashell goes on to attribute the Ascendancy's willingness to become a 'dependent colony of England' to their neglect of Irish culture and history and the anglicization of their children:

For to the shame of Ireland I must acknowledge, that it has been too much the custom to neglect the instructing of our youth in the annals of that country, respecting which they ought to be particularly interested ... One of the first ideas implanted youthful minds is a contempt for the land they ought to love; and one of the first principles inculcated, is that of a profound respect for English manners, English customs, and English persons ... No education is considered so unfashionable, no language so discordant, no accent so vulgar, as the Irish. The natural consequences of those early prejudices are tyranny, disgust and expatriation.<sup>73</sup>

As Janet Todd notes, Mount Cashell's nationalist defence of Irish culture owed little to the teachings of her former governess Mary Wollstonecraft, who rejected national distinctions in favour of a liberal universalism.<sup>74</sup> Rather it is the patriotic antiquarianism of Lady Moira and her circle that is evident in her approach to the union question, as is demonstrated in her argument for Ireland's superior civilization:

... Nothing so much conduces to the support of national virtue, as historical evidences of former celebrity. This the English knew but too well ... However, they have not been so completely successful in their attempts to suppress every proof of the former cultivation and glory of this nation, but I may be authorized to assert, that the civilization of this isle was long anterior to that of Great Britain; that the arts and sciences were cultivated here, in very remote ages; that Ireland was once remarkable for literary knowledge, and that multitudes of Irish manuscripts have been at various times destroyed by those merciless invaders, who endeavoured to barbarize a nation which they could not excel.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Joep Leersen, 'Anglo-Irish Patriotism and its European Context: Notes Towards a Reassessment', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 3 (1988), p. 14.

<sup>73</sup> Mount Cashell, *Reply to a Ministerial Pamphlet*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>74</sup> Although as Todd also suggests, this did not prevent Wollstonecraft from forming a prejudice against the Irish nation. Todd, 'Lady Mount Cashell', pp. 100-101.

<sup>75</sup> Mount Cashell, *Reply to a Ministerial Pamphlet*, pp. 20-21. Sydney Owenson would make a similar argument in her novel *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806). When the hero queries why there is no surviving evidence of Irish civilization, the priest replies that 'it is always the policy of the conqueror, (or the invader) to destroy those mementi of ancient national splendour which keep alive the spirit of the conquered or the invaded'. Sydney Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl. A National Tale*, Kathryn Kilpatrick (ed.) (Oxford, 1999[1806]), pp. 174-175.

This broader vision of Irish identity, encompassing both its historical and cultural aspects, is notably different from the narrow equation of the nation with the political public sphere espoused by male opposition pamphleteers such as William Drennan. Moore's suggestion that her national identity is rooted in these extra-parliamentary aspects of the nation offers the potential for an alternative 'female' imagining of the nation, one in which the loss of Irish political independence did not necessarily imply the annihilation of Irish identity.

#### IV

While the debates and public argumentation that accompanied the negotiations on the union paid a great deal of attention to the imminent loss of the Irish parliament and of Irish political autonomy, much less was said about what the union might mean in terms of Irish national identity or national feeling.<sup>76</sup> The passage of the Act thus raised the question of how Irish national identity might survive Ireland's incorporation into the British state. Were the Irish to become West Britons, or could a model of Irishness be constructed that was not reliant on its parliamentary or political expressions? In the decade following the Act of Union this question would be explored by Maria Edgeworth and Sydney Owenson through a new literary genre, the 'national tale', a term first used in the subtitle to Owenson's novel *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806). The Irish novels of Edgeworth, and more recently Owenson, have been the subject of much scholarly attention, and increasingly their works have been read alongside each other.<sup>77</sup> It is not within the scope of this study to explore at length the various rich and complex readings of these novelists' work. Consequently, this section will focus specifically on

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<sup>76</sup> See Thomas Bartlett, 'Britishness, Irishness and the Act of Union', in Keogh and Whelan (eds), *Britishness, Irishness and the Act of Union*, p. 247.

<sup>77</sup> See for example, Mary Corbett, *Allegories of Union in Irish and English Writing, 1790-1870* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 21-81; Ina Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge, 2002); Robert Tracy, 'Maria Edgeworth and Lady Morgan: Legality versus Legitimacy', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 40 (1985), pp. 1-22; Anne Fogarty, 'Imperfect Concord: Spectres of History in the Irish Novel of Maria Edgeworth and Lady Morgan', in Margaret Kelleher and James H. Murphy (eds), *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Ireland: Public and Private Spheres* (Dublin, 1997), pp. 104-116; Kevin Whelan, 'Foreword: Writing Ireland, Reading England', Sydney Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale*, Claire Connolly and Stephen Copley (eds) (London, 2000), pp. ix-xxiv; and Julie Anne Miller, 'Acts of Union: Family Violence and National Courtship in Maria Edgeworth's *The Absentee* and Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl*', in Kathryn Kirkpatrick (ed.),

the relationship between gender, politics and national identity in Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* and Edgeworth's *Ennui* (1809), comparing the writers' different perspectives on these issues and their contribution to new forms of Irish identity.

As already noted, the pamphlet war on the union freely borrowed tropes and plots from contemporary novels in order to dramatize the Anglo-Irish relationship. In turn, both Edgeworth and Owenson would re-appropriate and rework these tropes in their Irish novels. In addition to figuring the Union as a courtship drama, another literary plot employed during the debates was the *bildungsroman*. This narrative, which centres on the moral and educational development of the hero, was suggested by Edward Cooke, in his claim that enhanced contact with England would invariably have an ameliorating effect on Irish habits and manners.<sup>78</sup> 'If any person has a son uneducated, unimproved, and injured by bad habits', demanded Cooke:

... in order to remedy these imperfections, would it not be his first endeavour to introduce him in the best societies, and introduce him into the most virtuous, the most polished, and the most learned company; and if he could once reconcile himself to such companies, and teach him to relish their conversation, would he not be certain of his son's improvement, and of his finally turning out to his credit and satisfaction?<sup>79</sup>

For opponents of the union, such as Lady Mount Cashell, it was precisely this equation of anglicization with improvement to which they objected. Similarly, both Edgeworth and Owenson challenged Cooke's vision of the Anglo-Irish relationship by relocating the site of rehabilitation and moral improvement to Ireland. An English-educated, Anglo-Irish aristocrat taught to despise his country of birth is the central male character in both their national tales. In the *Wild Irish Girl*, Mortimer, the son of an Irish Earl, is sent to Ireland by his father after committing an unspecified indiscretion, a banishment he greets with dismay as he admits to having 'a decided prejudice' against Ireland, considering it to be a 'semi-barbarous' and 'semi-civilized' country.<sup>80</sup> In Edgeworth's *Ennui*, Lord Glenthorn, an absentee landlord, neglects his Irish estates to indulge in a

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*Border Crossings: Irish Women Writers and National Identities* (Dublin, 2000), pp. 13-37.

<sup>78</sup> See Claire Connolly, 'Writing the Union', p. 184.

<sup>79</sup> Cooke, *Arguments for and Against an Union*, p. 6.

<sup>80</sup> Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl*, p. 10.

dissolute and profligate lifestyle in England until the sudden appearance of his old Irish nurse prompts him to return to his birthplace. The gradual process of revising their pre-conceived notions of Ireland begins for both characters with their arrival in Dublin, their interest in Ireland increasing as they traverse the country to reach their estates.<sup>81</sup>

The romance plot, which details Edgeworth's and Owenson's male heroes' relationship and ultimately marriage with an Irish woman, thereby consolidating their new-found appreciation for Ireland, clearly draws on the allegory of a national marriage used during the union debates. Indeed, there is a remarkable similarity between Owenson's heroine, Glorvina and the *Anti-Union's* description of Ierne:

She was of the most ancient and respectable family ... she was singularly beautiful, and of that stile, that could not but captivate a man of taste. It was not the beauty of the court, or the fashion of the drawing-room, but her graces were those of the fresh mountain nymph ... She had been well-educated, and was highly accomplished; her performance on the harp was exquisite, and she accompanied the instrument in strains of the wildest genius and richest melody.<sup>82</sup>

The figure of the auburn-ringleted, harp-playing, Glorvina, robed in ancient Irish dress, condenses into a single character various female personifications of Ireland: the dreamy princess of Jacobite *aisling* poetry, the maiden harp of United Irish iconography and Regina Maria Roche's Ossianic heroine of sensibility. Owenson's representation of Glorvina vividly illustrates the ambivalent implications for Irishwomen of the 'woman-as-nation' trope. As used in male political discourse, such female symbolism served to underline women's exclusion from the political sphere, or their precarious relationship to the nation. However, as indicated here and in chapter five, such female personifications when deployed by women could provide a powerful platform through which to speak publicly. In the case of Glorvina the gulf between actual and abstract woman is elided to foreground the role that 'feminine' qualities and attributes can play

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<sup>81</sup> Ina Ferris has located the origins of the national tale's narrative of cultural encounter in the English genre of the Irish tour, an increasingly popular means of familiarizing English readers with their new co-nationals following the union. According to Ferris the national tale whilst drawing on the metropolitan-traveller figure rewrites these narratives 'by mobilizing the old romance plot of encounter to subject this figure to a disorientation that alters his ... centre of personal and national being'. Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale*, p. 12.

<sup>82</sup> *Anti-Union*, 17 January 1799, p. 37.



in the process of national reconciliation.<sup>83</sup> This reflects the female bardic role, similar to that assumed by Charlotte Brooke, in which women function as educators and conciliators.<sup>84</sup> Hence Glorvina acts as Mortimer's educator and guide, inculcating an appreciation of the value and beauty of Irish culture and history.

The relationship between Mortimer and Glorvina also serves another important function, not only does she enlighten his attitudes towards Ireland, but she also alters his perception of women. On his arrival in Ireland, Mortimer holds a host of prejudices against women, drawn from his experiences amongst '*the swinish multitude of fashion*'.<sup>85</sup> Initially horrified by accounts of Glorvina's classical education he writes to his friend:

I fear ... that this girl is already spoiled by the species of education she has received. The priest has more than once spoke of her erudition! *Erudition!* the pedantry of a schoolboy of the third class, I suppose. How much must a woman lose, and how little can she gain, by that commutation which gives her our acquirements for her own graces!<sup>86</sup>

Glorvina's intellectual abilities and cultivated understanding defy Mortimer's original expectations that he would find in her a naive primitivism, untouched by education. As the novel progresses his growing esteem for Glorvina parallels his enhanced appreciation of Ireland. By intertwining these two narratives of discovery and enlightenment, Owenson installs a greater degree of equality into the asymmetrical relationship between feminized Ireland and masculinized Britain, and partly subverts the more oppressive implications of the 'woman-as-nation' trope.

At the same time, Owenson is also deeply implicated in a process of gender

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<sup>83</sup> In a remarkable process of theatrical self-fashioning, Owenson further elided the gulf between representative and real woman, creatively reworking the details of her own life to underline her claim to embody Irish womanhood and patriotic identity. The distinction between the harp-playing Glorvina and her literary creator would become increasingly blurred following the publication of *The Wild Irish Girl*, as Owenson adopted traditional Irish dress and sang and strummed her way through the drawing rooms of the English and Irish gentry. See Mary Campbell, *Lady Morgan: The Life and Times of Sydney Owenson* (London, 1988).

<sup>84</sup> Owenson quotes liberally from Charlotte Brooke's *Reliques of Irish Poetry* (1789) and from other Irish antiquarians in the lengthy footnotes that crowd the text of *The Wild Irish Girl*.

<sup>85</sup> Owenson, *Wild Irish Girl*, p. 9.

<sup>86</sup> Owenson, *Wild Irish Girl*, p. 65.

construction which has much more restrictive implications for women. This is closely bound up with her representation of Irish national identity, which Joep Leersen has described as a form of auto-exoticism, 'a mode of seeing, presenting and representing oneself in one's otherness (in this case: one's non-Englishness)'.<sup>87</sup> According to Leersen, auto-exoticism involves the identification of the 'Real Ireland' in those aspects of the nation that are most extreme and emphatically 'other'. Hence, the setting of *The Wild Irish Girl* is the dramatic landscape of the west coast, rather than the drawing rooms of the Ascendancy, the action taking place amongst characters and scenes that appear quarantined from modern, urban culture. Rather than challenging English preconceptions of the 'wild Irish', Owenson reforms negative stereotypes into positive ones, simultaneously reinforcing and strengthening the polarity between Englishness and Irishness. A similar process of polarization is evident in her representation of Glorvina's hyper-femininity, her 'melting eyes' and 'unusual softness'.<sup>88</sup> Derived from the Irish *glór-bhin*, meaning sweet-voiced, Glorvina's very name suggests the connection between women and orality. The novel further underlines the affinity between Glorvina and the natural and elemental. She is deeply embedded in the 'wild' landscape she inhabits, and more than once in the novel Glorvina is described as 'both natural and national'.<sup>89</sup> Although critics have noted the essentialist representation of national identity in the *Wild Irish Girl*, perhaps less attention has been paid to how this interacts with an essentialist representation of gender.<sup>90</sup> While Owenson presents the relationship between men and women, and England and Ireland, as one of both equality and difference, she also implies that nationality and gender are fixed and natural categories of identity, a claim which precludes any interrogation of the social constructedness of gender.

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<sup>87</sup> Joep Leersen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork, 1996), p. 37-38.

<sup>88</sup> Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl*, p. 149. While Irish commentators have noted that how the historical binary between Ireland and England was figured in terms of gender, the presumption is that this binary relies on pre-existing definitions of femininity and masculinity. See for example Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London, 1995), p. 5. However, studies of the relationship between gender and national identity have increasingly pointed to the parallel construction of essentialized concepts of both national and gender identity from the late eighteenth century. See Andrew Parker and others 'Introduction', in Andrew Parker and others (eds), *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (New York; London, 1992), p. 2; Marjorie Howes, *Yeats's Nations: Gender, Class and Irishness* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 7.

<sup>89</sup> Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl*, pp. 65, 120.

<sup>90</sup> See Kathryn Kirkpatrick, 'Introduction', Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl*, Kathryn Patrick (ed.) (Oxford,

The designation of both gender and nationality as natural identities is, as Benedict Anderson has shown, emblematic of modern nationalism, the equation between nationness and other supposedly 'natural' categories of identity, such as parentage and gender, contributing a 'halo of disinterestedness' to the vocabulary of nationalism.<sup>91</sup> *The Wild Irish Girl* can be understood as part of the transition from the political conception of the nation as a public sphere of rational citizens, to the 'imagined community' of modern nationalism, which is based on affective and familial bonds. Although the romance between Glorvina and Mortimer is usually read as an allegory of Anglo-Irish relations, it also suggests internal cultural reconciliation between Gaelic Ireland and Anglo-Ireland. This national marriage is shadowed by an alternative union between Glorvina and Mortimer's father, one which may be read as representative of the United Irish union. Mortimer's father originally introduces himself to Glorvina and her family in the guise of a United Irishman fleeing the rebellion. Whilst staying with them he uses his influence to remove the 'prejudices of education' and to awaken in their minds to 'a more liberal train of ideas'.<sup>92</sup> This suggests a sympathetic reading of the United Irishmen, by educating the Irish Catholics in their enlightenment principles and forcing them to look beyond their own narrow prejudices and ancestral hatreds the movement had laid the foundations for reconciliation.<sup>93</sup> However, this union, though pragmatic and advantageous for both parties, is fundamentally lacking in the sentiment and sympathy that bind Glorvina and Mortimer together. In her analysis of this often neglected aspect of the plot, Mary Jean Corbett argues that the fact that Mortimer adopts the persona of an artist, and his father that of a rebel, is not just incidental to the plot, rather it suggests the supersession of revolutionary agitation by cultural and aesthetic

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1999), pp. xiii-xiv.

<sup>91</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2nd edn, London, 1991), p. 143.

<sup>92</sup> Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl*, p. 241.

<sup>93</sup> The narrative of *Ennui* is also set against the backdrop of the 1798 rebellion. Edgeworth's representation of the rebellion is less sympathetic than Owenson's and is directly informed by her own family's experience of the rising in Longford, during which her father was assailed by both the rebels and the neighbouring loyalist gentry, who suspected him to be a rebel sympathizer on account of his liberal views. Maria Edgeworth, 'Account of Maria Edgeworth', in John Beatty (ed.), *Protestant Women's Narratives of the Irish Rebellion of 1798* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 240-256. In *Ennui* Edgeworth identifies the rebels with the 'desperate wretches called *defenders*', she depicts the movement as entirely sectarian and does not allude to the broader context of United Irish revolutionary nationalism. Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent and Ennui*, Marilyn Butler (ed.) (London; New York, 1992), pp. 245-249.

appreciation and ‘the displacement of political violence by an ostensibly more benign aesthetic’.<sup>94</sup>

The privileging of the ‘imagined community’ based on mutual love and cultural appreciation, above the rational, political community envisaged by the United Irishmen, introduces an awkward tension into women’s relationship with the nation. At one level, the idea of the nation as an ‘imagined community’ embraces women, because it understands the family as the primary building block of the nation.<sup>95</sup> However, by imagining the nation as an extended family it also naturalizes unequal relationships between men and women. In her study of English women writers in the 1790s, Angela Keane argues that the nation is a more thoroughly gendered space than the ‘neutered political, public sphere’. Although the rationalist discourse of the public sphere is in practice largely homosocial, she argues that in terms of gender identity it is more flexible than the affective discourses of nationhood:

In the public sphere gender is constituted performatively, not biologically, and its modes of address are, hypothetically, appropriate to men or women ... it is the discourse of the public sphere, not of the nation, which allows them [women writers] to imagine themselves as participating citizens. It is the discourse of nationality not rationality that turns them into exiles, by naturalizing a patriarchal social contract and putting it beyond rational enquiry.<sup>96</sup>

Despite the similarities in the plot of both *The Wild Irish Girl* and *Ennui*, they are shaped by notably different approaches to the question of national identity, a difference which is generally configured as an opposition between Owenson’s romantic nationalism and Edgeworth’s enlightenment utilitarianism.<sup>97</sup> Edgeworth’s novel is centrally concerned with the constructedness of both class, national and gender

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<sup>94</sup> Corbett, *Allegories of Union*, p. 66.

<sup>95</sup> See John Horne, ‘Masculinity in Politics and War in the Age of Nation-States and World Wars, 1850-1950’, in Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (eds), *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History* (Manchester, 2004), p. 27.

<sup>96</sup> Angela Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s: Romantic Belongings* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 4, 6.

