CHAPTER 3

Repeal
Restoration, Democracy, and Revolution

> Our legislature is not dead, it only sleeps.[1]
>
> Daniel O'Connell (1843)

> What made the vast difference between Venice and Dublin and Cork? Was it not their institutions?[2]
>
> Rev J. Godkin (1845)

In 1834, William Cobbett, the prominent English radical, arranged to spend time in Ireland to research a book on Irish political life. When Daniel O'Connell caught wind of Cobbett's intentions, he saw a momentous propaganda opportunity. Unable to host Cobbett himself, O'Connell asked – or rather, ordered – Edward Dwyer, the former secretary of the Catholic Association, to arrange a public dinner in Dublin for the visitor. In a revealing observation about Cobbett's status as a leader of radical political opinion, O'Connell admitted a wholesome admiration for the meritocratic nature of British public life. For O'Connell, that Cobbett started life as a farm labourer, enlisted in the army, and finally rose to national prominence as a writer and activist, spoke volumes for his work ethic, *and* the society that enabled such an upward trajectory. The 'democratic principle in British institutions', mused O'Connell, allowed Cobbett 'to make such an advance'. But Irish influence within these 'British institutions' was, in O'Connell's estimation, negligible – a fact more glaring in the post-1832 political world. O'Connell wished Cobbett to witness firsthand the gulf between Irish political ideas and the programme of the state, and the lack of good government in Ireland.[3] The broadcasting of

[1] John Levy (ed.), *A Full and Revised Report of the Three Days' Discussion in the Dublin Corporation, on the Repeal of the Union* (Dublin: James Duffy, 1843), p. 37.
[2] Rev. J. Godkin, *Third Prize Repeal Essay: The Rights of Ireland* (Dublin: James Duffy, 1845), p. 112.
[3] Daniel O'Connell to Edward Dwyer, 11 September 1834, in W. J. Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell: The Liberator*, 2 vols. (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1888), i, pp. 535–6.

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Cobbett's Irish experiences would have, in O'Connell's words, 'the most beneficial effects'.[4]

Cobbett's visit to Ireland, which was his first and last, was notable for coming so late in his life. He was seventy-one years old when he made the crossing in the autumn of 1834; he died the following year, and the promised book on Ireland never materialised. He embarked on a tour of Ireland 'for the purpose of seeing with his own eyes the state of things in a country which had afforded so fertile a field for political controversy'.[5] Cobbett's radicalism was shaped by the centrality of the countryside in his political thought: his primary concern lay with the rural labourers, often exploited by large farmers, and threatened by the shift to mechanised agricultural techniques.[6] It was Ireland's rural poverty that Cobbett gravitated towards in a series of letters he wrote for his *Political Register* newspaper. The people were destitute, Cobbett observed, but the land was rich with livestock and crops; this was a different form of agrarian poverty from that found in more inhospitable rural parts of the wider United Kingdom.[7] Cobbett concluded grimly that Ireland needed the extension of the (old) poor law to provide relief to the paupers on the land, who were victims of an absentee landlord class that drained money from Ireland on an industrial scale.[8] This was a socio-economic problem, he surmised, but it required a political solution.

At a lecture in Dublin in November, Cobbett argued that 'a change there must be in the management of the affairs of Ireland'. Under the current constitutional setup, it was impossible for Ireland to influence government policy, which needed to tackle the destitution on the land:

> What is your number of representatives in the *imperial* Parliament? – for you are so lucky as to belong to an empire. Everything is now grand and imperial! Now, for my part, I would sooner have beer and bread, and live under a king, or even in a republic, than eat *lumpers*, and belong to an empire! (Hear, cheers, and laughter)... I say, as to the number of your representatives in the imperial Parliament, you can have no real

[4] Daniel O'Connell to William Cobbett, 2 November 1834, in Lewis Melville (ed.), *The Life and Letters of William Cobbett in England and America: Based upon Hitherto Unpublished Family Papers*, 2 vols. (London: John Lane, 1913), ii, p. 256.

[5] Robert Huish, *Memoirs of the Late William Cobbett, Esq., MP for Oldham*, 2 vols. (London: John Saunders, 1836), ii, p. 436.

[6] See Ian Dyck, *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[7] *Political Register*, 27 September 1834.

[8] *Political Register*, 1 November 1834. Cobbett was opposed to the 'new' poor law of 1834 (an act covering Ireland was passed in 1838) as it removed the right to relief.

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> representation at all. There are your hundred of Irish members on one side, and 558 on the other.[9]

For Cobbett, Ireland had the trappings of representative government, but the spirit of government under the Union pitted the Irish against the British, effectively barring the former from wielding legislative power in a chamber numerically dominated by the latter. If political culture within the United Kingdom operated on a British-Irish binary, the Irish were locked out of the virtues of representative government.