<sup>97</sup> In his comparative reading of the work of Edgeworth and Owenson, Kevin Whelan signals his marked preference for Owenson by distinguishing between Owenson’s ‘Jacobin feminism’ and what he disparagingly terms Edgeworth’s ‘effete Whiggism’. Whelan, ‘Writing Ireland, Reading Ireland’, p. x.

identities.<sup>98</sup> The plot hinges on the discovery that the Anglo-Irish landowner, Lord Glenthorn and the Irish blacksmith Christy O'Donohoe have been switched at birth by their nurse/mother Ellinor. However, having realized their true origins, their roles cannot be successfully reversed, because a lifetime of education and acculturation has made each unsuited to the other's social position. A similar suspicion of essentialist identities is evident in Edgeworth's treatment of the woman-as-nation trope. Rather than condensing both Irishness and womanhood into a single model of femininity, Edgeworth presents a tri-partite composite of the feminized nation, represented by the three central female characters in the novel.<sup>99</sup> The first of these is Lord Glenthorn's nurse, Ellinor. According to Trumpener, the figure of the nurse stands for the feminization, domestication and popularization of bardic tradition, the nurse transmitting culture and reconciling cultural difference.<sup>100</sup> Ellinor rescues Glenthorn from his life of dissipation in London, reminds him of his Irish responsibilities and instills in him a sense of ancestral pride, drawing on the prodigious memory and narrative power associated with the oral tradition:

She was inexhaustible in her anecdotes of my ancestors, all tending to the honour and glory of the family; she had also an excellent memory for all the insults, or traditions of insults, which the Glenthorns had received for many ages back, even to the times of the old kings of Ireland.<sup>101</sup>

The figure of Lady Geraldine is another reworking of the woman as educator/bard, and has been described as a less flamboyant version of Glorvina.<sup>102</sup> However, in contrast to the emphatically Gaelic Glorvina, Lady Geraldine is very much representative of the patriotic Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. Her name is suggestive of Pamela Fitzgerald, and

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<sup>98</sup> Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, p. 59. It was precisely this aspect of Edgeworth's novel which the essayist and conservative politician John Wilson Croker found praiseworthy. He credited the 'discrimination with the which the *individuality* of her persons is preserved through all the varieties of rank, sex and nation'. John Wilson Croker cited in Marilyn Butler, 'Introduction', *Castle Rackrent and Ennui*, p. 37. In contrast Croker was a notable adversary of Owenson, whose work he continually lambasted during his editorship of the *Quarterly Review*. He declared that Owenson wrote 'bad novels and worse poetry', and accused her of '... attempting to vitiate mankind, of attempting to undermine morality by sophistry, and that under the insidious mask of virtue, sensibility and truth'. John Wilson Croker cited in Mary Campbell, *Lady Morgan: The Life and Times of Sydney Owenson* (London, 1988), p. 72.

<sup>99</sup> For an interesting discussion of Edgeworth's allegorical Irishwomen see Marilyn Butler, 'Introduction', *Castle Rackrent and Ennui*, pp. 50-53.

<sup>100</sup> Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, p. 212.

<sup>101</sup> Edgeworth, *Ennui*, p. 214.

<sup>102</sup> Tracy, 'Maria Edgeworth and Lady Morgan', p. 7.

her outspoken views and strident nationalism evoke parallels with Lady Moira, with whom Edgeworth and her father were acquainted.<sup>103</sup> Like Glorvina, Lady Geraldine gradually disabuses Glenthorn of his erroneous notions about Ireland and to a certain extent lessens his prejudices against women. However, in this case it is the individual woman, not women as a collective, which he learns to appreciate: 'I began to perceive that there was some difference between woman and woman, beside the distinctions of rank, fortune and figure'.<sup>104</sup> At this point in the novel it appears as if Edgeworth will repeat the solution offered by Owenson and effect a union between Anglo-Irish land and Irish tradition through the marriage of Lady Geraldine and Lord Glenthorn, but this resolution is rejected. Instead, after Glenthorn has discovered his true identity, given up his estates and retrained as a lawyer he marries the less distinctively Irish Cecilia Delamere. Whilst lacking the intellectual vigour of Lady Geraldine, Cecilia compensates for this with more domestic and modest qualities. Reflecting on the differences between the two women, Glenthorn observes that 'one had the envied art of appearing to advantage in public - the other, the more desirable power of being happy in private'.<sup>105</sup> Edgeworth's portrayal of Ellinor and Lady Geraldine are generally sympathetic, but the novel's conclusion implies that it is through bourgeois domesticity, rather than bardic nationalism or political patriotism, that national improvement can be most effectively secured. While Edgeworth avoids constructing a monolithic ideal of Irish national womanhood, her liberal suspicion of essentialist identities does not prompt a radical rethinking of women's relationship to the public sphere, or the nation.

Discussions of the national tale generally note that it was a genre pioneered by women, but there has been little reflection as to why this new literary genre was inaugurated by female writers at this historical moment. Leersen explains the transition towards auto-exoticist literary invocations of Irish identity, as a product of the failure of Irish parliamentary emancipation and the adoption by Irish authors of the novel.<sup>106</sup> While he does not make any connection between these two events and the female authorship of the national tale, I would suggest that they are closely linked.

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<sup>103</sup> See the correspondence between Lady Moira and Maria Edgeworth. PRONI, Belfast, Granard papers, T/3765/M/2/31/3-4.

<sup>104</sup> Edgeworth, *EmmUI*, p. 214.

<sup>105</sup> Edgeworth, *EmmUI*, p. 302.

As noted in the previous chapter, women writers were generally excluded from the political counterpart of the literary public sphere, their absence replicating their formal exclusion from both the official political nation of the Protestant Ascendancy, and the oppositional republican citizenry of the United Irishmen. Despite this exclusion, female authors used the 'feminized' medium of the novel to reflect upon issues of cultural and national identity. By 1800 the popularization and novelization of Irish culture, as distinct from the 'scientific antiquarianism' of men such as Joseph Cooper Walker and Sylvester O'Halloran, was already associated with women, and the works of Owenson and Edgeworth can be understood as building on the incipient strand of female bardic nationalism developed by writers such as Charlotte Brooke, Anna Millikin and Regina Maria Roche. In the politically charged atmosphere of the 1790s, these alternative female imaginings of national identity were largely submerged, or, as with Charlotte Brooke, appropriated to the revolutionary cause. However, in the wake of the failed rebellions of 1798 and 1803 the martial basis for national reconciliation proposed by the United Irishmen was no longer available. The Act of Union, and the removal of the ostensibly 'masculine' public sphere centred on the Irish parliament, similarly erased the parliamentary basis of the Irish nation. The collapse of the 'official' and 'oppositional' public spheres thus required new ways of thinking about Irish national identity.

Following the passage of the union, William Drennan declared his retreat from active politics to focus on domestic pursuits: 'My country is now contracted into the limit of this house ... We have now no country. We are individuals. I am no longer an Irishman, a petty pamphleteer, but I am a husband and I hope I will be a father'.<sup>107</sup> Drennan's personal disillusionment with politics was felt by other Irishmen. The opposition MP Peter Burrowes had asserted during the parliamentary debates on the act that, 'if an union should pass, I shall be indifferent how many or how few deputies shall be sent from this emasculated country', and the immediate post-union period constituted

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<sup>106</sup> Leersen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, pp. 38-42.

<sup>107</sup> William Drennan to Mrs Anne Drennan, 4 August 1800, in Agnew (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters*, vol. 2, p. 616.

a general lull in Irish politics.<sup>108</sup> Irish MPs failed to make an impression in the British parliament and it was only with O'Connell's emancipation campaign in the 1820s that politics at both a parliamentary and national level again galvanized the Irish public. Without a parliament to influence or pressure, the Irish press became noticeably less vigorous in its political commentary. Newspapers struggled to survive in the wake of the union, and they were closely monitored by Dublin Castle. As Douglas Simes notes, the press during this period moved away from the rational-critical discourse of the public sphere, to reflect the sectarian divisions of an increasingly polarized society.<sup>109</sup> The extension of British copyright law to Ireland following the union also struck at the Irish book trade, ending the lucrative Irish reprint industry, and resulting in an overall decline in the number of printers, booksellers and stationers.<sup>110</sup>

The failure of revolutionary politics, parliamentary autonomy, and the decline of the Irish political press and print culture may explain why the female-authored novel emerged as the most potent vehicle for national expression in the decade following the Act of the Union. To a certain extent it was women's exclusion from these masculine components of the public sphere that enabled them to respond so readily to the shift in the centre of political gravity that accompanied the union. John Hutchinson argues that the resurgence of cultural nationalism in Ireland has generally followed the failure of more politically-oriented movements centred on the achievement of an autonomous state.<sup>111</sup> While he understands these transitions as the product of inter-generational conflict between old and new nationalist leaders, the post-rebellion, post-union period can also be understood as a transition from masculine forms of politics, either military or parliamentary, towards a more 'feminized' form of national identity, in which national reconciliation is based on socialization, education, culture and familial bonding. The designation of cultural nationalism as particularly 'feminine' is of course

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<sup>108</sup> Peter Burrowes quoted in Dougherty, 'Mr and Mrs England', p. 210.

<sup>109</sup> Douglas Simes, 'Ireland, 1760-1820', in Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows (eds), *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760-1820* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 113, 122-123.

<sup>110</sup> Richard Cole, *Irish Booksellers and English Writers 1740-1800* (London, 1986), pp. 152, 154-155. The high proportion of printers and booksellers involved in the United Irishmen also meant that many members of the trade were imprisoned, or in exile following the 1798 rebellion. Kevin Whelan, 'The United Irishmen, Enlightenment and Popular Culture', in David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (eds), *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion* (Dublin, 1993), pp. 276-277.

<sup>111</sup> John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Making of the Irish State* (London, 1987).



itself a discursive construct, but in many ways it is the logical by-product of the insistence by Drennan and other anti-unionists that their independent and national masculinity could only be expressed through fraternal military bonding or an independent Irish parliament.

By aligning the female personification of Ireland with an alternative form of national identity based on an emotional engagement with Irish culture and history, Owenson, and to a lesser degree Edgeworth, pioneered a new form of cultural nationalism and closely identified it with women. 'Politics', Owenson declared, 'can never be a woman's science, but patriotism must always be a woman's sentiment'.<sup>112</sup> However, the feminization of national literature and culture did not go unchallenged. Gary Kelly and several other literary historians have charted the remasculinization of culture during the early nineteenth century, whereby male writers increasingly 'appropriated or marginalized women writers' initiatives, themes, genres and individual works'.<sup>113</sup> Most notably, Walter Scott would re-establish masculine authority over the novel through his Scottish historical romances, transforming the genre into one that was considered 'serious' enough to be a legitimate field for male authors.<sup>114</sup> A similar process is evident in Ireland during this period, as writers such as Charles Maturin, William Carelton and John and Michael Banim began to produce their own versions of the national tale. The move towards male domination of this literary form in Ireland from the 1820s, Jacqueline Belanger suggests, was the result of a growing belief that the realities of Irish society, its violence and complexity, could only be convincingly represented by male authors.<sup>115</sup>

In the preface to the 1846 re-issue of *The Wild Irish Girl*, Owenson humbly referred to

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<sup>112</sup> Sydney Owenson quoted in Mary Campbell, *The Life and Times of Sydney Owenson* (London, 1988), p. 61.

<sup>113</sup> Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution, 1790-1827* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 178-179.

<sup>114</sup> See Jacqueline Pearson, 'Masculinizing the Novel: Women Writers and Intertextuality in Charles Robert Maturin's *The Wild Irish Boy*', *Studies in Romanticism*, 36 (1997), p. 637. Jacqueline Pearson argues that Charles Maturin's *The Wild Irish Boy* (1808) involves an inter-textual debate with both Sydney Owenson and Maria Edgeworth. She reads the novel as a treatise on the dangers of female-centred literary romance.

<sup>115</sup> Jacqueline Belanger, 'Some Preliminary Remarks on the Production and Reception of Fiction Relating to Ireland, 1800-1829', *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text*, 4 (2000). Online: Internet (12/3/2004): <[http://www.cf.ac.uk/encap/corvey/articles/cc04\\_n02.html](http://www.cf.ac.uk/encap/corvey/articles/cc04_n02.html)>. p. 9.

the fact that her own literary initiative had since been 'carried out to perfection by abler talents', naming Banim, Carleton, and Thomas Crofton Croker. She singled out the literary historical essays of Thomas Davis for particular praise, declaring that 'he combined all that is brightest in true Irish genius'.<sup>116</sup> Certainly Owenson made a significant contribution to the discourse of nineteenth-century romantic nationalism.<sup>117</sup> Thomas Flanagan observes that *The Wild Irish Girl* 'gave first form to the rhetoric of Irish nationalists' and Leersen identifies the Young Ireland writers of the 1840s as the direct heirs of Owenson.<sup>118</sup> During the nineteenth century the potency of the affective dimensions of Irish nationalism, as pioneered by Owenson, would increasingly be understood and exploited by Irish writers and politicians. Whilst romantic nationalism had enabled Owenson to make a claim for the importance of female patriotism, the reappropriation of this form of national expression by Irish nationalists would reduce women to an increasingly marginal role.

## V

The debates on the Act of Union illustrate the extent to which political discourse and discourses about gender are intertwined. Male opponents read the marital proposal as an assault on their independent masculinity, putting into question their ability to defend the passive feminized nation from the sexual advances of another nation. For those who pursued this analogy to its conclusions, the union, by figuring Ireland as the feminine dependent of the British state, meant the emasculation of the Irish nation and the symbolic castration of its masculine public sphere. I would suggest that the union as marriage allegory had a difference resonance for women, as they imaginatively identified with the question of female marital choice. From a feminist perspective, such as Mary Anne McCracken's, the union merely exposed the fundamental inequality that

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<sup>116</sup> Sydney Owenson, 'Prefatory Address to the 1846 Edition', in Sydney Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl*, Claire Connolly and Stephen Copley (eds), (London, 2000), appendix, p. 255.

<sup>117</sup> Owenson's contribution to the Irish nationalist cause was early recognized by the 'Juvenile Sons of Erin', a group of Irish exiles based in New York. During their St Patrick's Day celebrations in 1808, they included amongst their toasts a tribute to Owenson: 'May her laudable example in raising her country to a respectable rank in the scale of nations by her ingenious researches into its records be emulated by those who possess similar talents'. *Irish Magazine and Monthly Asylum for Neglected Biography*, July 1808, p. 351.

<sup>118</sup> Leersen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, p. 65; and Thomas Flanagan, *The Irish Novelists, 1800-1850* (New York, 1959), p. 120.

underpinned both the marriage contract and the Anglo-Irish relationship.

Contemporary references to female opposition to the union, and women's intervention in the pamphlet war indicate that women were considered to have a role in the formation of public opinion. However, this position remained precarious. Female pamphleteers such as Lady Mount Cashell and Mary Anne Emmet still felt the need to assume a male persona in order to make their voices heard. As argued here, it was partly because of women's liminal position within the political-public sphere, that they were able to elaborate new ways of thinking about Irish national identity in the post-rebellion, post-union period. With the collapse of the 'official' and 'oppositional' public sphere both Sydney Owenson and Maria Edgeworth used the feminized medium of the novel to construct a form of literary national identity that was not narrowly focused on the parliamentary or political aspects of the nation. Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* in particular played an important role in the transition from the 'rational-public sphere' of eighteenth-century political patriotism to the affective 'imagined community' of nineteenth-century romantic nationalism. This transition had ambivalent implications for women's relationship to the nation. At one level it foregrounded the role that women could play in the construction and reproduction of national identity, as educators, custodians of tradition and through the family. However, the imagined community also reifies essentialist conceptions of gender identity, identifying women with nationalist sentiment rather than the science of masculine politics. As the following chapter argues, the commemoration of the United Irishmen by Irish romantic nationalists was directly concerned with re-appropriating and re-masculinizing the affective discourse of the 'imagined community'. The female personification of Ireland that Owenson and Edgeworth had imbued with a degree of political agency would again become the passive object of masculine desire, or a grief-stricken emblem of national suffering.

## Chapter Seven: 'In his grave her heart is lying':

### Gender, memory and mourning after '98

In February 1848 the Young Ireland newspaper, the *United Irishman*, marked the fiftieth anniversary of the 1798 rebellion by publishing a history of the United Irishmen. The article began by reiterating a standard nationalist complaint respecting the lack of public monuments to the fallen leaders of the 1798 and 1803 risings, before reflecting on the fate of their wives and sweethearts:

Rank clay fattening over a skeleton in Kildare – In Michan's vaults the mummied trunks of brothers – in the earth above them 'relics cold and unhonoured' ... and these are all that remain to Ireland of the last men who died for her. Their families nay their names have fretted away. Their wives and children are scattered over the world in graves and garrets. Pamela Fitzgerald starving in an alley of the capital where once she ruled a Republican queen – Matilda Tone, a lone widow in Paris, or a childless woman in America – and Sarah Curran, yielding up the 'broken heart' far off in Sicily – such has been the fate of all they loved and all who love them.<sup>1</sup>

The assertion that a collective amnesia existed regarding the memory of the martyrs of 1798 was somewhat disingenuous. Indeed, merely by alluding to the graves of these United Irish leaders and the names of their widows the author of this piece could immediately invoke for his readers the triumvirate of nationalist leaders with whom they were associated: Lord Edward Fitzgerald, Theobald Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmet.

As John Gillis observes in his discussion of the relationship between memory and national identity, the construction of memory is 'always embedded in complex class, gender and power relations that determine what is remembered (or forgotten)'.<sup>2</sup> In post-rebellion and post-Union Ireland the conflict between these categories of identity and the memory of 1798 was particularly acute, complicated by sectarian and political divisions. While the political, class and religious dimensions of the remembrance

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<sup>1</sup> *United Irishman*, 26 February 1848.

<sup>2</sup> John R. Gillis, 'Introduction: Memory and Identity the History of a Relationship', in John R. Gillis (ed.), *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton NJ, 1994), p. 3.

process have recently become the focus of attention, the place of gender in determining how 1798 was remembered has been largely overlooked.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as the above quotation suggests, women played an important part in the construction of the United Irishmen's heroic memory, in both symbolic and more practical roles. Although this study has chosen not to focus on Matilda Tone, Pamela Fitzgerald or Sarah Curran, it was these women who would feature most prominently in nineteenth and twentieth-century nationalist histories of the United Irish movement. Focusing on the period between 1798 and 1848, this chapter will attempt to explain why and how these women were remembered, and why other women involved with the United Irish movement were forgotten.

Beginning with a brief account of the contest over the interpretation of the rebellion after 1798, this chapter will compare accounts of women's involvement in the rising in loyalist and nationalist histories. Loyalist histories were more likely to allude to female participation during the rebellion, which they understood to be symptomatic of the insurrection's unnatural reversal of the social order. In response, nationalist histories generally downplayed women's active involvement in the rising, though images of female combatants would continue to feature in popular memory and balladry. The treatment of women during the rebellion also became a central issue in both nationalist

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<sup>3</sup> There is a burgeoning literature on the subject of remembrance and commemoration in modern Ireland, much of which has focused on the memory of 1798 and the United Irish movement see Kevin Whelan, '98 after '98: The Politics of Memory', in *The Tree of Liberty: Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of Irish Identity 1760-1830* (Cork, 1996); Ian McBride, 'Introduction: Memory and National Identity in Modern Ireland', in Ian McBride (ed.), *History and Memory in Modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 1-42; Roy Foster, 'Remembering 1798', in McBride (ed.), *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, pp. 67-94; James S. Donnelly Jr, 'Sectarianism in 1798 and in Catholic Nationalist Memory', in Laurence M. Geary (ed.), *Rebellion and Remembrance in Modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 15-37; Tom Dunne, "'Tá Gaedhil Bhocht Cráidhte': Memory, Tradition and the Politics of the Poor in Gaelic Poetry and Song", in Geary (ed.), *Rebellion and Remembrance*, pp. 68-91; Maura Cronin, 'Memory, Story and Balladry: 1798 and its Place in Popular Memory in pre-Famine Ireland', in Geary (ed.), *Rebellion and Remembrance*, pp. 112-134; Sean Ryder, 'Speaking of '98: Young Ireland and Republican Memory', *Éire/Ireland*, 34 (1999), pp. 51-69; Joep Leersen, '1798: The Recurrence of Violence and Two Conceptualizations of History', *Irish History Review*, 22 (1998), pp. 37-45; Guy Beiner, 'To Speak of '98: The Social Memory and Vernacular Historiography of Bliain na bhFrancach - The Year of the French' (Unpublished PhD thesis, UCD, 2001). The few works to discuss the place of women and gender in the history and commemoration of the United Irishmen include: Nancy Curtin, 'Matilda Tone and Virtuous Republican Femininity', in Dáire Keogh and Nicholas Furlong (eds), *The Women of '98* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 26-46; Anna Kinsella, 'Nineteenth-Century Perspectives: The Women of 1798 in Folk Memory and Ballads', in Keogh and Furlong (eds), *Women of '98*, pp. 187-199; and Dáire Keogh, 'The Women of 1798: Representations and Realities', in Mary Cullen (ed.), *1798: 200 Years of Resonance. Essays and Contributions on the History and Relevance of the United Irishmen and the Revolution of 1798* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 63-67.

and loyalist histories, with sympathetic accounts of the rebellion citing the rebels' gallant conduct towards women as proof of Irishmen's chivalric national masculinity.

Although nationalist histories tended to marginalize women's political involvement in the United Irish movement and their role in the 1798 rebellion, women were accorded an important role as symbolic vehicles for the expression of national grief, and nationalist literature abounded with images of women weeping over the graves of the United Irish martyrs. The following section relates these symbolic representations to broader shifts in Irish nationalist culture: the transition from neo-stoical, republican forms of commemoration to the more elegiac and sentimental commemorative mode of romantic nationalism, and the translation of Gaelic cultural practices, such as the lamenting tradition, into the Anglophone public sphere. As will be argued, the prominence of female grief in Irish nationalist discourse was partly due to the absence of more 'official', monumental forms of commemoration, although the inherent passivity of this commemorative mode would also be challenged by the Young Ireland movement in the 1840s.

This chapter will demonstrate how the conjunction between the figure of the grieving woman and the construction of a limited pantheon of United Irish martyrs led Sarah Curran, Matilda Tone and Pamela Fitzgerald to become the central female figures in nationalist accounts of the United Irishmen. The representation of these women in Irish nationalist discourse will be examined, tracing how their position as symbolic characters in their husbands' tragic dramas entailed both their sentimentalization and depoliticization. The identification of women as chief mourners and custodians of memory, it will be argued, was part of a broader trend in nineteenth-century nationalist ideologies towards the gendering of the nation's past and future. Taken together these analyses will suggest how the representations of women in the historiography of the rebellion, and the roles attributed to women in Irish nationalist commemorations, were shaped by a complex interplay of contemporary gender conventions and the specific political exigencies faced by Irish nationalists in the first half of the nineteenth century.

In his account of the bitter political struggle over the memory of the 1798 rebellion Kevin Whelan observes:

The 1798 rebellion was fought twice: once on the battlefields and then in the war of words which followed in those bloody footprints ... The debate aligned on divisions which predated and postdated 1798 and which the rebellion bisected. The historiography was deeply implicated in the existing political divisions; the war of words was an amplification and extension of the divisive 1790s debate.<sup>4</sup>

The opening salvo in this 'war of words' was Richard Musgrave's *Concise Account of the Material Events and Atrocities which Occurred in the Late Rebellion (1799)*, followed by his considerably less concise *Memoirs of the Different Rebellions in Ireland (1801)*. As noted in chapter four, the principal purpose of Musgrave's account was to present the rebellion as entirely motivated by Catholic sectarianism, a 'popish-plot' the ultimate aim of which was the extermination of Irish Protestantism. To this end, Musgrave linked the events of the 1790s with other key dates in the Irish Protestant historical memory, notably the 1640s and 1690s, and consciously modelled his narrative on the Protestant atrocity literature of Temple, King and Woodward. As well as drawing on a traditional narrative framework of Protestant persecution Musgrave's account was motivated by more immediate political concerns: a desire to influence British policy making in order to secure the continued pre-eminence of the Church of Ireland and to ensure that the Act of Union would not be accompanied by Catholic emancipation.<sup>5</sup> This loyalist interpretation of the 1798 rebellion was somewhat modified by the liberal Protestant accounts of Joseph Stock (1800), James Gordon (1801) and Francis Plowden (1803) which emphasised the essential loyalty of the Catholic community, minimized the sectarian and republican elements of the rebellion and favoured a lenient approach towards the rebels.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Whelan, '98 after '98' p. 133.

<sup>5</sup> Whelan, '98 after '98', pp. 135-145.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Stock, *A Narrative of what Passed at Killala in the County of Mayo* (Dublin, 1800); James Gordon, *A History of the Rebellion in Ireland in the Year 1798* (Dublin, 1801); and Francis Plowden, *An Historical Account of the State of Ireland* (London, 1803).

The Catholic Church also sought to refute the sectarian interpretation of the rising, presenting the Catholic community as inherently obedient and quiescent. The Church hierarchy led by Archbishop Troy was particularly keen to downplay the role of Catholic clergy in the Wexford rising.<sup>7</sup> Catholic repudiation of the rebellion was given additional impetus by the campaign for emancipation during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Despite having reputedly been a sworn United Irishman, Daniel O'Connell publicly rejected the aims and ideology of the movement and attributed Catholic involvement in 1798 to the seditious influence of Ulster Presbyterians and to Orange persecution and provocation. As leader of the Repeal Association in the 1840s, O'Connell similarly distinguished between the 'moral force' character of the repeal movement and the revolutionary republican separatism of the United Irishmen, whom he described in 1841 as 'weak and wicked men'.<sup>8</sup> The sense of a consensual amnesia with regard to the legacy of 1798 was encapsulated in John Kell Ingrams's 1843 poem 'The Memory of the Dead' with its accusatory opening lines:

Who fears to speak of Ninety-Eight?  
Who blushes at the name?  
When cowards mock the patriot's fate,  
Who hangs his head for shame?<sup>9</sup>

The use of 'The Memory of the Dead' as evidence in the trial against the 'Repeal traversers', which included O'Connell, for seditious conspiracy in 1844 demonstrated just how politically charged the remembrance of '98 remained.<sup>10</sup>

However, the collective silence respecting the rebellion implied by 'The Memory of the Dead' should not obscure ongoing efforts to reclaim the memory of '98 for Irish nationalism in the first half of the nineteenth century. *The Irish Magazine and Monthly Asylum for Neglected Biography* (1807-1815), edited by the Catholic radical Watty Cox, devoted many pages to histories of the rebellion and biographies of United Irish leaders aimed at keeping their memory present in the public mind. The magazine's

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<sup>7</sup> Whelan, '98 after '98', pp. 148-150.

<sup>8</sup> Whelan, '98 after '98', p. 151.

<sup>9</sup> *Nation*, 1 April 1843.

<sup>10</sup> The state prosecution argued that the publication of 'The Memory of the Dead' in the Young Ireland paper, the *Nation*, proved the seditious inclinations of its editor, Charles Gavan Duffy. Ryder, 'Speaking of '98', p. 53; Richard Davis, *The Young Ireland Movement* (Dublin, 1987), pp. 53-55.



rousing collection of poetry in tribute to the dead leaders of 1798 and 1803 proved hugely successful with the popular audience to which it was addressed.<sup>11</sup> A more bourgeois mode of memorialisation was produced by Thomas Moore, a friend and contemporary of several of the United Irish leaders including Robert Emmet. Moore's sentimental elegies on Robert Emmet and Sarah Curran were instrumental in the construction of Emmet's romantic-heroic identity.<sup>12</sup> As Whelan has noted, reservations about undermining the campaign for Catholic emancipation by reviving the debate on 1798 were partially overcome once emancipation became a *fait accompli*. This paved the way for the publication of a series of United Irish memoirs beginning with the publication of Wolfe Tone's autobiography in Washington in 1826, Thomas Moore's biography of Lord Edward Fitzgerald in 1831, and the memoirs of Thomas Cloney in 1832, Joseph Holt in 1838 and Archibald Hamilton Rowan in 1840.<sup>13</sup>

Whilst United Irish memoirs and histories generally strove to refute the sectarian interpretation of the rising formulated by Musgrave, Maura Cronin argues that this aspect remained prominent in popular memory. Pointing to the gulf between histories of the rebellion from above and below she suggests that the popular memory of 1798 was remarkably similar to that of loyalists, 'more redolent of Musgrave than of Davis', with ballads celebrating the massacre at Scullabogue being sung as late as the 1840s. Communal memory was pervaded by a visceral sense of the raw cruelty and violence of the rebellion and a strong sense of locality, places linked to the events of '98 acquiring a resonance in local memory and balladry.<sup>14</sup> Guy Beiner's study of the vernacular historiography of the French invasion of Connacht in 1798 suggests that a powerful

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<sup>11</sup> Cox had edited the *Union Star* during the 1790s, a paper so seditious in content that the United Irishmen suspected Cox of being a government agent paid to discredit the cause. He was imprisoned several times for libel but continued to publish the magazine from Newgate. See Nancy Curtin, *The United Irishmen: Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791-1798* (Oxford, 1994) p. 227; Whelan, '98 after '98', p. 164; and Marianne Elliott, *Robert Emmet: The Making of a Legend* (London, 2003), pp. 110-112.

<sup>12</sup> Elliott, *Robert Emmet*, pp. 113-119.

<sup>13</sup> Theobald Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone. Memoirs, Journals and Political Writings, Compiled and Arranged by William T. W. Tone*, Thomas Bartlett (ed.) (Dublin, 1998 [1826]); Thomas Moore, *The Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* (London, 1831); Thomas Cloney, *A Personal Narrative of those Transactions in the County Wexford in which the Author was Engaged, during the Awful Period of 1798* (Dublin, 1832); Joseph Holt, *Memoirs*, Thomas Crofton Croker (ed.) (London, 1838); and Archibald Hamilton Rowan, *The Autobiography of Archibald Hamilton Rowan*, William Hamilton Drummond (ed.) (Shannon, 1972 [1840]); Whelan, '98 after '98', p. 167.

<sup>14</sup> Cronin, 'Memory, Story and Balladry', pp. 112-134.

communal memory of the rebellion was preserved orally. He argues that local commemorations evince the more democratic character of folk historiography, remembering those rebels who were forgotten in the canonical histories, which tended to focus on a limited pantheon of recognized heroes.<sup>15</sup>

The rehabilitation of the 1798 rebellion within 'official national discourse', and the transformation of its key leaders into nationalist heroes, was most fully effected during the 1840s by the Young Ireland movement. The contrasting relationship with the United Irish legacy within the Repeal movement can be viewed as emblematic of the principal ideological differences between 'Old Ireland', associated with O'Connell's Catholic moral-force nationalism, and the more romantic, secular and militant nationalism of the Young Irelanders. The publication of Richard Robert Madden's multi-volume history of the United Irishmen between 1842 and 1846 was instrumental in reviving interest in the events and personalities of 1798. Madden also contributed to the Young Ireland newspaper the *Nation*, founded in 1842, and was encouraged in his researches by the paper's editor Thomas Davis. While the history was roundly condemned by the Ascendancy press it was greeted with acclaim by nationalist newspapers, including the *Nation*.<sup>16</sup> Several of the *Nation*'s principal writers had familial links with the United Irish movement, John Blake Dillon and John Mitchel's fathers were both probably United Irishmen and Charles Gavan Duffy had known and been greatly influenced by Charles Hamilton Teeling in his youth. The radical wing of Young Ireland led by John Mitchel established the *United Irishman* newspaper in February 1848, and the movement's self-identification as the heirs of the United Irishmen would lead them to stage an unsuccessful insurrection, inspired by the pan-European revolutions, in July 1848.<sup>17</sup> Yet, as Sean Ryder notes, the movement also had

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<sup>15</sup> Beiner, 'To Speak of '98', pp. 11, 396.

<sup>16</sup> Leon Ó Broin, 'R. R. Madden, Historian of the United Irishman', *Irish University Review*, 3 (1972), pp. 20-33.

<sup>17</sup> The term 'Young Ireland' refers to the group of writers that were initially associated with the *Nation* newspaper. Originally affiliated with O'Connell's campaign for the repeal of the Act of Union, they would come to develop a more militant nationalist rhetoric, influenced by contemporary European nationalist movements. The leading figure in the early stages of the Young Ireland movement, Thomas Davis (1814-1845) was greatly influenced by the work of the German romantic philosophers Herder and Lessing and incorporated their vision of the nation as a spiritual and organic community into his writings. See Eva Stöter, 'Grimmige Zeiten': The Influence of Lessing, Herder and the Grimm Brothers on the Nationalism of the Young Irelanders', in Tadhg Foley and Seán Ryder (eds), *Ideology and Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 173-181. The stated aim of the movement's newspaper the

an ambivalent relationship to the United Irish legacy, often distancing themselves from the more radical elements of United Irish ideology, the political exigencies of the 1840s leading them to focus on the mytho-romantic dimensions of their heroic sacrifice, an aspect that will be discussed in greater detail below.<sup>18</sup>

## II

The continued political valency attached to histories of the United Irishmen and the rebellion during the nineteenth-century meant, as Dáire Keogh has commented, that they could not accommodate 'the totality of women's experience', political priorities contributing to women's 'depoliticization and relegation to secondary roles'.<sup>19</sup> The relegation of women to the roles of 'symbol, model or victim' in United Irish historiography has become something of an axiom in recent histories of women's involvement with the movement. According to Thomas Bartlett there are 'sound socio-political reasons for this neglect', resulting from contemporary conceptions of rebellion as 'men's work' and the fact that 'in general nationalism in the nineteenth century had little time for women, at least in a public role'.<sup>20</sup> Whilst this is a roughly accurate summation of the factors that contributed to women's marginalization in nationalist historiography, the complex relationship between gender and the politics of remembering '98 is still worthy of further investigation. Though the prominence of political interpretations of the rebellion may have sidelined women, the ways in which women were represented were necessarily shaped by the political contest over the reading of the rebellion.

Representations of women in histories of the rebellion echoed the polarity which Edmund Burke had constructed in his account of the French revolution between the passive figure of 'beauty in distress' embodied in his portrayal of Marie Antoinette and

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Nation, was to provide the Irish people with a publication that was 'racy of the soil', and which would 'purify' the people 'with a lofty and heroic love of country'. Davis, *The Young Ireland Movement*, p. 25. On the key differences between O'Connell and the Young Irelanders see Oliver MacDonagh, *O'Connell: The Life of Daniel O'Connell, 1775-1847* (London, 1991), p. 310. On the split between 'Young' and 'Old' Ireland between 1845-46 see Davis, *The Young Ireland Movement*, pp. 81-116.

<sup>18</sup> Ryder, 'Speaking of '98', pp. 51-69.

<sup>19</sup> Keogh, 'The Women of 1798: Representations and Realities', p. 63.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Bartlett, 'Bearing Witness: Female Evidences in Courts Martial Convened to Suppress the 1798 Rebellion', in Keogh and Furlong (eds), *The Women of '98*, pp. 65-67.

his depiction of public women in the revolutionary crowd as ‘the furies of hell, in the abused shape of the vilest of women’.<sup>21</sup> As discussed in chapter one, Burke’s account of the French revolution foregrounded the impact which it had on gender roles and relations, identifying in the public roles assumed by women and in the loss of veneration for rank and sex a fundamental shift in the natural social order.<sup>22</sup> While Musgrave would have had little sympathy for Burke’s views on Ireland, and interpreted the 1798 rebellion in religious rather than political terms, his identification of rebel women as shrill, lascivious harridans draws on similar imagery to that used by Burke and the anti-Jacobins. He maintained that prostitutes sympathetic to the radical cause were used to seduce the military into becoming United Irishmen, and as noted in chapter four, he frequently depicted the female rebels as more religiously zealous and bloodthirsty than their male counterparts, commenting more than once that the women exceeded the men in their cruelty and desire for plunder.<sup>23</sup> Tom Furniss has persuasively argued that Burke’s treatment of women in the *Reflections* betrays his anxieties about the ‘slippage of the conventional signs of gender and class’. In the context of revolutionary upheaval women assume masculine attributes, the queen becomes ‘but a woman’ and distinctions of sex and class are confounded.<sup>24</sup> Musgrave’s account of the ‘fantastick apperance’ of the rebels’ wives wearing the ‘elegant apparel’ of the protestant ladies of Wexford reveals similar concerns about the fragility of social distinctions; sartorial reversal becomes emblematic of the gender, class (and religious) inversions that accompanied the rebellion.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Tom Furniss, ‘Gender in Revolution: Edmund Burke and Mary Wollstonecraft’, in Kelvin Everest (ed.), *Revolution in Writing. British Literary Responses to the French Revolution* (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia, 1991), p. 73.

<sup>22</sup> The connection drawn by Burke between French radicalism, sexual license and the subversion of the natural sexual order became a common trope in conservative Protestant discourse during the 1790s. The Revd. William Magee in a sermon addressed to the Association for Discountenancing Vice and Promoting the practice of Virtue and Religion in 1796, attributed the ‘rapid decrease of modest and chastity amongst our females’ to the spread of Jacobinism and the rise of the United Irishmen. Rev. William Magee, *A Sermon Preached before the Association for Discountenancing Vice and Promoting the Practice of Virtue and Religion in St Anne’s Church on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> May 1796 by Rev. William Magee*. (Dublin, 1796).

<sup>23</sup> Musgrave, Richard, *Memoirs of the Different Rebellions in Ireland, from the Arrival of the English. Also a Particular Detail of that which Broke out on the 23rd May, 1798* (2nd edn, Dublin, 1801), pp. 177,360,454, 559.

<sup>24</sup> Furniss, ‘Gender in Revolution: Edmund Burke and Mary Wollstonecraft’, pp. 84-86.

<sup>25</sup> Musgrave, *Memoirs*, p. 454.

The continued influence of anti-Jacobin rhetoric on Irish conservatives' accounts of women's involvement with the United Irishmen is evident in Samuel McSkimmin's comparison of the members of the United Irishwomen societies with the 'amazonian' women of the French revolution.<sup>26</sup> According to McSkimmin: 'Judging from the violent language of these amazons, they were anxious for an opportunity to rival by deeds of the dagger, the "Dames de la Halle" and the "Poissardes", those valuable allies of the French revolution'.<sup>27</sup> The image of the savage rebel woman elaborated by Musgrave influenced subsequent loyalist accounts and can be seen in George Cruickshank's illustrations to accompany William Hamilton Maxwell's *History of the Irish Rebellion in 1798* (1845). Drawing on episodes described by Musgrave, his engravings portrayed the rebel women with heavily simianized and masculinized features, smoking pipes and swigging whiskey, urging the men to brutality during the massacre at Wexford Bridge and plundering the palace of the Bishop of Ferns.<sup>28</sup> Describing the 'excessive butchery' which occurred at Rathangan, Maxwell noted that 'even woman forgot her sex and barbarously participated'.<sup>29</sup> The contrast between women's military activity in 1798 and middle-class gender conventions was pointed up in Maxwell's response to the story of Betsy Gray, a young Ulsterwoman, who had been shot with her brother and lover during the battle of Ballynahinch. 'For a young lady, a battle-field is very romantic', remarked Maxwell, 'but a drawing room a safer locality by far'.<sup>30</sup>

The fact that it is in a loyalist rather than a nationalist history that the sole allusion to the United Irishwomen societies is to be found would seem to suggest that historians sympathetic to the movement were keen to play down the participation of women.<sup>31</sup> At

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<sup>26</sup> In his study of the shifting meanings attached to the figure of the Amazon, Dror Wahrman notes that in the early eighteenth-century the figure of the Amazonian woman had relatively positive, or at least neutral connotations. However, by the late eighteenth century the female Amazon had acquired a distinctly pejorative significance, a shift which Wahrman links to the hardening of formerly more fluid gender identities. Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London, 2004), pp. 7-11.