John, Lord Russell, the leading architect of the Reform Act of 1832, defined the aim of expanding the franchise and altering the design of constituencies as the transformation of parliament into a 'mirror of the sentiments of the people'.[10] The 'mirroring' principle enabled reformers of the 1832 vintage to consent to maintaining a limited franchise, as a broader range of 'interests' (professional, industrial, middle class) were now represented in the Commons.[11] But the 'mirroring' principle struggled when confronted with Irish questions after Catholic Emancipation, partly because political culture in Ireland evolved on very different lines from Britain during the 1830s and 1840s. Against the backdrop of the structural 'colonial' aspects of Irish governance, which lacked legitimacy within the smaller island, Ireland challenged insular British debates about parliamentary reform and representation. The parliamentary 'mirror' held up during the nineteenth century contained reflections of Irish representatives, but their legislative and executive powerlessness was often unseen.

This critique of the operation of parliamentary government became a major part of the argument for the Repeal of the Union, made famous by O'Connell. The logic of 'Repeal' was that Ireland languished under the Union through political neglect: successive administrations governed Ireland without recourse to Irish ideas, resulting in a stagnant economy and political unrest. While the Union incorporated Ireland into the United Kingdom, in theory providing a role for the Irish within the imperial whole, the constitutional structures of the new state mitigated against such a vision. The Union state struggled to shake off the perception that it was the *British* who governed Ireland, rather than a genuine partnership. Repealing the Union posited that the solution to Irish woes

[9] Denis Knight (ed.), *Cobbett in Ireland* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1984), pp. 186, 190–1.
[10] Gregory Conti, *Parliament the Mirror of the Nation: Representation, Deliberation, and Democracy in Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 28.
[11] Ibid., p. 2.

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lay in the restoration of an Irish parliament, which would bring balance to the relationship between Britain and Ireland, as both countries would enjoy meaningful self-government while sharing the same monarch. The articulation of the idea of Repeal also served as a declaration that Irish discontent with the structures of the United Kingdom was deeply felt.

The ideal of self-government was an intoxicating assumption. For O'Connell, the ability to control the destiny of a government was the supreme goal of a political civilisation. As he put it in a public letter in 1830, 'No man can undervalue self-government, but a man of low and grovelling mind'. The theory of Union offered the appearance of self-government within an expansive polity, but the perception of many in Ireland who flocked to the Repeal banner was that the constitutional experiment of 1801 merely furthered British domination over the smaller island. 'If an Irishman be equally fit to govern', argued O'Connell, 'to make laws, and to execute them, as the native of any other country, why should we give to others the power of making laws for us, or of executing them?'[12] Catholic Emancipation had addressed one powerful sense of political exclusion, while also crystallising another. The asymmetrical nature of the Union, the imbalance in the weighting of representatives, and their ability or otherwise to exercise power, came increasingly to the fore of Irish argument.

That said, O'Connell was famously inconsistent in his pursuit of Repeal. At times he was a ruthless advocate for the restoration of an Irish parliament; in other contexts, Repeal was quietly dropped in the pursuit of a meaningful relationship with the government. The rule of thumb during the 1830s with O'Connell is that he was a loud anti-Union activist while the Tories held power, and a constructive collaborator when the Whigs were in government.[13] O'Connell's critics, contemporary and posthumous, believed that such flip-flopping revealed a moral vacuum in his political outlook: the so-called 'Liberator' was willing to renege on Ireland's national demand for self-government if there was an opportunity for advancement on a more limited legislative front, such as tithe reform, or softening coercion.[14] O'Connell himself did not see any such inconsistency. He was a politician, after all, aware of the need to strike bargains to

[12] Daniel O'Connell, *Fourth Letter of Daniel O'Connell, Esq., on the Repeal of the Union* (Dublin: T. O'Flanagan, 1830), pp. 28–9.

[13] For the approaches of the two British parties and how they affected O'Connell's judgement, see Jay R. Roszman, '"Ireland as a weapon of warfare": Whigs, Tories, and the problem of Irish outrages, 1835 to 1839', *Historical Journal*, vol. 60, no. 4 (2017), pp. 971–95.

[14] James Quinn, *John Mitchel* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2008), p. 8.