<sup>27</sup> Samuel McSkimmin, *Annals of Ulster from 1790-1798*, E. J. McCrum (ed.) (Belfast, 1906 [1849]), p. 38.

<sup>28</sup> William Hamilton Maxwell, *History of the Irish Rebellion in 1798, with Memoirs of the Union and Emmet's Insurrection in 1803* (London, 1845), pp. 88, 155.

<sup>29</sup> Maxwell, *History of the Irish Rebellion*, p. 68.

<sup>30</sup> Maxwell, *History of the Irish Rebellion*, p. 218.

<sup>31</sup> As noted in chapter three, the only reference to the United Irishwomen societies is to be found in McSkimmin's loyalist account of the 1790s. McSkimmin, *Annals of Ulster*, p. 38. Although Mary Anne

the same time there are some references to women's involvement in early nineteenth-century United Irish memoirs. Thomas Cloney paid tribute to the valour and enthusiasm of Mary Doyle during the battle of New Ross and Joseph Holt recalled the valuable services of Suzy Toole 'the Moving Magazine'.<sup>32</sup> Anne Kinsella has pointed to the celebration of certain heroines of 1798 in folk memory and ballads including Mary Doyle, Molly Weston of Kilcumney and the sister of Henry Munroe, who, according to the ballad 'General Munroe', led the rebel troops following her brother's death:

In came his sister, and she drest in green,  
With a sword by her side that was both sharp and keen,  
She gave three huzzas, and away she did go,  
Saying, "Revenge I will have for my brother Munroe".<sup>33</sup>

The valorization of these women's exploits in folk memory is perhaps representative of the gulf between interpretations of the rebellion from above and below. As Cronin has noted, popular memory of the rebellion was less likely to gloss over its sectarian and violent aspects, and by extension less concerned with refuting the allegations of loyalist historians such as Musgrave.<sup>34</sup> Consequently they may have been less sensitive to the suggestions of sexual and social upheaval that women's participation connoted. Popular memory of women's participation as combatants in 1798 is evident in the Ballinamuck legend of 'the noggin of milk'. According to Maureen Murphy, several

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McCracken alluded to the societies in the letters which she presented to Madden for his research on the Ulster United Irishmen, Madden does not appear to have inquired any further about the nature of these societies, or to have mentioned them in his history of the United Irishmen. TCD, Dublin, Madden Papers, 873/151. Mary Anne McCracken to Henry Joy McCracken, 17 March 1797.

<sup>32</sup> Cloney, *A Personal Narrative*, pp. 38, 41; Joseph Holt, *Rebellion in Wicklow: General Joseph Holt's Personal Account of 1798*, Peter O'Shaughnessy (ed.) (Dublin, 1998), pp. 38, 68. Although the conservative Thomas Crofton Croker, who originally transcribed and edited Holt's memoirs, inserted his own description of Suzy Toole, in which he stressed her masculine attributes and harsh appearance: 'Her face when young was broad as a full moon and her nose nearly flat to her face, having been broken by a stone in a faction fight ... her powerful muscles and brawny limbs made her more than a match for many men'. Joseph Holt, *The Memoirs of Joseph Holt*, Thomas Crofton Croker (ed.) (London, 1838), p. 49.

<sup>33</sup> 'General Munroe', in R. R. Madden, *Literary Remains of the United Irishmen of 1798* (Dublin, 1887), p. 237; Anne Kinsella, 'Nineteenth-Century Perspectives: The Women of 1798 in Folk Memory and Ballads', pp. 187-199. Margaret Dobbin, recalling the 1798 rebellion in Down in a series of letters written to her grand-daughter in 1875, bears out this portrait of Henry Munroe's sister, who she remembered as '... a woman of masculine mind and a daring fearless disposition, she feared no man, said what she pleased, outraged by her brother's fate she fairly defied the Government and went so far at last that she was arrested and confined in Carrickfergus jail ... I often thought she would have made a better commander than he [her brother Henry] did, but neither could have gained a victory at the above date'. TCD, Dublin, Papers Relating to the United Irishmen, 10354/10.

<sup>34</sup> Cronin, 'Memory, Story and Balladry', pp. 120-121.

versions of this story survived in Mayo oral traditions. Each recounts how a lone woman during the rebellion asked by a government soldier for a drink, returns with a noggin of milk and when the soldier goes to drink it, delivers a fatal blow to the soldier's head.<sup>35</sup> Similar versions of this legend have also been found in Wicklow and Wexford, and Beiner has found oral traditions in Mayo describing women who joined the rebel ranks as combatants. In oral memories of the rebellion in Mayo, collected during the early twentieth century male story-tellers often cited female relatives (usually their grandmothers) as the original source of information, indicating both the importance of women in the transmission of historical tradition, as well as the possibility of a fuller account of women's experiences in the rebellion.<sup>36</sup>

For bourgeois nationalists such as Charles Hamilton Teeling, the figure of the sword-wielding female rebel was sidelined and women presented as supportive auxiliaries to their male relatives. Relating Margaret Bond's conveyance of letters and writing materials to the prisoners in Kilmainham in the guise of a pie, he concluded by eulogizing her in the language of nineteenth-century sentimental femininity: 'Oh woman! – When pain and anguish wring the brow, A ministering angel thou'.<sup>37</sup> This depiction of Margaret Bond as a 'ministering angel' is at odds with the more radical assessment of Bond by a government agent, who counselled Pelham and Cooke against admitting her to Kilmainham, as she 'constantly carries a prayer Book about her, to swear Women, thinking through their Influence with the other Sex to disseminate this cursed Doctrine the more'.<sup>38</sup>

In Musgrave's account of the 1798 rebellion, the brutality and fanaticism of the rebel women was directly contrasted with the mildness and suffering piety of Protestant women. Following the model of William Temple, who had used authenticated affidavits of Protestant sufferers in his history of the 1641 rebellion, Musgrave based

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<sup>35</sup> Murphy notes the narrative similarities between this legend and the biblical tale of Judith who beheaded the Assyrian leader Holofernes. Maureen Murphy, ' "The Noggin of Milk": An Old Testament Legend and the Battle of Ballinamuck' in Keogh and Furlong (eds), *The Women of '98*, pp. 182-185.

<sup>36</sup> In Longford, for example, a man recollected stories told by his grandmother about her participation in the Battle of Ballinamuck, where, carrying a baby on her back, she brought food to the French soldiers before joining the battle. Beiner, 'Speaking of '98', pp. 341-342.

<sup>37</sup> Teeling, *History of the Rebellion of 1798*, p. 29.

<sup>38</sup> NAI, Dublin, Rebellion Papers, 620/30/211. 'Left Hand' to Secretary Pelham and Secretary Cooke, 27 May 1797.

much of his history on loyalists' depositions, including several from women. He actively sought out instances of rebel brutality, writing to George Lenox-Coyne in 1799 that 'any anecdotes of atrocities committed by the United Irishmen and Defenders will be very acceptable'.<sup>39</sup> From female Protestant witnesses he collected details of their ordeals during the rebellion, such as Isabella Brownrigg's account of her imprisonment on board Thomas Dixon's sloop in Wexford harbour.<sup>40</sup> Relating this episode, Musgrave stressed the constant threat of rape which the female captives endured, noting that the women 'resolved on drowning themselves, should such an attempt be made'.<sup>41</sup> However, Musgrave was unable to provide any substantial evidence that loyalist women had been raped by the rebels, for, as John Beatty observes, he certainly would have 'played the propaganda card' if they had suffered.<sup>42</sup> Despite the absence of any reliable evidence on this issue Musgrave persisted in reflecting on the horror of Protestant women absolutely at the mercy of their rebel captives. He maintained that if the rising in Dublin had been successful all loyalist men were to have been murdered and their wives 'violated by the ruthless pikemen'.<sup>43</sup> The account of the murder of George Crawford and his grand-daughter provided one of the most potent examples of rebel brutality against a Protestant woman, but in Musgrave's description it is given an added sexual dimension, as he describes the rebels' fatal piking of the fourteen-year old girl in the 'breasts, the thighs and the head'.<sup>44</sup> The equation of the piking with sexual violation recalls Burke's depiction of the revolutionary crowd piercing the bed of Marie Antoinette with bayonets and poignards, an act which encapsulates the monstrous character of the revolution in its willingness to violate female honour and abandon codes of chivalry. Musgrave's account of the murder of the Crawfords was repeated in

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<sup>39</sup> Cited in Whelan, '98 after '98', p. 137.

<sup>40</sup> 'Account of Isabella Brownrigg', in John Beatty (ed.) *Protestant Women's Narratives of the Irish Rebellion of 1798* (Dublin, 2001) pp. 90-116; Musgrave, *Memoirs of the Different Rebellions in Ireland*, pp. 450-453.

<sup>41</sup> Musgrave, *Memoirs of the Different Rebellions in Ireland*, p. 450. Isabella Brownrigg herself presented death as preferable to rape, writing in her original manuscript: 'Not one hour or moment of Ease had I experienced from Monday May 28th. How indeed cou'd I, at the mercy of thousands of ruffians who might at any time they pleased do whatever they pleased without fear of punishment or even censure! The prospect of immediate death is horrible (as I can tell) but that was little to the horrors every woman must have dreaded.' 'Isabella Brownrigg' in John Beatty (ed.), *Protestant Women's Narratives*, p. 111.

<sup>42</sup> 'Introduction', in John Beatty (ed.), *Protestant Women's Narratives*, p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> To support his contention that 'the rebels made a constant practice of violating women who fell into their hands' he offered as a rather weak proof a declaration from the rebel general, Patrick Sutton, instructing all United Irish officers to punish any of their forces found guilty of committing outrages against women. Musgrave, *Memoirs of the Different Rebellions in Ireland*, pp. 219, 368.

<sup>44</sup> Musgrave, *Memoirs of the Different Rebellions in Ireland*, p. 245.



Maxwell's *History* and Cruickshank's accompanying engraving vividly evokes the spectacle of an innocent girl at the mercy of a rapacious and brutal peasantry (figure three).

Musgrave's reliance on speculation and suggestion in his representation of the rebels' lasciviousness and mistreatment of Protestant women would seem to confirm the United Irish leaders' success in enforcing their policy of treating women as non-combatants. As detailed in chapter one, assurances of Irishmen's innate gallantry had formed an important rhetorical device in the United Irishmen's efforts to distance themselves from the worst excesses of the French Revolution, a device prompted in part by Burke's *Reflections*, and which was also used to bolster the movement's claims for Irish civility. It is difficult to ascertain how much this intellectual commitment to gallantry influenced the behaviour of insurgents. Certainly the break down of the United Irish leadership in Wexford meant that they were unable to prevent the massacres at Scullabogue and Wexford Bridge in which both women and children died. Nonetheless, this breakdown of order did not result in the mass rape of women comparable to that which accompanied the counter-revolutionary campaign.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> According to Charles Hamilton Teeling the first general proclamation issued by the United Irishmen concluded with an exhortation to abide by this chivalric code: 'Soldiers of Erin, remember your homes; let the domestic hearth never be violated, nor the arms of the nation sullied by cruelty or revenge. Bear in mind that the weak and the defenceless claim your protection, and that retaliation is only the weapon of the coward and the slave. Let this be engraven on your hearts, and let it be proclaimed to the extremity of our land that *insult to female honour, contempt of orders, pillage and desertion, shall be punished with death.*' Teeling, *History of the Irish Rebellion of 1798*, p. 89.



**Figure Three**  
***Murder of George Crawford and his granddaughter***  
**George Cruickshank, c. 1845**

The honourable behaviour of United Irish forces with respect to women was verified in Rev. James Gordon's history of the rebellion published in 1803. He observed that: 'In one point at least we must allow some praise to the rebels. Amid all their atrocities, the chastity of the fair sex was respected ... though many beautiful young women were absolutely in their power'.<sup>46</sup> He proceeded to contrast this restraint with the behaviour of the administration's forces, but he offered a less flattering explanation for the difference in conduct, which he attributed to the sexual laxity of the female rebels:

... who, in the general dissolution of regular government, and the joy of imagined victory, were perhaps less scrupulous than at other times of their favours. The want of such an accompaniment to the royal troops may in some degree account for an opposite behaviour in them to the female peasantry.<sup>47</sup>

While interpretations of the rebellion written by United Irishmen after 1798 reflected pre-existing tensions within the movement between radical and more conservative members, the honourable conduct of the rebels towards women was one issue on which there was uniform agreement.<sup>48</sup> Accounts of United Irish gallantry became a standard feature in their histories of the rebellion, from Edward Hay's account of the Wexford rising published in 1803 to Miles Byrne's 1863 memoir.<sup>49</sup> In a section entitled 'Female Chastity' in William Sampson's memoirs he again invoked Irishmen's native chivalry, and contrasted this with the debauched behaviour of British troops:

The crime then of Irishmen is this, to win the fair by persuasions, and defend them with their last drop of blood. The *boast* of their enemies is,

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<sup>46</sup> Gordon, *History of the Rebellion in Ireland in 1798*, p. 259.

<sup>47</sup> Gordon, *History of the Rebellion in Ireland in 1798*, p. 259. Teeling may have been consciously refuting this allegation of sexual immorality in the rebel camp when he explained women's presence among the rebel forces as resulting from conjugal and sisterly affection: 'The expedition presented a spectacle, which though at other times it would have appeared singular, was by no means novel in that period of civil war – a few females on single horses, the attached wives or sisters of some beloved individuals in the ranks, from whom no fortune could separate them, or peril affright'. Teeling, *History of the Irish Rebellion of 1798*, pp. 272, 276.

<sup>48</sup> On the conflicting interpretations of the rebellion within the United Irish movement see Whelan, '98 after '98', pp. 155-156.

<sup>49</sup> Edward Hay, *History of the Insurrection of the County of Wexford, A. D., 1798; Including an Account of Transactions Preceding that Event, with an Appendix* (Dublin, 1803), pp. 169-170, 247; Cloney, *A Personal Narrative*, p. 212, Teeling, *History of the Irish Rebellion of 1798*, pp. 89, 271, 272; R. R. Madden, *The United Irishmen their Lives and Times*, (New York, 1916 [1842-46]), vol. 2, p. 208; and Miles Byrne, *Memoirs of Miles Byrne* (Shannon, 1972 [1863]), p. 91.

to overcome their chastity by brutal force, and their loathing by the bayonet. Oh, monsters! hateful in the eyes of civilized humanity!<sup>50</sup>

The insistence on the gallant conduct of the United Irish rebels certainly figured as an important propaganda tool, partly mitigating the brutal violence of the massacres at Scullabogue and Wexford Bridge and confuting Musgrave's attempts to raise the spectre of loyalist womanhood ravished by a savage peasant jacquerie. As argued in chapter one, the important role accorded to the treatment and position of women in United Irish ideology could have both progressive and restrictive implications for women's status. Following Enlightenment narratives of civilization female emancipation could be linked to Irish independence and social development. Alternatively the treatment of women could act simply as a measure of Irish masculinity and male civility. The evidence of nineteenth-century nationalist histories of the rebellion would appear to indicate the pre-eminence of the latter formulation.<sup>51</sup> Although the Young Ireland press counted many women amongst its contributors, it continued to expound a chivalric nationalist view of gender relations.<sup>52</sup> Nationalist histories of the rebellion which contrasted the violation of Irish women by British troops with the honourable conduct of the rebel forces were implicitly echoing early modern allegorical representations of the British conquest as a rape as well as restating the role of Irish manhood as the chivalric protectors of Irish women/nation found in Jacobite *aisling* poetry. However, as the next section will argue, in addition to the figure of the violated woman another model of female suffering was elaborated in Irish nationalist accounts of the rebellion, in the form of the grief-stricken woman.

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<sup>50</sup> William Sampson, *Memoirs of William Sampson* (2nd edn, Virginia, 1817), p. 432.

<sup>51</sup> As George Mosse has argued, during the nineteenth century Romanticism's invocations of medieval chivalry contributed to the development of a bourgeois code of sexual respectability, which he contends was intimately connected to the evolution of nationalist ideologies. George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (Madison, 1985).

<sup>52</sup> On the bourgeois chivalric ethos of Young Ireland see Seán Ryder, 'Gender and the Discourse of Young Ireland Nationalism', in Timothy P. Foley and others (eds), *Gender and Colonialism* (Galway, 1995), pp. 210-224. Jan Canavan has identified fifteen women writers who contributed to the *Nation*. Nearly all used pseudonyms and published mainly pieces of verse, although they were often very militant in tone, especially the compositions of Jane Francesca Elgee, later Lady Wilde. Jan Canavan, 'Romantic Revolutionary Irishwomen: Women, Young Ireland and 1848', in Margaret Kelleher and James H. Murphy (eds), *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Ireland: Public and Private Spheres* (Dublin, 1997), p. 214.

### III

As noted in the previous chapter, the post-rebellion, post-union period witnessed the transition from Enlightenment, legal and political definitions of the nation, towards a more romantically inflected vision of the nation as an 'imagined community'. In its latter incarnation, nationalism can be understood as primarily about feeling, a characteristic suggested by Benedict Anderson's association between nationalism and concepts such as kinship.<sup>53</sup> In her analysis of the affective dimension of nationalism in Young Ireland discourse, Marjorie Howes observes that most accounts of nationalism's engagement with feeling have concentrated on its erotic dimension, and in particular the female personification of the nation, represented in Irish nationalism as either the eroticized lover worshipped by her patriots with an 'ecstatic heterosexual devotion' or, as in later nineteenth-century Irish nationalism, as an idealized mother 'whose purity secures her son's faithfulness'. According to Howes both of these narratives 'involve suppressing homosexual desire between men and presenting heterosexual love as the appropriate model of national affect'.<sup>54</sup> However, she also identifies alternative structures of affect within Irish nationalism, with perhaps less exclusionary implications for women's relationship to the nation, in the articulation of national suffering and national sentiment through the medium of tears.<sup>55</sup> While Howes focuses on how representations of tears in Young Ireland discourse served to generate national feeling and provoke suitably nationalist action during the 1840s, this form of nationalist subjectivity also has important implications for representations of the rebellion in early nineteenth-century Ireland.

The figure of violated womanhood in nationalist histories discussed above clearly drew on the erotic dimension of national feeling, figuring the rebellion as a contest for sexual/political access to the female body/nation. However the unprecedented loss of life on the rebel side during and after 1798, and the loss of a generation of national

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<sup>53</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, London, 1991), p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> Marjorie Howes, 'Tears and Blood: Lady Wilde and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism', in Tadhg Foley and Ryder (eds), *Ideology and Ireland in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 154.