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secure political concessions.[15] But his tactical vision does not imply a lack of ideological commitment. At the heart of his approach was a consistent championing of 'justice' for Ireland. 'Justice', which O'Connell depicted as political equality for Ireland within the United Kingdom, rather than a parliament in Dublin *in of itself*, was initially the chief goal. The immediate origins of the powerful Repeal agitation of the 1840s, the age of the 'monster' meetings, lay in a campaign dubbed 'Justice, or Repeal'. Ever a man for establishing new political organisations, O'Connell founded the Precursor Society in 1838, which campaigned for parity in political rights between Britain and Ireland. This was to be the 'precursor' to a renewed struggle for Repeal if a transformation of the Union was not forthcoming. 'If Justice shall be done us, now we, of the present generation, are bound to submit to that Union', O'Connell announced in 1839.[16] There was no need to repeal the Union if all citizens across the United Kingdom enjoyed an equality of political rights and religious liberty. 'If we get the justice we require, then our Repeal Association is at an end', O'Connell announced at a mass rally in 1840. But O'Connell was also quick to add that he did not expect 'justice' to be done.[17]

O'Connellism was, then, not a straightforward 'nationalist' political platform based on the separate and distinct rights of the Irish people. O'Connell's primary aim was *good government* that provided redress to Irish grievances: if this could be achieved within the existing structures of the United Kingdom, all well and good; if not, the trial of the Union was over, and it was time for the restoration of a parliament in Dublin. For O'Connell, the fundamental problem at the heart of the Union concerned not clashing national identities but a lack of political and legal equality between the two islands. The period encompassing the campaign for Repeal, then, got to the crux of the issues of representative government and the Irish self-image. Were the interests of a small country best served as part of a globally powerful multinational Union, or as a separate political entity on the fringes of empire?

The Repeal Imagination

With the achievement of Catholic Emancipation, O'Connell looked forward to Ireland's full incorporation into the British political system.

[15] Kevin B. *Nowlan, The Politics of Repeal: A Study in the Relations between Great Britain and Ireland, 1841–1850* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 7; Oliver MacDonagh, *The Emancipist: Daniel O'Connell, 1830–1847* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), p. 280.

[16] Edward Bullen (ed.), *Five Reports of the Committee of the Precursor Association* (Dublin: Richard Grace, 1839), p. vi.

[17] *Freeman's Journal*, 16 April 1840.

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On entering parliament, O'Connell paraded his radical credentials by pressing for the expansion of the rights of voting (and thus of citizenship) to those who paid tax. Declaring himself a 'radical reformer' in the House of Commons in 1830, O'Connell lashed out at the aristocratic 'Old Corruption' that permeated the political hierarchy of the United Kingdom:

> Every day he lived, he was more and more convinced that nothing could be more debasing than the present system of Representation. When he saw Gentlemen otherwise of the highest honour, from the mere contact and association corrupted to the purposes of an oligarchical tyranny, he could not bring himself to speak of the system but with abhorrence and disgust. He raised his voice on behalf of the people; he called upon the House, which had shorn the talons of the Monarchy, to use its power to cut short the fell fangs of the oligarchical faction which lorded it over the land.[18]

Such sentiments were shared by many prominent radicals, such as Cobbett and Henry Hunt. Indeed, such was O'Connell's status that he was feted as one of the leading 'British' reformers of his day.[19]

The O'Connellites used their parliamentary platform to prove their universalist credentials in championing the abolition of the slave trade throughout the British Empire (which was achieved in 1833), and Jewish emancipation (which came, in a convoluted manner, in 1858). Underpinning these campaigns – and tying them to their core Irish cause – was the belief that 'justice' should drive all political action.[20] On entering the first reformed parliament in 1833, the O'Connellites sat on the same benches as the radical members of parliament, and fell in with Thomas Attwood, founder of the Birmingham Political Union.[21] Writing retrospectively, one of those Irish MPs, O'Connell's son John, was struck by the paradox of the British constitutional tradition that he observed firsthand. Unlike many of its European cousins, the British parliament appeared capable of reforming itself, and its role in the ending of slavery was a great victory for humanity. 'Why is it that a nation capable of acts

[18] *Hansard*, vol. 22, 18 February 1830, cols. 719–20.
[19] Laurent Colantonio, '"Democracy" and the Irish people, 1830–1848', in Joanna Innes and Mark Philp (eds.), *Re-Imagining Democracy in the Age of Revolutions: America, France, Britain, Ireland, 1750–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 166.
[20] Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, 'Black abolitionists, Irish supporters, and the brotherhood of man', *Slavery & Abolition*, vol. 37, no. 3 (2016), p. 605; U. R. Q. Henriques, 'The Jewish Emancipation controversy in nineteenth-century Britain', *Past & Present,* no. 40 (1968), pp. 138–9.
[21] John O'Connell, *Recollections and Experiences from a Parliamentary Career from 1833 to 1848*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1849), i, pp. 2, 5.