<sup>55</sup> Howes, 'Tears and Blood', p. 155.

leaders to battle, execution and exile, raised the issue of how this loss of (mostly) male life was to be commemorated and how grief and suffering might be channelled into the nationalist project. Defending the *Irish Magazine's* tendency to revive painful memories by dwelling on the deaths of United Irish martyrs and the bloodshed that accompanied the rebellion, Walter Cox declared that 'the very life-blood of public spirit is nourished by an acquaintance with the history of our sufferings'.<sup>56</sup> Despite Cox's confidence that an acquaintance with the history of Irish sufferings would foster a sense of national injustice and act as a platform for national action, the role and representation of suffering in Irish public discourse was not an uncomplicated matter. As Luke Gibbons argues, during the eighteenth century the figure of the body in pain, bleeding or weeping, was relegated from the public sphere of justice to the private domain of sensibility. Relating these shifts to the development of Edmund Burke's theories of sympathy, he contends that the expression of national injustice and oppression in eighteenth-century Ireland was constrained by a neo-stoical discourse that dismissed excessive displays of emotion or suffering as effeminate.<sup>57</sup> In Gibbons' account the neo-stoical conception of the citizen which 'sought to purge the body and its discontents from the public sphere' is exemplified by Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) in which the right of the sufferer to complain is repudiated:

... the passions which the spectator is least disposed to sympathize with, and in which, on that account, the point of propriety may be said to stand low, are those of which the immediate feeling or sensation is more or less disagreeable, or even painful to the person principally concerned ... We esteem the man who supports pain and even torture with manhood and firmness; and we can have little regard for him who sinks under them, and abandons himself to useless outcries and womanish lamentations.<sup>58</sup>

As this quote suggests, the stoical bearing which Smith believed was necessary to create a sympathetic relationship between the spectator and the suffering subject was closely

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<sup>56</sup> *The Irish Magazine and Monthly Asylum for Neglected Biography*, January 1809.

<sup>57</sup> Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics and the Colonial Sublime* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 11.

<sup>58</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, D. D. Raphael and A. L. MacFie (eds) (Oxford, 1976 [1759]), p. 244. In the sixth edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* published in 1790, Smith revised the work even further in the direction of stoicism. D. D. Raphael and A. L. MacFie, 'Introduction', Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, pp. 5-10.

identified with masculinity, here juxtaposed with 'useless outcries and womanish lamentations'. Julie Ellison has described Smith's vision of the sympathetic relationship as a resolutely homosocial affair, the ideal manifestation of moral sentiment involving a dignified upper-class sufferer whose very self-control provokes his friends to vicarious tears.<sup>59</sup> Smith's formulation was a refinement of the more austere form of stoicism discernable in classical republican thought. Dorinda Outram has examined the influence of classical republicanism on the culture of death and commemoration in revolutionary France, arguing that for a brief period an extreme form of masculine stoicism was espoused which banished 'feminine' displays of grief from the public sphere, in an effort to cleanse the public sphere of such potentially disruptive emanations of personal feeling.<sup>60</sup>

This neo-stoical approach to commemoration can also be identified in United Irishmen's response to the execution of William Orr in 1797, whose death provided the movement with its first republican martyr.<sup>61</sup> The phrase 'Remember Orr' became a rallying cry in the build up to the 1798 rebellion. As part of United Irish efforts to inscribe the memory of Orr on the public consciousness William Drennan composed the 'Wake of William Orr', which was first published in the *Press*. According to Madden this 'probably had more effect on the public mind than any production of the day in prose or verse'.<sup>62</sup> A resolutely martial anthem, the opening stanza of the poem reflected the neo-classical gendering of commemoration, intoning:

There our murdered brother lies;  
Wake him not with woman's cries;  
Mourn the way that manhood ought-  
Sit in silent trance of thought.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Julie Ellison, *Cato's Tears and the making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago, 1999), p. 10.

<sup>60</sup> Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture* (Newhaven, 1989), pp. 85-87.

<sup>61</sup> A young Presbyterian farmer, convicted for administering the United Irish oath, the figure of Orr, as Nancy Curtin notes, invoked implicit parallels with the Roman republican hero, Cincinnatus, also a farmer, who, after saving Rome, retired to a life of virtuous industry working the land. Nancy Curtin, "'A Nation of Abortive Men": Gendered Citizenship and Early Irish Republicanism', in Marilyn Cohen and Nancy Curtin (eds), *Reclaiming Gender: Transgressive Identities in Modern Ireland* (New York, 1999), p. 41. On Orr's trial see Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, p. 85-87.

<sup>62</sup> Madden, *The United Irishmen their Lives and Times*, vol. 4, p. 54.

<sup>63</sup> William Drennan, 'The Wake of William Orr', in Madden, *Literary Remains of the United Irishmen*, p. 47.

These lines suggest a deliberate marginalization of women's grief in favour of a more austere and masculine form of mourning. The self-controlled and contemplative response of the neo-classical subject is privileged over the visceral and emotional outpouring of 'womanish lamentations'. Yet Drennan also recognizes the emotive power of the figure of the grief-stricken widow. Shifting his attention to Orr's pregnant wife he wonders: 'Who is she with aspect wild? The widow'd mother with her child-  
/Child new stirring in the womb!/Husband waiting for the tomb'. In the concluding lines he again enjoins male mourners to refrain from tears. 'Here we watch our brother's sleep/Watch with us, but do not weep.'<sup>64</sup>

A letter to his sister, written shortly before Orr's execution, contains the germs of Drennan's elegy on Orr. Responding to reports that Lord Yelverton, the judge who had sentenced Orr to death, had shed tears for Orr after passing his sentence, Drennan proclaimed his hatred for these 'Yelvertonian tears'. Distinguishing between 'tears of sense, and tears of sentiment', Drennan wrote: 'The first do well enough to wash the face, but the others rise, pure, from the secret source of sensibility' and he contrasted Yelverton's tears with those of Orr's wife: 'There are tears – those of a wife about to be a widow, in a prison, her four children close by her, a fifth stirring within her, her husband in the condemnation of a vindictive and Draconian statute, striving to comfort her – he does not shed tears.'<sup>65</sup> In condemning the judge's tears that do not prompt political justice and exhorting United Irishmen not to weep for their fallen comrade lest it detract from their political purpose, Drennan relegates these sympathetic relationships from the public sphere, to the domestic realm. While a wife who sheds tears for her husband is an object of pity, her tears that 'rise pure from the secret source of sensibility' are the product of personal affection.

Although 'The Wake of William Orr' construes women's grief as a threat to the martial resolve of the United Irishmen, in Drennan's injunction to 'wake him not with woman's cries' he also alludes to an alternative culture of mourning, the keening tradition

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<sup>64</sup> Drennan, 'The Wake of William Orr', p. 48.

<sup>65</sup> William Drennan to Martha McTier, 29 September 1797 in Jean Agnew, (ed.), *Drennan-McTier Letters* (Dublin, 1999), vol. 2, pp. 338-339.



associated with Irish wake customs. As discussed in chapter four, this tradition presented a very different form of commemoration to that elaborated in classical republicanism, one which foregrounded the bereaved woman precisely because of her ability to lend her personal loss a political charge. Importantly, in the context of post-rebellion Ireland, the keening tradition also allocated the *bean chaointe* a significant role in the construction of communal memory, laments on the death of local martyrs or heroes being passed orally across generations of female practitioners. In his 1824 account of Irish keening rituals the conservative antiquarian Thomas Crofton Croker noted both the important role of women in the lamenting tradition and the seditious content of many of these laments:

Those criminals whose lives have been forfeited in the cause of rebellion, derive no small consolation from the idea of martyrdom, which they imagine they have attained, and in this they are encouraged by the popular voice, apostrophizing their shade as that of an hero and a patriot.<sup>66</sup>

Beiner has identified several laments for fallen rebels in Gaelic-speaking areas of Connacht, one of which, the lament for Fr. Manus Sweeney, was supposedly based on a spontaneous keening by his sister at the gallows. The keening tradition was also fused with fairy lore in the popular memory of 1798. According to legend, fairy women secretly lamented the dead after the battles of 1798 in the Connacht glen *Atha na gCeanna* (Ford of the Heads), locals recalling the sound of their tortured cries.<sup>67</sup> As previously noted the climate of fear both during and after the rebellion contributed further to the already close links between women and Irish funeral ceremonies, as women took responsibility for the clandestine burial of their male relatives, an activity considered too dangerous for men.

While Drennan's 'Wake for William Orr' outlined a pre-rebellion form of commemoration, which drew on the republican rhetoric of the United Irishmen, such a martial commemorative mode became more fraught in the aftermath of the rebellion.

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<sup>66</sup> Thomas Crofton Croker, *Researches in the South of Ireland. Illustrative of the Scenery, Architectural Remains and the Manners and Superstitions of the Peasantry, with an Appendix Containing a Private Narrative of the Rebellion of 1798* (Dublin, 1981 [1824]), p. 182.

<sup>67</sup> Beiner, 'To speak of '98', pp. 405, 411.

As detailed in chapter six, the Act of Union can be understood as an emasculating experience for Irish political culture. The failure of the rebellion signalled the end of the military option as a basis for Irish national identity, but opened up a space in which more identifiably 'female' forms of national expression could be articulated. In this post-rebellion, post-Union context the vernacular tradition of the lamenting woman supplanted the republican tradition of stoic, homosocial commemoration. However, while the *keen*, with its oral performative aspects had enabled women to assume a public and sometimes political role in community remembrancing, in the nineteenth century it was largely men who gave literary expression to this female grief. The image of the wailing woman lamenting the death of her loved ones filtered into popular balladry in the form of 'The Maniac - Mary Le More'. Several different versions of the ballad appeared during the first half of the nineteenth century each focusing on the motif of the young woman driven mad by grief following the death of her male relatives in the rebellion.<sup>68</sup> A version entitled 'Mary, A Doggerel Poem' published in *The Irish Magazine* in 1808 described as its subject 'a poor beautiful Creature in the County of Meath, who lost her father by the Rebellion of 1798. His melancholy Death gave such a shock to her senses that she became insane, and in a short time fell victim to her madness'.<sup>69</sup> Madden included two versions of the ballad in his *Literary Remains of the United Irishmen*. One, which was taken from the 1803 second edition of *Paddy's Resource*, described the dishevelled and crazed appearance of Mary Le More:

My father! she cried, with the wildest emotion  
 Ah no, my poor father now sleeps in the grave.  
 They were friends of his son and of freedom who bore him,  
 They have tolled his death knell, they have laid the turf oe'r him,  
 He is gone! he is gone! and the good will deplore him,  
 When the blue wave of Erin hides Mary Le More.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Mary Helen Thuente has identified the earliest record of this song in a letter from a government informer in January 1799 which reported that it was being circulated as a printed ballad in Nottingham. She notes the multiple origins of the image of Mary Le More including the lamenting tradition and the eighteenth-century vogue for songs about young women maniacs. Mary Helen Thuente, 'Liberty, Hibernia and Mary Le More: United Irish Images of Women', in Keogh and Furlong (eds), *Women of '98*, pp. 18-25.

<sup>69</sup> *The Irish Magazine*, March 1808, p. 140.

<sup>70</sup> The ballad also invokes the image of violated Irish womanhood suggesting that Mary Le More's madness was brought on following her rape by British soldiers: 'Ah, soldiers, 'twas foul, while the cabin was burning,/And the father lay dead, the poor daughter was mourning,/Oh hide with the sea mew, ye maids, and take warning,/These wretches have ruined poor Mary Le More'. 'The Maniac - Mary Le More' in Madden, *Literary Remains of the United Irishmen of 1798*, pp. 1-3. The link between the

Mary Le More presents another version of the Irish female personification trope, drawing on the motif of the violated female and of the grief-stricken woman/nation that re-echoed the depictions of a sorrowful Erin in Gaelic *aisling* poetry. The increased prominence of the grieving woman in the Irish nationalist 'dramaturgy of death' was signalled by the figuration of the feminized nation weeping over the tombs of her fallen heroes in commemorative poetry. The frontispiece of the *Irish Magazine* portrayed a woman, in classical attire draped over a headstone on which the name 'Edward' is faintly decipherable, a probable reference to Lord Edward Fitzgerald (figure four). The magazine also published multiple poems on the theme of the United Irish martyrs' graves, many of which featured the figure of a mourning Erin/Hibernia.<sup>71</sup>

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rebellion and madness is also evident in the northern loyalist Amelia Bristow's narrative poem 'The Maniac, A tale'. However, there is an interesting reversal of gender roles as it is a man, the Ulster Protestant Alberto, who falls victim to madness following the death of his wife and children at the hands of the rebels. 'The Maniac, A Tale; or, a view of Bethlem Hospital: And the Merits of Women' (1810) in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions* (Cork, 2002), vol. 4, pp. 834-836.

<sup>71</sup> See for example 'Lines to the Memory of Lord E\_\_\_\_\_d F\_\_\_\_\_d' and 'The Grave of Russell', in *The Irish Magazine*, May 1811, p. 221; and January 1812, pp. 45-46.

Mary Ann Wolk Tone and Edward Fitzgibbon, one of the famous figures in the  
history of United Irish martyrs was Robert Emmet, a man whose death from  
his leadership of the 1803 rising thus from the recent drama that introduced his death  
the heroic reputation was partly secured by his story, which from the death,  
including his remarkable execution for his part in the rebellion.



DUBLIN, Published by WALTER COX .  
1809.

Figure Four  
Frontispiece from the *Irish Magazine and Monthly Asylum for Neglected Biography*  
1809

Alongside Wolfe Tone and Edward Fitzgerald, one of the foremost figures in the pantheon of United Irish martyrs was Robert Emmet, a position which derived less from his leadership of the 1803 rising, than from the potent drama that surrounded his death. His heroic reputation was partly ensured by his stirring speech from the dock, concluding with his memorable exhortation that his tomb should remain uninscribed, 'until other times, and other men, can do justice to my character; - when my country takes her place among the nations, then and not till then – let my epitaph be written'.<sup>72</sup> Emmet had been sentenced to be hanged and beheaded, and following his execution the body was buried in a plot reserved for paupers behind Newgate prison, although it was reputedly later re-interred elsewhere. The theme of the uninscribed tomb, which inspired multiple nationalist verses, and the search for the final resting place of Emmet, would become key elements in the development of the Emmet legend.<sup>73</sup> An equally important factor in the construction of Emmet's heroic identity was the account of his tragic romance with Sarah Curran. Indeed, Daniel O'Connell claimed that Emmet's memory would have been long forgotten except for the romance attached to his involvement with Curran.<sup>74</sup> The daughter of the celebrated barrister, John Philpot Curran, who successfully defended several United Irishmen during the 1790s, Sarah Curran had first met Emmet in her father's home and they probably began a secret love affair in 1802. When Emmet was arrested in 1803 letters from Sarah were found in his possession and she was further incriminated when Emmet sent her a note from prison begging to destroy their correspondence. Having intercepted this letter the Dublin magistrates, led by Major Henry Sirr, ransacked the Curran home and seized this

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<sup>72</sup> Cited in Elliott, *Robert Emmet*, p. 85.

<sup>73</sup> Elliott, *Robert Emmet*, p. 97.

<sup>74</sup> Harry Sirr, *Sarah Curran's and Robert Emmet's Letters* (Dublin, 1910), p. 16. There was of course another woman closely connected with Emmet's memory, his faithful housekeeper Anne Devlin. In terms of class and religion Devlin presented something of a contrast to Curran, being both Catholic and from the rural lower class. Her loyalty to Emmet under torture, and during her imprisonment in Kilmainham gaol, would earn her a key position in the legend of Emmet. Indeed, Marianne Elliott suggests that by the end of the nineteenth century her tale had largely overtaken Emmet's in nationalist story-telling, a shift that Elliott attributes to the more earthy quality of Devlin, but which may also have something to do with the fact that she was a Catholic. Elliott, *Robert Emmet*, pp. 2-3. R. R. Madden was principally responsible for re-discovering Devlin's role in Emmet's biography, when he found her living in poverty during his researches on the United Irishmen. In his tribute to Devlin he stressed her steadfastness and her humble origins: 'The true nobility of nature displayed by this poor creature of plebeian origin under all her sufferings - the courage exhibited in the face of death, in the midst of torture, by this low-born woman - the fidelity and attachment of this menial servant to a beloved master ... will not be forgotten'. When Devlin died in 1851 Madden organized her burial and erected a gravestone that remembered her as 'the faithful servant of Robert Emmet'. Madden, *The United Irishmen their Lives and Times*, vol. 7, pp. 136, 144.

correspondence. Although Sarah was not charged with any involvement in the 1803 rising, her stern father reacted to the revelation of her relationship with Robert Emmet by effectively expelling her from the family home. In 1805 she married Henry Sturgeon a captain in the British army and accompanied him first to England and later to postings in Malta and Sicily. She died in 1808 shortly after the death of her first child, born prematurely the same year.<sup>75</sup>

As the doomed romance between Emmet and his sweetheart became publicly known, poignant scenes involving Curran were invented and added to the already dramatic details of Emmet's death. One told how she had escaped her family's vigilance to attend Emmet's execution, waving a white handkerchief to catch his attention before falling into a faint. Another story related how she had visited Emmet's grave at dusk. Neither story, as Elliott has concluded, could have been true as Curran was ill at the time of Emmet's death and kept under strict supervision at her family home.<sup>76</sup> Curran's place in Emmet's tragic narrative was further consolidated by Thomas Moore's poem 'She is far from the land' which was included in his hugely successful series of poems set to Irish music, *Irish Melodies*, published in ten numbers between 1808 and 1834.<sup>77</sup> Moore, Ireland's foremost Romantic poet, reworked the sentimental Gaelicism of Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* in poetry and balladry. Indeed, Joep Leersen has speculated that there may have been some rivalry between Owenson and Moore as to who could claim to be the principal player of the national harp.<sup>78</sup> Together, Owenson and Moore played a seminal role in translating the literature and culture of the 'hidden' Gaelic Ireland into the 'imagined community' of the nineteenth-century nation.<sup>79</sup> In the *Irish Melodies* this fusion of Gaelic and English culture was partly achieved by the setting of 'elegant' English verses to the 'wild' music of Edward Bunting's Irish airs.

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<sup>75</sup> On the relationship between Curran and Emmet see Major-General H.T. Macmullen, *The Voice of Sarah Curran: Unpublished Letters Together with the Full Story of her Life Told for the First Time by Major General H. T. MacMullen* (Dublin, 1955); Elliott, *Robert Emmet*, pp. 71-77.

<sup>76</sup> Elliott, *Robert Emmet*, p. 138.

<sup>77</sup> Seamus Deane, 'Thomas Moore', in Seamus Deane (ed.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. 1, p. 1056. On the literary continuities between Moore's poetry and Gaelic literature see Tom Dunne, 'Haunted by history: Irish Romantic writing 1800-1850', in Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (eds), *Romanticism in National Context* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 86-87.

<sup>78</sup> One of Moore's best known poems was 'The Harp that once through Tara's Halls'. Joep Leersen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork, 1996), p. 59.

<sup>79</sup> See Joep Leersen, *Hidden Ireland, Public Sphere* (Dublin, 2002).

Moore's reference to Curran's plaintive song, in 'She is far from this land', also suggests the influence of the Gaelic lamenting tradition:

She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps,  
And lovers are round her sighing;  
But coldly she turns from their gaze, and weeps,  
For her heart in his grave is lying.

She sings the wild songs of her dear native plains,  
Every note which he loved awaking;-  
Ah! little they think, who delight in her strains,  
How the heart of the Minstrel is breaking.<sup>80</sup>

The American writer and conservative romantic, Washington Irving, was inspired by Moore to include a brief portrait of Sarah Curran entitled 'The Broken Heart' in his *Sketch Book* (1819-1820). In his mawkish portrait of Curran, Irving perpetuated the image of a lonely mourner consumed by grief, describing her appearance at a masquerade ball, where she wandered through 'the garish scene' with an 'air of utter abstraction, until she began 'with the capriciousness of a sickly heart, to warble a little plaintive air', which soon 'melted every one into tears'.<sup>81</sup>

Both Moore's poem and Irving's portrait were reprinted in Madden's 'Life of Robert Emmet' and set the tone for Madden's sentimental depiction of Curran, whom he praised as the 'the most amiable and gentle of womankind'.<sup>82</sup> Continuing the theme of the heart-broken Curran mourning her dead lover, Madden composed a poem entitled 'Miss Curran's Lament over the Grave of Robert Emmet', which drew on the apocryphal story of Curran's nocturnal visit to Emmet's grave:

The joy of life lies here,  
Robert Aroon,

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<sup>80</sup> 'She is far from the Land', in *The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore* (London and New York, 1891), p. 219. In the early twentieth century the republican feminist Constance Marcievicz would fulminate against Thomas Moore's chivalric view of Irish womanhood, declaring: 'Tommy Moore ... set Ireland a very low idea of woman to worship. To him woman is merely sex ... Not a companion or a friend, but a beautiful houri holding dominion by her careful manipulation of her sex and her good looks'. Constance Marcievicz, 'The Future of Irishwomen', in Louis Ryan (ed.), *Irish Feminism and the Vote: An Anthology of the Irish Citizen Newspaper, 1912-1920* (Dublin, 1996), p. 170.

<sup>81</sup> 'The Broken Heart', in Washington Irving, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow and Other Stories* (London, 1999), pp. 56, 59.

<sup>82</sup> Madden, *The United Irishmen*, vol. 8, p. 10.

All that my soul held dear,  
Robert Aroon.  
Spouse of my heart, this shrine,  
This long-lost hope of thine,  
Entombs each hope of mine,  
Robert Aroon.

But tears must fall unseen,  
Robert Aroon,  
The turf is not yet green,  
Robert Aroon.  
No stone must bear thy name,  
No lips thy wrongs proclaim,  
This heart must shroud thy fame,  
Robert Aroon.<sup>83</sup>

While the poem's title and its repeated refrain of 'Robert Aroon' indicate the influence of the keening tradition, these verses also point to the limits of the female lament in Irish nationalist discourse. Madden implies that it is the absence of public monuments to the Irish martyrs and the enforced silence with respect to the memory of the United Irishmen that has elevated female grief to such a prominent position in the commemoration process, the proper public commemoration that should be accorded Ireland's heroes being temporarily substituted for the personal, private memory of the grieving woman. As Leersen has noted there are almost no pre-1850 monuments or *lieux de mémoire* embodying a 'national' Irish, anti-Ascendancy consciousness. He observes that the consecration of public spaces belongs to 'monumental history', which involves state-sanctioned public commemoration and is generally the preserve of autonomous nations and elites, a form of memory which Leersen distinguishes from 'community remembrancing'. Whilst early nineteenth-century Ireland saw some moves towards the creation of an oppositional account of Irish history, Leersen argues that this retained structural links with forms of community remembrancing which remain inchoate and informal 'a matter of folklore and local communities rather than of state-sanctioned political life or academic scholarship'. Despite the transition of the 'hidden' Catholic Ireland into the public sphere during the nineteenth-century, these structural links remained:

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<sup>83</sup> R. R. Madden, 'Miss Curran's Lament over the Grave of Robert Emmet', in Madden, *Literary Remains of the United Irishmen*, pp. 250-251. 'Aroon' comes from the Irish Gaelic phrase, 'a rún', meaning 'my dear'.



We can see that this 'folklore' element remains the defining trait as Catholic, nationalist Ireland begins to penetrate into the public media: what is published is Minstrelsy, popular poetry, as in the collections of Hardiman and O'Daly, in a quasi-oral idiom which is perpetuated by the Young Irelanders and the poets around *The Nation*.<sup>84</sup>

This demotic and subaltern pattern of remembrance subscribes to the 'traumatic paradigm of history', which, Leersen argues, 'evinces a different sense of history, one which sees history from the point of view of the losers, the bereaved, the victims'. In its celebration of heroic failures such as Robert Emmet and in their use of balladry and popular poetry, nineteenth-century commemorations of the United Irishmen certainly exhibited the traits of the subaltern 'traumatic' paradigm. This may account for the key role attributed to women in the commemoration process, as it drew on a traditional mode of community remembrancing through the keen or lament, and also focused attention on the bereaved and the victims of history, embodied in the 'violated woman' and the 'grieving widow'.

However, the relationship between Irish nationalists, in particular the Young Ireland movement, and a commemorative mode that celebrates the victim is not an unambivalent one. An obsession with national suffering and loss could too easily lapse into an 'imperial sentimentality' such as that practised by Thomas Moore, aimed at eliciting English sympathy for Irish wrongs. As Moore himself acknowledged, such an articulation of national suffering does not necessarily prompt justice: 'Thy masters themselves as they rivet thy chains,/ Shall pause at the song of their captive, and weep'.<sup>85</sup> While several of Moore's poems evinced a distinctly nationalist agenda and his works on Emmet and Lord Edward Fitzgerald played an important part in preserving the memory of these United Irish heroes, his Whig politics and fondness for the English aristocracy led him to be viewed with suspicion by Young Ireland. Signalling their distaste for Moore's sentimentality, they instructed their correspondents in 1843 to cease imitating the compositions of Moore and demanded a clearer and more direct

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<sup>84</sup> Joep Leersen, 'Monument and Trauma: Varieties of Remembrance', in McBride (ed.), *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, 214-215; and '1798: The Recurrence of Violence and Two Conceptualizations of History', pp. 37-45.

<sup>85</sup> Thomas Moore quoted in Howes, 'Tears and Blood', p. 157.

style from their contributors.<sup>86</sup> In his essay on the history of Ireland Thomas Davis declared his antipathy for the model of Irish history as an unrelenting catalogue of woes which merely confirmed the country's abject position:

Something had to be done to rescue Ireland from the reproach that she was a wailing and ignorant slave ... She has ceased to wail – she is beginning to make up a record of English crime and Irish suffering, in order to explain the past, to justify the present and caution the future. She begins to study the past – not to acquire a beggar's eloquence in petition, but a hero's wrath in strife.<sup>87</sup>

Implicit in Davis' rejection of the depiction of Ireland as a 'wailing slave' is the juxtaposition between a feminine passivity and masculine action, the 'hero's wrath in strife', that echoes William Drennan's dismissal of 'women's cries' in favour of masculine modes of commemoration. Indeed, the *Nation* reprinted 'The Wake of William Orr' in 1843 with a glowing introduction.<sup>88</sup> His attempt to 'remasculinize' nationalist commemoration is reflective of Young Ireland's efforts to reinvigorate the martial element of Irish history, a process that would culminate in the failed 1848 rising. The metaphorical 'silence' that had surrounded the memory of 1798 in the opening decades of the nineteenth century had been filled by the weeping of women. By the 1840s Young Ireland was beginning to revise this inchoate form of remembrancing in favour of a more open celebration of the United Irish martyrs.

#### IV

As Seán Ryder argues, because of the continuing controversy surrounding the legacy of 1798 Irish nationalists who were sympathetic to the rebellion were faced with the dilemma of celebrating the memory of 1798 without necessarily endorsing the aims or revolutionary methods of the United Irishmen. One of the strategies developed by those

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<sup>86</sup> *Nation*, 8 April 1843. In his historical memoir of the Young Ireland movement Charles Gavan Duffy further elucidated the difference between Thomas Moore and the more masculine rhetoric of the *Nation*: 'His melodies dating from the unsuccessful insurrection of '98 and the Union were the wail of a lost cause, while the songs of *The Nation* vibrated with the virile and passionate hopes of a new generation'. Charles Gavan Duffy quoted in Leersen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, p. 148.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas Davis 'The History of Ireland', in C. P. Meehan (ed.), *Literary and Historical Essays* (Dublin, 1883), p. 28.

<sup>88</sup> *Nation*, 1 April 1843.

who wished to register sympathy for the United Irishmen without being accused of sedition was to 'de-republicanize' and 'de-sectarianize' the rebellion. This involved the elaboration of a form of 'heroic memory' that 'redefined the leaders of the rebellion as embodiments of moral virtue and culturally specific nationalism'.<sup>89</sup> Ryder's analysis is influenced by David Lloyd's account of national-subject formation in bourgeois-nationalist discourse. According to Lloyd, Irish romantic nationalism, in its quest for a unity that could transcend the cultural, linguistic and sectarian divisions within Irish society, posited an historical unity based on the heroic lineage of Irish martyrs and an identification between the individual martyr and the spirit of the nation. Figures such as Robert Emmet thus became a symbol, an 'ideal paradigm of the individual's relation to the nation'.<sup>90</sup> This quest for unity, combined with the fraught legacy of 1798, involved the marginalization of the ideological aspects of the United Irishmen and a greater emphasis on their personal morality and individual virtue. As Ryder comments: 'There was little discussion in the *Nation* of the political doctrine of Tone's republicanism, but much about his personal character and courage'.<sup>91</sup>

This emphasis on the individual hero manifested itself in the publication of several biographies of the key United Irish martyrs during the first half of the nineteenth century, including Thomas Moore's *Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* (1831) and the 1836 chapbook *The Life, Trial and Conversations of Robert Emmet*. The 'Library of Ireland' series had also intended to publish Thomas Davis's *Life of Tone* and Thomas Devin Reilly's *Biographies of the United Irishmen*, however neither of these were ever completed. The culmination of these efforts was R. R. Madden's multi-volume *The United Irishmen their Lives and Times*, which was largely structured around biographies of the United Irish leaders. The foregrounding of the United Irishmen's personal characters over their political beliefs entailed a much greater focus on their personal relationships as sites in which their noble qualities could be demonstrated, consequently Irish nationalist memoirs paid a great deal of attention to the relationships between the United Irishmen and their wives and sweethearts. This is

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<sup>89</sup> Ryder, 'Speaking of '98', p. 57.

<sup>90</sup> David Lloyd, 'The Spirit of the Nation', in Claire Connolly (ed.), *Theorizing Ireland* (Basingstoke, 2003), p. 167.

<sup>91</sup> Ryder, 'Speaking of '98', p. 66.

especially the case in Madden's history of the movement, in which he devoted individual chapters specifically to Sarah Curran, Matilda Tone and Pamela Fitzgerald.

Roy Foster's two related observations regarding the writing of Irish history: its tendency to use the individual history as a national microcosm and the use of narrative and literary modes in telling the 'Irish story', are both applicable to Madden's history of the United Irishmen.<sup>92</sup> The permeable boundaries between fiction and history had earlier been highlighted by the 1825 publication in the *Dublin and London Magazine* of a novelized account of Emmet's life by Michael James Whitty. Lengthy extracts from this were later published in *The Life, Trial and Conversations of Robert Emmet* (1831), and it heavily influenced Madden's account.<sup>93</sup> According to Marianne Elliott, Madden's treatment of Robert Emmet 'reads like a work of bad fiction', and certainly the influence of Victorian melodrama is evident in his construction of Emmet's narrative, in which Emmet is figured as the noble hero, Sarah Curran the pure object of his devotion, and Major Sirr as the arch villain.<sup>94</sup> The contrast between Emmet's virtues and those of his captor Sirr were vividly delineated in Madden's account of Major Sirr's raid upon Sarah Curran's home. His indignation was raised to an even greater pitch by the fact that Sirr, 'a man of brute force, of brute courage, of brutal mind and of brutal instincts' had attempted to comfort Curran, 'the poor-heart sick girl', during the raid. 'Let us imagine', thundered Madden, 'the feelings of one in such circumstances as hers, compelled to endure not only the horror of his presence, but the revolting proffer of his care and his protestations of sympathy'.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> See Roy Foster, 'Storylines: Narratives and Nationality in Nineteenth-Century Ireland', in Geoff Cubitt (ed.), *Imagining Nations* (Manchester, 1998), p. 39; and Roy Foster, 'Introduction', *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making it up in Ireland* (London, 2001), p. xiv.

<sup>93</sup> See *The Life, Trial and Conversations of Robert Emmet, Esq. Leader of the Irish Insurrection of 1803* (Manchester, 1836); and Elliott, *Robert Emmet*, pp. 128-131, 134.

<sup>94</sup> Elliott, *Robert Emmet*, p. 133. Patrick Joyce has also noted the extensive use of melodrama in nineteenth-century British political discourse. As Joyce comments it dealt in a 'polarised world of moral absolutes, in which reality was rendered as a Manichean struggle of good and evil in their countless expressions'. Patrick Joyce, *Politics and the People: A Study in Political Culture, c. 1815-1867* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 177. Gary Owens has explored the use of melodrama in an Irish context in reports on the executions of the Manchester martyrs in 1867. Gary Owens, 'Constructing the Martyrs: The Manchester Executions and the Nationalist Imagination', in Lawrence W. McBride (ed.), *Images, Icons and the Irish Nationalist Imagination* (Dublin, 1999), p. 24.

<sup>95</sup> Madden, *The United Irishmen their Lives and Times*, vol. 7, p. 19. Madden's outrage at the violation of the domestic realm is also evident in his account of the infiltration of the Sheares' family by the government informer, Captain John Waneferd Armstrong. Armstrong, pretending to be a United Irishman, had befriended the Henry and John Sheares, and been entertained by the family, before securing

As the elevation of Emmet to the status of heroic martyr and symbolic signifier of the Irish national soul required to a certain extent his depoliticization, a similar process occurred in accounts of Sarah Curran's relationship with militant republicanism. While the letters between Emmet and Curran had ultimately not been used in his prosecution, Major Sirr maintained that he had destroyed a substantial correspondence between the couple in order not to embarrass the Curran family. According to a note found amongst the Sirr papers, and cited by Madden, 'never was there such a correspondence between lovers – projects of domestic peace were all subordinated to those of public conflict'. The author of the note claimed that Curran had entered entirely into Emmet's plans for rebellion and had gloated at 'the prospect of seeing her father hung from a tree in his own orchard'.<sup>96</sup> These claims may not have been unfounded. Henry Sirr's grandson later quoted a letter from the British Home Secretary to Castlereagh, which referred to the correspondence between Emmet and Curran, commenting 'Mademoiselle seems a true pupil of Mary Wollstonecraft'.<sup>97</sup> Madden, however, vehemently repudiated these suggestions writing:

A man of Emmet's character, who loved the name of honour more than he feared death, and in his sentiments with respect to the destiny and the noble qualities of women, was true and loyal in his chivalry, as ever a knight of old; whose purity of life and morals, inflexibility of principles and purpose have never been denied; whose mind, moreover, was highly cultivated ... *was not likely to fix his attentions lightly or on one unworthy of them.*<sup>98</sup>

In order for Curran to function as a symbolic representation of the Irish nation, and as an appropriate recipient of Emmet's devotion it was thus necessary for her to be abstracted from the 'masculine' world of revolutionary politics. Instead she became the epitome of devoted and self-sacrificing womanhood. 'I know not', wrote Madden, 'where there is to be found a more touching and striking example of devoted fondness,

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their convictions and executions: 'he dined with them, sat in the company of their aged mother and affectionate sister, enjoyed the society of the accomplished wife of one of them, caressed his infant children; and on another occasion ... was entertained with music, the wife of the unfortunate man, whose children he was to leave in a few days fatherless, playing on the harp for his entertainment! These things are almost too horrible to reflect on'. Madden, *The United Irishmen their Lives and Times*, vol. 9, p. 222.

<sup>96</sup> Madden, *The United Irishmen their Lives and Times*, vol. 8, p. 24.

<sup>97</sup> Harry Sirr, *Sarah Curran's and Robert Emmet's Letters* (Dublin, 1910), p. 10.

<sup>98</sup> Madden, *The United Irishmen their Lives and Times*, vol. 7, pp. 27-28. My italics.

of devoted fidelity to the object of affection ... than in the instance of the exercise of the faith, fortitude, patience and self-renunciation practically manifested by Sarah Curran'.<sup>99</sup> At the same time, Emmet's image was subjected to a similar process of depoliticization and romanticization, as he was transformed from a revolutionary republican and leader of a disastrous rebellion, into a noble and chivalric 'knight of old'.

In the case of Pamela Fitzgerald, the process of depoliticizing her image was more difficult given her high-profile connection with the French Revolution. As noted in chapter two, Pamela had been the object of suspicion in elite circles during the 1790s and according to Lady Sarah Napier she was also very unpopular amongst the English 'common people', whom, she wrote, had 'imbibed prejudices against her ... to a degree that is quite horrible'.<sup>100</sup> This reputation, combined with her mysterious origins, shaped loyalist depictions of her as a violent republican. Commenting on Lord Edward Fitzgerald's marriage to Pamela, Richard Musgrave wrote that Pamela had 'nothing to recommend her to him, but the extravagance and malignity of her republican principles'.<sup>101</sup> In Irish nationalist accounts of Pamela her French republican connections were downplayed and she was presented as a wholehearted convert to the Irish nationalist cause. The *Irish Magazine* asserted that 'this excellent lady imbibed all the attachment for Ireland which predominated in the breast of her husband and with an equal passion and solicitude' and insisted that she was universally popular 'the delight of every rank'.<sup>102</sup> Charles Hamilton Teeling, an intimate of the Fitzgeralds, similarly presented Pamela as a devoted Irish patriot. According to Teeling, 'Ireland was her constant theme, and Edward's glory the darling object of her ambition', though he was keen to stress that this enthusiasm did not detract from her femininity, noting that 'the softer feelings of her sex would sometimes betray the anxiety with which she anticipated the approaching contest'.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Madden, *The United Irishmen their Lives and Times*, vol. 8, p. 10.

<sup>100</sup> Lady Sarah Napier to the Duke of Richmond (n. d.) quoted in Madden, *The United Irishmen*, vol. 5, p. 63.

<sup>101</sup> Musgrave, *Memoirs of the Different Rebellions*, p. 300.

<sup>102</sup> 'Memoirs of the late Lord Edward Fitzgerald' in *Irish Magazine*, July 1808, p. 320.

<sup>103</sup> Teeling, *History of the Irish Rebellion of 1798*, p. 82. As noted in chapter two, Pamela Fitzgerald had played an important role in the secret correspondence network that had facilitated the United Irishmen's negotiations with the French. However, in his biography of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, Madden rejected the idea of a politically engaged Pamela. Drawing on Madame de Genlis' memoirs he cited her account of an interview with Pamela, in which she had declared that she never discussed political affairs with her

Ignoring Pamela's role as a political actor United Irish historians were more likely to focus on her position as an object of nationalist sympathy, enacting the part of the grieving widow. Teeling waxed sentimental on the sight of Pamela immediately following Edward's death: 'the lovely mourner wrapt in sable attire; deserted, yet not alone; for the tender pledge of conjugal affection clings to a bosom now insensible to all but sorrow'.<sup>104</sup> The image of Pamela as a 'lovely mourner' was given visual expression in an engraving that was reproduced as a frontispiece to Madden's memoir of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, and which depicted her as a melancholic figure, her head covered, clasping her two children to her (figure five).

However, the issue of Pamela's remarriage in Hamburg to the American consul Mr Pitcairn less than two years after her husband's death posed a problem for those who wished to represent her as an ambulatory mausoleum to her husband's memory. As mentioned above, Sarah Curran had similarly married not long after the death of Robert Emmet, and this second marriage was largely glossed over in nationalist accounts or depicted as blighted by Curran's continued attachment to the memory of her dead lover, despite the fact that Curran's letters from this period show it to have been an affectionate and relatively happy union.<sup>105</sup>

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husband. Madden had previously questioned the reliability of Madame de Genlis' memoirs, but he accepted this account despite the fact that he had testimony from the daughter of William James MacNeven, which recalled both Pamela and Lucy Fitzgerald enthusiastically greeting the news that the United Irishmen had secured French assistance. Madden, *The United Irishmen their Lives and Times*, vol. 5, p. 128; and TCD, Dublin, Madden papers, 873/526, 'Biographical Memoir of Dr W. J. MacNeven'.

<sup>104</sup> Teeling, *History of the Irish Rebellion of 1798*, p. 83.

<sup>105</sup> See Curran's letters to Anne and Bessie Penrose between 1806 and 1808. NLI, Dublin, Sarah Curran papers, 8326(1).



**Figure Five**

*Lady Pamela Fitzgerald and her Children*

From an engraving by Scriven after the portrait by George Romney (undated)



In Madden's memoir Pamela's unsuccessful remarriage to Pitcairn is viewed as a significant failing on Pamela's part. 'In the unhappy circumstances in which Pamela found herself placed in Hamburg', he wrote, 'she forgot her husband's memory'.<sup>106</sup> For Madden this was a severe criticism. Throughout his history of the United Irishmen he had paid tribute to those women who had fulfilled their role as custodians of their husband's memory. Margaret Bond was praised for not forgetting her 'duty to her husband's memory' by erecting a monument to him in Church street. Lord Edward Fitzgerald's daughter, Lady Guy Campbell, similarly received Madden's approbation for demonstrating 'her filial love and reverence for her father's memory' by having her father's remains re-interred in the Leinster family vault in Kildare.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, as Madden acknowledged it was from the female relatives of the United Irishmen such as Mary Anne McCracken and Jane MacNeven that he had gathered much of the information for his history:

With few exceptions, the materials collected for the memoirs of the leaders of the United Irishmen would in all probability have perished, had they not fallen into the hands of women, who clung to the memories of their departed friends with feelings of attachment commensurate with the calamities which had overtaken the objects of their affection or regard. It would seem that in man's adversity, when his fellow-men fall away from his sinking fortunes, or detach their thoughts from his maltreated memory, there is a steadfastness in the nature of woman's love, a fidelity in her friendship, which gives to the misfortunes of her kindred a new claim to her solicitude for everything that concerns their interests or their fame.<sup>108</sup>

As detailed in chapters five and six, the association between women, memory and tradition had been cultivated by Irish women writers from Charlotte Brooke to Sydney Owenson, through the figure of the feminized bard. Although this enabled women to construct an alternative, less exclusionary form of national identity, which privileged culture and tradition above politics and political violence, as culture was re-subordinated to politics in nineteenth-century Irish nationalism a gulf developed between men's and women's relationships to the nation's past and future. The gendering of national memory was not restricted to Ireland. John Gillis has identified a

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<sup>106</sup> Madden, *The United Irishmen*, vol. 5, p. 131.

<sup>107</sup> Madden, *The United Irishmen*, vol. 6, p. 120, vol. 5, p. 152.

<sup>108</sup> Madden, *The United Irishmen*, vol. 6, p. 140.

similar trend in nineteenth-century Europe and America towards regarding women as the keepers and embodiments of memory, which he attributes to the evolution of nineteenth-century individualism, whereby men, designated as the carriers of progress, felt much further removed from the past than women.<sup>109</sup> This analysis is also reflected in Anne McClintock's discussion of the gender dichotomy in nineteenth-century nationalist discourses between women, who are regarded as the authentic and atavistic embodiments of national tradition and men, who are associated with nationalism's revolutionary principle of discontinuity.<sup>110</sup> The gendering of memory is emblematic of the shift from the United Irishmen's original vision of progressive national development that could incorporate both men and women, towards the concept of the nation as an organic, familial community. Whereas the former concept allowed for the possibility that gender relationships, like other social relationships, might evolve and change, the latter tended towards more essentialist categories of identity, women's essential nature fixing them as responsible for both the nation's biological reproduction, and the preservation and transmission of national memory.

Although romantic nationalism often figured women as rather passive repositories of memory, either weeping over their dead lovers, or conserving relics associated with their heroic male relatives, an alternative, and perhaps more actively politicized model of widowhood was available in the form of the republican widow. Matilda Tone was, as Nancy Curtin observes, the exemplar of republican widowhood. Curtin identifies this role as involving two goals, the raising of her son in his father's image and the preservation and shaping of her husband's memory.<sup>111</sup> In contrast to both Sarah Curran and Pamela Fitzgerald, Matilda continued to mix in republican and United Irish circles,

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<sup>109</sup> Gillis, 'Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship', p. 10. On the evolution of women's role as chief mourners within the family during the nineteenth century see John R. Gillis, *A World of their own Making. Myth Ritual and the Quest for Family Values* (New York, 1996), pp. 214-215.

<sup>110</sup> Anne McClintock, "'No Longer in a Future Heaven': Gender, Race and Nationalism' in Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat (eds), *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Post-colonial Perspectives* (Minnesota, 1997), p. 92.

<sup>111</sup> Nancy Curtin, 'Matilda Tone and Virtuous Republican Femininity', p. 41. Indeed, her very name, bestowed upon her by her husband and taken from John Home's 1757 tragedy *Douglas*, seems to foreshadow her subsequent fate as well as suggesting a model for the United Irishmen's vision of the republican relict. This successful but controversial Scottish play, in which Tone had acted opposite his mistress Elizabeth Martin prior to his marriage, centres on the figure of Matilda, Lady Randolph, who, following her husband's death, has contracted a loveless marriage to Lord Randolph, but remains constant to her first husband's memory.

in both Paris and New York following her husband's death. This continued contact with French and American republicanism may be understood as having influenced her performance of widowhood. In a speech by Lucien Buonaparte to the Council of Five Hundred on behalf of the Tone family, he compared Matilda to those Spartan women who 'on the return of their countrymen from battle, when with anxious looks, they ran over the ranks, and missed amongst them their sons, their husbands, and their brothers, exclaimed: "He died for his country; he died for the republic"'.<sup>112</sup> This celebration of Matilda Tone's willing sacrifice of her husband for the benefit of the republic provides a rather different version of widowhood to that elaborated by Irish romantic nationalists with their focus on the personal grief of figures such as Sarah Curran. A similarly vigorous version of republican widowhood was elaborated by the Hibernian Provident Society on the occasion of Matilda's visit to New York in 1807, where they presented Matilda with a medallion inscribed 'to the worthy relict of the late Illustrious Patriot Gen. Theobald Wolfe Tone', depicting Cato 'contemplating the immortality of the soul'. They also presented her sixteen year old son, William with a sword, declaring their 'lively hope that it may one day in his hand, avenge the wrongs of his country'.<sup>113</sup>

This emphatically martial tribute to Matilda and her son reflected the more politicized atmosphere of the Irish immigrant community in the United States, who, adopting the rhetoric of American republicanism, were able to espouse a revolutionary program that openly heroicized the United Irishmen in a way that was impossible to do in Ireland.<sup>114</sup> Matilda's continued contact with United Irish exiles in America and France encouraged her to assume the role of the republican widow, but as Curtin observes this was a role to which Matilda both conformed and resisted. Matilda's most significant contribution to the preservation of her husband's memory was the publication of Wolfe Tone's journals in 1826. Matilda had long contemplated the publication of these memoirs, although in 1814 she wrote to her sister that they would not be published until 'they become purely

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<sup>112</sup> 'Motion submitted by the president, Lucien Buonaparte, for the relief of the widow and children of Theobald Wolfe Tone', in Theobald Wolfe Tone, *The Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone. Memoirs, Journals and Political Writings, Compiled and Arranged by William T. W. Tone, 1826*, Thomas Bartlett (ed.) (Dublin, 1998), appendix A, p. 895.

<sup>113</sup> TCD, Dublin, Madden papers, 873/35. 'Address presented to the widow of T. W. Tone and sword to her son by the Hibernian Provident Society in New York, October 1807'.

<sup>114</sup> Ryder, 'Speaking of '98', p. 58.

historical, till the world is calm and people have time to feel'.<sup>115</sup> The decision to publish in 1826 was most likely prompted by the unauthorized publication of extracts from the memoirs in the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1824. Matilda may have also deferred publication out of sensitivity to her second husband, who died the same year.<sup>116</sup> While William Tone was credited as editor of the memoirs it is widely recognized that Matilda worked alongside her son in preparing the manuscripts for publication, excising Tone's references to his affairs with women, as well as unflattering comments he had made about the United States.<sup>117</sup> The publication of the memoirs certainly had a substantial influence in securing Tone's posthumous reputation and was particularly influential with Thomas Davis and the Young Irelanders, who were responsible for initiating the cult of Tone in the 1840s.<sup>118</sup> Although Davis never completed his biography of Tone he had drafted a dedication to Matilda Tone in which he paid tribute her 'Roman firmness' and judged her 'the only fit guardian of this memoir of him who lies in Bodenstown'.<sup>119</sup> Upon learning of the unofficial pilgrimages to Wolfe Tone's unmarked grave in Bodenstown, Matilda Tone made an impassioned plea for a headstone to be erected, which was duly carried out by the Young Irelanders in 1844.<sup>120</sup>

Matilda's decision to enter her son William on a military career partly fulfilled Irish republicans' desire to see him follow in his father's footsteps and Matilda herself presented this decision as a conscious tribute to his father: 'I was certain the army would have been his father's choice for him, and I tore the last weakness from my heart, and determined he should enter it as became his father's son.'<sup>121</sup> However, Matilda came into conflict with United Irish exiles in France as a result of her determination to place her son William in the Imperial Cavalry School at St. Germain rather than in the Irish Legion established by Napoleon in 1804. The United Irish exiles protested against this decision to General Henry Clarke, the French official who had been responsible for negotiations with the United Irishmen prior to the rebellion, falsely claiming that they

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<sup>115</sup> Quoted in Thomas Bartlett 'Introduction', *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, p. xli.

<sup>116</sup> Bartlett 'Introduction', *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, p. xli; and Nancy Curtin, 'Matilda Tone and Virtuous Republican Femininity', p. 43.

<sup>117</sup> Bartlett 'Introduction', *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, p. xli-xliv.

<sup>118</sup> Marianne Elliott, *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence* (New Haven and London, 1989), p. 413.

<sup>119</sup> TCD, Dublin, Madden Papers, 873/43. Dedication to Matilda Tone by Thomas Davis

<sup>120</sup> Elliott, *Wolfe Tone*, p. 412.

<sup>121</sup> Matilda Tone 'Mrs. Tone's Interview with Napoleon' in Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, appendix B, p. 908.

had supported Matilda since Tone's death. Infuriated by this, and adamant that her son's military career would be blighted if he joined this ragged group of emigrant soldiers she forcefully argued with Clarke that on this issue her personal concern for her families' well being overrode her presumed duty to the Irish cause. 'Good God!', she wrote to William Sampson, 'do the Irish think that because Tone volunteered in their service and shed his best blood in their cause and left his family destitute in a foreign country that his posterity are to be their slaves.'<sup>122</sup> Although Matilda's refusal to sacrifice her son to the Irish republican cause may have conformed to the republican suspicion that women tended to place personal and familial attachments before the public good, she continued to closely follow and support Irish nationalist endeavours. In 1829 'The Friends of Ireland' association based in New York, proposed a resolution of thanks to Matilda Tone 'for her liberal donation toward the Irish Catholic rent; and ... her patriotic virtue so worthy of the widow of one of Ireland's best sons'.<sup>123</sup> The long-standing correspondence between Matilda and Eliza Fletcher, the widow of the Scottish reformer Archibald Fletcher, whom Matilda had met in Edinburgh in 1816, also suggests Matilda's continued interest in international radical and independence movements. In their letters they discussed the progress of liberation movements in South America, Poland and Greece, and welcomed the European revolutions of 1848, which they related back to their own experiences of radical politics in the 1790s.<sup>124</sup>

In assuming a more politically engaged interpretation of widowhood Matilda had to balance between her conscientious preservation of Wolfe Tone's reputation and a perhaps more stifling role as a living mausoleum to her dead husband's memory. An anonymous account of a visit to the Tones in Paris published in the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1825 depicted Matilda, like Sarah Curran, as an eternal mourner, her home a shrine to her dead husband and children. The author also suggested that Matilda had

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<sup>122</sup> Matilda Tone to William Sampson quoted in Marianne Elliott, *Wolfe Tone*, p. 406.

<sup>123</sup> This was a contribution towards Daniel O'Connell's campaign for Catholic emancipation. Quoted in Luke Gibbons, 'Republicanism and Radical Memory: the O'Conors, O'Carolan and the United Irishmen', in Jim Smyth (ed.), *Revolution, Counter-Revolution and Union: Ireland in the 1790s* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 211.

<sup>124</sup> Jane Rendall, "'Friends of Liberty & Virtue': Women Radicals and Transatlantic Correspondence 1780-1848', in Caroline Bland and Maire Cross (eds), *Gender and Politics in the Age of Letter Writing, 1750-2000* (Aldershot, 2004).

been reluctant to remarry thinking it due to 'the memory of her husband that she should bear no other name'. Relating a visit to Matilda on the eve of her marriage he wrote:

She happened to be alone, was unusually sad, and for the first time that I had seen her, dressed in white. I felt slightly shocked at the instant by the transition, and my eye passed involuntarily to the portrait of Tone, which hung immediately before her. She rose and retired, in silence, and in tears.<sup>125</sup>

According to Curtin it was this article's depiction of Matilda's 'dazzling social life' in Paris that prompted her to publish the *Life* the following year, as she felt that such allusions to her frivolity tarnished both her and Tone's reputation.<sup>126</sup> However, in a statement appended to the 1826 edition of the *Life*, Matilda declared that it was this portrait of her prior to her second marriage that had offended her the most. While she did not deny that the meeting had taken place, she challenged the sentimental gloss which had been put on the encounter, dismissing it as 'a hackneyed and commonplace novel scene'.<sup>127</sup> She contended that she did not own a white dress, had never noticed where the gentleman's eyes had glanced and had certainly not left the room in tears, and she protested strongly at this attempt to recast the details of her life into a sentimental fiction:

They have been furbished up with alterations, additions, and embellishments, so as to form a sort of dramatic narrative, amusing to read, but where times are confounded, and truth and fable strangely jumbled together. In a historical novel or tragedy, this license is permitted or taken, but the author generally apologises for it.<sup>128</sup>

Unlike Sarah Curran, whose transformation into a tragic heroine was effected posthumously, Matilda was able to resist these efforts to present her as a sorrowing and passive figure. Her refutation suggests an astute recognition of how the blurring of the boundaries between literature, myth and history acted to elide the distinction between symbolic and real womanhood. Despite Matilda Tone's vigorous rejection of this

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<sup>125</sup> *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, 13 (1825), p. 271.

<sup>126</sup> Curtin, 'Matilda Tone and Virtuous Republican Femininity', p. 43.

<sup>127</sup> Matilda Tone, 'Mrs Tone's Interview with Napoleon', in Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, appendix B, p. 924.

<sup>128</sup> Tone, 'Mrs Tone's Interview with Napoleon', pp. 924-925.

portrait it was reprinted by Madden in his memoir of Wolfe Tone.<sup>129</sup> This disregard for Matilda's version of events combined with Madden's failure to visit her during his researches amongst the United Irish émigré community in New York, probably influenced her response to Madden's history which she described as 'feeble but honest, slovenly written and printed'.<sup>130</sup> Yet she also welcomed this renewed interest in the United Irishmen writing to her daughter-in-law in 1842, 'I think this little revival is good for us of '98, for we were slipping a little into the background'.<sup>131</sup> In a letter to the *New York Truth-Teller* published in 1842 Matilda publicly corrected what she felt were inaccuracies in Madden's account of her husband's role in the United Irish movement, which she asserted might have been avoided had Madden consulted with her.<sup>132</sup> In this she proved herself ready, if provoked, to invoke her status as the chief-mourner for Tone and to present herself as his 'heart-broken' widow:

I am told that Doctor Madden was twice to New York in search of documents for his history. I wonder he did not apply to me. I never heard of him till I saw his book advertised – perhaps he was ignorant of my existence, for I live in complete retirement, and to use Carolan's words – "Lonely and desolate I mourn the dead" – I am ashamed of this rambling and diffuse letter, but here under the weight of seventy-three years and a broken heart, I cannot make it better, else I would write it over again.<sup>133</sup>

## V

As the previous section argued women played a vital role in the construction of their husband's heroic identities, either as characters in their tragic dramas or, as in the case of Matilda Tone, in a more active fashion as the custodians of their husband's memory. However, the identification of the ideal national subject with the figure of the male martyr clearly complicates the issue of women's position as national subjects in their own right. As Seán Ryder argues in reference to Young Ireland nationalism, the issue

<sup>129</sup> Madden, *The United Irishmen*, vol. 3, pp. 252-254.

<sup>130</sup> Matilda Tone to Catherine Anne Tone, December 1842, quoted in Elliott, *Wolfe Tone*, p. 413.

<sup>131</sup> Matilda Tone to Catherine Anne Tone, December 1842, quoted in Elliott, *Wolfe Tone*, p. 413.

<sup>132</sup> As J. J. St Mark notes, Madden's decision not to visit Matilda Tone during his visit to Washington in 1834-1835 is puzzling, as Matilda resided nearby in Georgetown, and she would have been the source of valuable information. J. J. St. Mark, 'Matilda and William Tone in New York and Washington after 1798', *Éire/Ireland*, 22 (1987), p. 9.

<sup>133</sup> Matilda Tone October 1842, reprinted in the *Nation*, 17 December 1842.

of gender difference threatened to undermine the singular, transcendent identity of the national subject, as gender difference cut across national difference: ‘... the national subject posited by the rhetoric of Young Ireland is almost without exception a *mule* subject, not the “genderless” “transcendent” Irish person which its own generalizing logic would imply’.<sup>134</sup> This inherent contradiction was partially resolved through the elevation of United Irish widows from adjuncts in the construction of men’s heroic identity to the position of exemplary figures, expressive of an ideal female national-subjectivity. In ‘The *Nation’s* Valentine. To the Ladies of Ireland’, a poem by the Young Irelander Richard D’Alton, Sarah Curran is invoked as a model to be emulated by Irish women:

Unsullied and soft as the snow’s infant winglets  
Is the bosom of her who is muse of our song,  
And her melting eyes shine through dark clouds of rich ringlets,  
With a soul that to Emmet’s first love might belong  
... not hers is the wish to behold her adorer  
Forget his land’s wrongs in the light of her eyes.<sup>135</sup>

D’Alton proceeds to urge the ‘daughters of Erin’ to follow the example of Curran and ‘smile but on him who braves danger and toil’.

Between April and July 1848 the *Nation* published a series of articles on Matilda Tone under the title ‘Illustrious Irishwomen’, which the author stated was motivated by a desire ‘to place before our countrywomen a mirror, in which they will see their true duties in the struggle for which Ireland is now preparing’. The account of Matilda Tone’s life, largely taken from Wolfe Tone’s memoirs, stressed her self-sacrifice and fortitude during her various trials. While the author referred to some who believed Matilda Tone’s abilities to have been ‘superior to those of her husband’ he was keen to stress that her achievements were consistent with her femininity:

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<sup>134</sup> Ryder, ‘Gender and the Discourse of “Young Ireland” Nationalism’, p. 211. Thomas Davis’ poem ‘Tone’s Grave’, may be understood as an effort to resolve this tension, as he describes the character of Wolfe Tone as one which combined masculine rationality with female emotion: ‘For in him the heart of a woman combined/ With a heroic life, and a governing mind’. Thomas Davis, ‘Tone’s Grave’, in Thomas Davis, *The Poems of Thomas Davis. Now First Collected. With Notes and Historical Illustrations* (Dublin, 1846), p. 4.

<sup>135</sup> *Nation*, 11 February 1843.



Heroism of this passive order, which exhibits itself, as in Mrs Tone's life, by unshaken constancy, proud uncomplaining endurance in a holy cause, and cheerful encouragement to her husband to adhere to it, does not so powerfully strike the imagination, or challenge the admiration of the world as the deeds of a Jeanne d'Arc or a Charlotte Corday. These, are however, the only forms which the heroic can take in the great mass of women.

Just as Theobald Wolfe Tone had become for Young Ireland an heroic embodiment of the spirit of the Irish nation, Matilda was presented to Irishwomen as encapsulating the more passive, self-sacrificing heroism which the nation demanded from them:

Women of Ireland! has this antique virtue of patriotism vanished from amongst you,... Your hearts beat high when history or fiction places before you a mother or a wife whose courage and virtue, elevating her above all petty thoughts of worldly prudence, presses eagerly forward to buckle on the sword of the son or husband whose country calls on him to save her.. Do you never think that you also have a country, and that with you mainly rests her future destiny? The moment that to see Ireland free shall become in the hearts of Irishwomen a passionate longing ... Ireland will burst her fetters.<sup>136</sup>

This account of Matilda's virtues clearly drew on republican rhetoric and was probably prompted by the looming prospect of a Young Ireland revolution. By 1848 then, both Matilda Tone and Sarah Curran were securely established within the Irish nationalist tradition as models of female national expression, a template which left limited scope for women's involvement within the nationalist movement, allowing them to act as the inspiration for masculine action or as self-sacrificing wives and mothers.

In other ways the roles attributed to women in the commemoration of the United Irishmen between 1798 and 1848 shaped gender roles in subsequent commemorative processes. Gary Owen has noted the use of women's grief to political ends in the mass funeral processions that were staged throughout Ireland following the execution of the Manchester martyrs in 1867. Women featured prominently in these funeral processions, their presence heightening the emotional intensity of the events. Nationalist accounts of one of the martyrs, William Allen, who had been engaged to be married, drew implicit

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<sup>136</sup> *Nation*, 22 April 1848 and 17 June 1848.

parallels with the romantic tragedy of Sarah Curran and Robert Emmet.<sup>137</sup> The intimate connection between women, death and memory was given further material expression in the memorials to the United Irishmen and nationalist martyrs that proliferated in the second half of the nineteenth century culminating in a veritable orgy of monument building in 1898, many of which featured female figures of Erin dressed in mourning.<sup>138</sup> In 1897 the nationalist literary journal edited by Alice Milligan, the *Shan Van Vocht*, printed an 'Appeal to women of Ireland' reporting on the establishment of an organization 'in which the women of Ireland will unite to do their part in honouring the martyrs of '98'. The principal functions of the organization according to the notice would be: 'the care and decoration of graves, the collecting of memorials of '98 and the publications of records'.<sup>139</sup> The designation of women as chief mourners and guardians of memory, which became established during the first half of the nineteenth century, thus continued to influence women's role in nationalist commemoration half a century later.

As argued here, the marginalization of women's role as active participants in 1798 was partly determined by an anti-Jacobin model of the relationship between gender and revolution, which constructed a polarity between the feminine figure of 'beauty in distress' and the regressive savagery of female revolutionaries. In response to loyalist allegations of United Irish brutality Irish nationalist historians would continue to protest the inherent gallantry of the United Irishmen, a response that would feed into elaborations of Irish chivalric masculinity in the nineteenth century. While this chivalric ethos demonstrated the erotic aspect of national-subjectivity, an alternative structure of national feeling was also presented by nineteenth-century nationalists, in the form of grief for the nation's fallen heroes. In contrast to neo-classical models that privileged stoic self-command above female grief, the sublimation of a vernacular keening tradition into nationalist commemorations of 1798 foregrounded the emotive power of

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<sup>137</sup> Echoing earlier representations of Curran, one correspondent related how Allen's sweetheart, Mary Hickey, since his death 'with a wounded heart, wanders almost friendless upon the earth'. Owens, 'The Manchester Executions', pp. 28-31. The Curran-Emmet relationship may also have inspired Joseph Mary Plunkett, one of the leaders of the 1916 Easter rising to marry his sweetheart Grace Gifford in Kilmainham gaol on the eve of his execution. Innes, *Woman and Nation*, p. 73.

<sup>138</sup> Orlaith Mannion, "'Silent but Eloquent Reminders": The Nationalist Monuments in Cork and Skibereen', in Geary (ed.), *Rebellion and Remembrance in Modern Ireland*, pp. 186-187.

<sup>139</sup> Virginia Crossman, 'The Shan Van Vocht: Women, Republicanism, and the Commemoration of the 1798 Rebellion', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 22 (1998), pp. 133-134.

female tears. This in turn determined the representation of those women associated with the triumvirate of United Irish heroes, Sarah Curran, Pamela Fitzgerald and Matilda Tone, as symbolic figures of mourning, although in the case of Matilda Tone there is evidence of some resistance to this passive model in favour of a more active role as custodian of her husband's memory. While the identification of women as the keepers and embodiments of memory may be understood as an extension of the bardic role elaborated by Charlotte Brooke and Sydney Owenson, this gendering of national memory would also limit the means through which women could contribute to the nation's future.

These representations of women may be perceived as the natural consequence of prevailing gender conventions, but such representations must also be located within the context of the political contest over the memory of the United Irishmen in the first half of the nineteenth century. Hence the prominence accorded to women as vectors of national grief derives in part from the official 'masculine' silences respecting 1798. Similarly, the tendency to depoliticize female actors such as Curran, Fitzgerald and Tone, and to reduce them to symbolic figures, either grieving widows or objects of masculine devotion, is consistent with Irish romantic nationalism's rehabilitation and romanticization of the United Irishmen, which was achieved by detaching them from their ideological context, reducing the male martyrs as well to pure symbols. By 1848 then, the identification of women within United Irish historiography as 'symbol, model or victim', a template that would influence histories of 1798 well into the twentieth century, had been largely established.

## Conclusion

In a speech on the future of Irishwomen presented to the Irish Women's Suffrage League in 1915, the nationalist feminist Constance Marcievicz began by reflecting on her countrywomen's role in the nation's political past. Having paid tribute to the inspirational warrior-queens of Celtic legend, she came to dwell on the less inspiring example of the women associated with the 1798 rebellion. Although she acknowledged that little was known of these women, of whom 'we get only glimpses from male chroniclers', she concluded that, '... their roles seem to have been passive ... the same is true even of brave Anne Devlin, true of weak Sarah Curran, who drifted to madness of Emmet's death'.<sup>1</sup> As Marcievicz obliquely recognized, her idea of these women had been mediated through the distorting lens of a male-dominated nationalist historiography, which presented them in a limited range of auxiliary roles: the dutiful wife, faithful servant, supportive sister, and mournful widow. Yet the distinction she drew between the impressive warrior women of ancient Ireland and the passive 'women of '98' indicates the extent to which her evaluation of these women's contribution to Irish history was based on republican criteria – it was because they had not fought and died alongside their male relatives that they were judged to be such disappointing 'foremothers' to the republican feminists of the early twentieth century.

Although she was a perceptive critic of women's historical subordination within the nationalist movement, Marcievicz did not relate the marginal position of women within the United Irishmen to the gender distinction inherent in republican ideology's idealisation of the male citizen-soldier. Certainly, classical republicanism, and the binary oppositions it drew between active and passive citizenship, domestic and public, male and female, could function as a powerful exclusionary mechanism in political discourse. However, a simplistic division between masculine military activity, and the domestic duties of the republican wife and mother cannot fully describe the complex relationship between gender and radical politics during the 1790s. By focusing too narrowly on the military component of the United Irish movement, and the decade's

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<sup>1</sup> Constance Marcievicz, 'The Future of Irishwomen', in Louise Ryan (ed.), *Irish Feminism and the Vote: An Anthology of the Irish Citizen Newspaper, 1912-1920* (Dublin, 1996), pp. 169-170. Countess Constance Marcievicz was involved in the Irish socialist, feminist and nationalist movements of the early twentieth century. The only female leader of the Easter 1916 rising, Marcievicz, subsequently became Ireland's first woman MP and cabinet minister. See Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* (2nd edn, London and East Haven CT, 1995).

violent dénouement, we risk reproducing the dichotomy between male activity and female passivity that shaped Marcievicz's disparaging assessment of the 'women of '98'. Instead, as this thesis has argued, it is perhaps more fruitful to understand the development of radical politics during the 1790s in terms of the evolution and expansion of 'public opinion', and the processes through which both men and women came to think of themselves as critically-debating political subjects.

The broader conceptualization of the 'political' suggested by Jürgen Habermas' model of the eighteenth-century public sphere allows us to construct a less rigidly gendered view of political activity during the 1790s. Within United Irish ideology, the idea that the progress of civil society was dependent on the inclusion of women in the discussion of public affairs could, as we have seen, form the basis for a tentative claim for women's political and intellectual emancipation. And, in practice, women participated in the late eighteenth-century Irish public sphere in a range of ways: by reading pamphlets, newspapers and treatises; by discussing politics in their correspondence; by publishing literary works that commented directly, or indirectly, on issues of national importance; and by participating in intellectual, philanthropic and political associations. However, while acknowledging the heterosocial character of much of the public sphere, it is also necessary to add some qualifications and nuances to this account of women's political participation.

It is important to recognize that Irish women's engagement with the public sphere and radical politics was shaped by class, and to a degree, by religious affiliation. As has been suggested, the political culture of eighteenth-century Belfast, with its burgeoning print culture, civic associations, and assertive middle class conforms most closely to the model of the bourgeois public sphere. Hence women participated in the town's civic and political life through institutions such as the Presbytery and the Belfast Reading Society, and practiced self-government through female philanthropic associations, and the United Irishwomen societies. Evidence on the United Irishwomen remains frustratingly slight. Yet, the possible involvement in their organization of Jane Greg, an assertive, highly educated woman with feminist sympathies, would suggest that they were more than merely supportive 'tea-pot' clubs.<sup>2</sup> The divisions between the familial

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<sup>2</sup> Samuel McSkimmin, *Annals of Ulster, 1790-1798*, E. J. McCrum (ed.) (Belfast, 1906 [1849]), p. 38.

realm, civil society and the state were less distinct within the elite world of the Protestant Ascendancy. Much of women's political influence derived from a hereditary system of political property and was openly used to forward familial interests, as opposed to the pursuit of the 'public good' that supposedly motivated the virtuous citizens of the bourgeois public sphere. At the same time, elite Irish women did align themselves with the oppositional public sphere through the Patriot movement. They also participated in the intellectual and cultural life of the nation through institutions such as the salon and the Dublin Society, and as patrons of literary, scientific and antiquarian research. I have only been able to briefly sketch Irish women's involvement in these aspects of the enlightened public sphere, but it is a subject that deserves further research. The confessional nature of the eighteenth-century Irish public sphere is also an issue when considering Catholic women's public and political roles. While I would broadly agree with Joep Leersen's conclusion that eighteenth-century Catholic Ireland was characterized by the absence of a public sphere, plebeian political behaviour may be understood as taking place within a competing subaltern public, which was largely oral and communal in nature.<sup>3</sup> As we have seen, women did assume a public and often political role within their communities, through the lamentation of the dead, as verbal incendiaries, and in the role of *file na pobail* (poet of the people).

It would be misleading to suggest that women were unaffected by, uninterested in, or uninvolved with politics prior to the 1790s. To what extent then, did the United Irish programme of mass politicization alter or affect women's political identities? I would argue that the rapid expansion of the public sphere, and the pervasiveness of political conflict during the 1790s, lent an added urgency and purpose to women's activities that enabled them to think of themselves as political actors in new and different ways. The galvanizing influence of the United Irish politicization programme is evident in the enthusiasm with which Martha McTier and Mary Anne McCracken read and discussed radical literature. Similarly, whilst women's philanthropic activity is often thought of as blandly religious, and generally conservative, during the 1790s, in Belfast at least, it became implicated in the broader conflict between 'aristocrats' and 'democrats'. Under a system of government censorship and surveillance, women's ostensibly 'private' correspondence also assumed a public and potentially subversive significance. As the

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<sup>3</sup> Joep Leersen, *Hidden Ireland, Public Sphere* (Dublin, 2002).

examples of Lady Lucy Fitzgerald and Lady Margaret Mountcashell suggest, the 1790s altered the character of elite women's political involvement, as they ventured beyond the acceptable limits of dynastic politics to assert an autonomous republican identity. In the case of Sarah Tighe and Lady Moira, the 1790s required a complex negotiation of competing religious, political and national identities that forced them to re-evaluate their role within the Irish ruling class. The extent to which revolutionary ideology supplanted pre-existing sectarian and local grievances amongst the men and women of the Catholic plebeian classes remains questionable. Women's involvement in popular politics appears to have been primarily religious in motivation, and based on a traditional ideology of 'dispossession and repossession', rather than any revolutionary-democratic agenda. Nevertheless, whilst women had functioned in a purely symbolic capacity in previous popular protest movements, during the 1790s they were drawn into radical activity, as participants in the political crowd, as members of the United Irish societies, and as combatants in the 1798 rebellion.

As this thesis has argued, women engaged with radical politics in a number of different ways during the 1790s. However, I would not suggest that their participation was either full or equal. Indeed, women's political practice remained circumscribed by implicit gender conventions. Hence, although I have argued that women's epistolary practice assumed a political importance during this decade, few women made the transition from manuscript into print, and female-authored publications during this period, even those that were overtly political, remained confined to more feminine genres such as the novel or poetry. Although women were sworn into the United Irish movement, they do not appear to have been accorded full membership, or to have assumed any formal leadership roles. And, perhaps most importantly, while the United Irish movement were prepared to make a radical imaginative leap in advocating the extension of the franchise to Catholics and 'the men of no property', the expansiveness of their political vision fell short when it came to female suffrage.

The absence of significant debate on the question of female emancipation does not necessarily mean that they were indifferent to, or unaware of the issue. Certainly, their conservative opponents were quick to point out the logical contortions involved in extending political rights to the humblest illiterate peasant, whilst excluding women. By positing a model of the male arms-bearing citizen the United Irishmen were able to

transcend both sectarian and class differences, whilst legitimating the exclusion of women from full citizenship. A perhaps more benign explanation is that it was only through the exclusion of women that this heterogenous and unstable coalition of classes and creeds could be given a positive content. As property, religion and education were no longer the key criteria for citizenship, it was masculinity alone that bound together these diverse groupings. At the same time, classical republicanism, as it was filtered through the Scottish Enlightenment, was blended with the languages of sympathy, civility and politeness, softening and modifying some of its more austere, hyper-masculine elements. Hence, the United Irishmen did not evince a vigorous hostility to female influence, or demand that women be confined to the domestic sphere, nor did cyclical republican narratives of degeneration and effeminization feature prominently in their political thought. The progressive narratives that did form the basis of their vision of political development could incorporate a more egalitarian view of gender relations. However, as we have seen the more inclusive implications of such narratives were largely circumvented through recourse to the language of chivalry, a move that is somewhat surprising given the close associations between Burkean conservatism and chivalric masculinity during the revolutionary decade.

If the reasons for women's exclusion from the United Irish programme of political rights were obscure or unspoken, many of the implicit assumptions about the relationship between gender and politics that underpinned Irish political discourse were made explicit during the debates on the Act of Union, as opponents equated the loss of the Irish parliament to the castration of Irish manhood, and urged their compatriots to rally to the defence of the feminized nation. Contemporary references to female opposition to the measure, and women's intervention in the pamphlet debate, indicate that women were considered to be, and considered themselves to be, members of the critically-debating public, with an interest in the fate of the Irish parliament. At the same time, the political nation was at this moment unambiguously defined as a masculine domain. As I have suggested it was, in part, this narrow identification of the political nation with masculinity that led female writers to elaborate new forms of national identity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Rather than contesting women's right to function as equal rational actors within the political sphere, bardic nationalism allowed women to engage in the alternative, affective discourse of the imagined community. Because the imagined community was not based on



parliamentary or political structures it provided a particularly fruitful means through which women could define themselves as national subjects. By emphasising the literary, cultural and historical bases of the nation, female writer such as Charlotte Brooke, Regina Maria Roche and Sydney Owenson could foreground their role as custodians of tradition, and repositories of national sentiment. It is no coincidence then, that in the aftermath of the Act of Union and the collapse of the Irish political sphere, it was that quintessentially feminine genre, the novel, which assumed centre-stage in the formation of a new romanticized rhetoric of Irish nationality.

However, the designation of the nation as an organic, familial community ultimately had ambivalent implications for women. The identification of both gender difference and national difference as natural facets of human organization further impeded women's claims to rational equality. The female personification of Ireland, which Irish women writers had attempted to imbue with a degree of agency, would again become, in the hands of male romantic nationalists, a passive emblem of national suffering, or the object of male devotion. In the first half of the nineteenth century an increasingly rigid emotional division of labour would emerge in the commemoration of the United Irishmen, as women were figured as the sorrowful mourners of the fallen heroes of 1798, and men as their virile avengers. This reflected the broader gendering of the nation's past and future in nineteenth-century nationalism, whereby women were associated with the preservation of the nation's historical and biological continuity, and men embodied the nation's thrusting, forward-looking and revolutionary aspects. Whilst the future-oriented character of United Irish discourse could incorporate a vision of national development in which both men and women participated equally in the nation's social, economic and political progress, this progressive strand of nationalist ideology was largely submerged as the injunction 'to remember' became a dominant imperative of nineteenth-century nationalism. Although nationalist rhetoric would continue to stress the high status accorded to women in Irish society, this would merely reinforce the construction of a national chivalric masculinity, as reflected in the representations of the United Irish rebels as gallant guardians of women's honour, and of their leaders as dashing 'knights errant'.

As this thesis has attempted to demonstrate, gender, alongside class, religion and ethnicity, must be understood as a key element in the historical construction of Irish

political discourses and concepts of national identity. Previous studies of the 1790s and the United Irishmen have all too often relegated women's exclusion from the movement's programme of universal rights to a passing footnote, or brief reference. The assumptions that underpin this indifference are that women's historical confinement within the private sphere meant that they could not be, or were not considered to be, political actors; that further analysis cannot shed any further light on the movement's political ideology; and that it would be ahistorical to expect late eighteenth-century radicals to have more inclusive attitudes. I hope I have shown that many of these assumptions are invalid. Similarly, I have sought to indicate that an analysis of the relationship between gender, politics and national identity is not merely of relevance to women's history but can illuminate wider developments in Irish history. This is as much about formulating questions as it is about offering conclusive answers: To what extent was the formation of a unified Irish political identity dependent on the exclusion of women? Can the post-Union transition to romantic nationalism be understood in terms of a shift between 'masculine' and 'feminine' forms of national identity and expression? How do constructions of Irishness influence gender construction and vice versa? How has the form and character of nationalist remembrance been shaped by gender? Integrating gender into the study of Irish political history, then, requires not only the interrogation of the distinction between male political activity and female domestic passivity, but also an examination of the historical construction of such binary dichotomies between 'men who gave for us their blood' and women who can only shed tears.

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