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such as these', O'Connell mused, 'appears to be so utterly incapable of justice or reason' when Ireland was concerned?[22]

Traditionally, O'Connellite politics are viewed diachronically, as the origins of a modern Irish nationalism that was almost exclusively Catholic.[23] When examined synchronically, however, Repeal can be framed as an Irish response to the 'Age of Reform'. Repealing the Union envisaged a restoration of the Irish parliament, which O'Connell framed as a national demand; but this does not mean that Repeal was merely a preface to the later struggle for Home Rule. The assumptions that underpinned Repeal political thought were drawn from the rich well of contemporary parliamentary reform, chiefly the ideal of creating representative government, with democratic legitimacy at its heart. In 1830, at the height of the campaign for parliamentary reform, O'Connell triggered fresh agitation behind the Repeal banner. In the autumn of that year, he founded the (typically wordy) Association of Irish Volunteers for the Repeal of the Union. The Association did not last long – it was swiftly prohibited by Wellington's government, with the O'Connellites forced into staging 'Repeal breakfasts' in lieu of public meetings to get around restrictive laws – but it changed the nature of political debate in Ireland. The Repeal of the Union had become a mainstream political idea.

While the Tory government was successful in shutting down the Association of Irish Volunteers for the Repeal of the Union, it could not halt an avalanche of new pamphlets and printed material that framed Repeal as part of the wider reforming agenda. The language used in the early debate concerning Repeal in the aftermath of Catholic Emancipation, like that of parliamentary reform, was steeped in an appeal to constitutional traditions. Patrick Morris, a successful Catholic merchant, published a series of political and economic arguments in favour of Repeal in 1831, directed at liberal Protestants in his native Waterford. Morris proclaimed that the Irish had never known 'the advantages of a Government fairly representing their wants and interests'. Both the 'old' Irish parliament and the Union experiment excluded the bulk of the population and maintained aristocratic privilege in the face of the 'People'. This had resulted in a breach of the ethos of the Union, Morris surmised, with the passing of coercive laws for Ireland that did not apply to

[22] Ibid., i, p. 45.

[23] Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *Daniel O'Connell and the Repeal Year* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1966), p. viii. Donal McCartney, *The Dawning of Democracy in Ireland, 1800–1870* (Dublin: Helicon Ltd., 1987), pp. 213–14.

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Britain. Nothing short of a 'local Legislature', which enjoyed the confidence of the 'People', reasoned Morris, would raise Ireland 'from her present depressed and impoverished state'. Morris added that government rooted in the 'People' represented a return to the true nature of the British constitution, an idea that chimed with contemporary radical opinion.[24] 'All that the Irish want is good government', he argued, constructed on the pillars of representative legitimacy and justice. As it was, the 'free principles of the British Constitution', from Morris's perspective, did not extend to Ireland, leading to an arbitrary form of governance.[25]

Other political pamphleteers positioned Repeal within a broader radical framework. The noted Irish writer George Ensor described the British parliament as merely 'the echo of royalty', unable to cast off the corrupting hand of hereditary privilege.[26] William Joseph Battersby, in his *Repealer's Manual* (which went through three editions during the 1830s), imagined Repeal against the backdrop of other far-reaching constitutional reforms, such as the secret ballot, short parliaments, and an enlarged franchise.[27] Indeed, the connection between the idea of Repeal and wider parliamentary reform was also cited by enemies, who painted a scenario of a restored Dublin parliament captured by the excesses of radicalism, leading to mob rule and the destruction of property rights.[28] The anti-Repeal *National Magazine* (published in Dublin) feared a destabilising power struggle between a democratic parliament in Ireland and an aristocratic lower house in London, resulting in constitutional paralysis.[29] Repeal was thus strongly tinged – for some, tarnished – by its association with radical parliamentary reform.

This was no less true of radicals who valued reform above Repeal. In 1831, Luke Hope, the son of James 'Jemmy' Hope, the veteran of the 1798 and 1803 rebellions, launched *The Irish Rush-Light*, a short-lived

[24] James Epstein, 'The constitutional idiom: radical reasoning, rhetoric and action in early nineteenth-century England', *Journal of Social History*, vol. 23, no. 3 (1990), pp. 553–74.

[25] Patrick Morris, *Six Letters, Intended to Prove that the Repeal of the Act of Union, and the Establishment of a Local Legislature in Ireland, are Necessary to Cement the Connection with Great Britain and containing a short view of the Trade, Manufactures, and Agriculture of Ireland: Addressed to the Right Honourable Sir John Newport* (Waterford, 1831), preface, p. 5.

[26] George Ensor, *Anti-Union: Ireland as She Ought to be* (Newry: Morgan and Dunlop, 1831), pp. 16, 22.

[27] W. J. Battersby, *The Repealer's Manual or, the Union Reconsidered*, 3rd ed. (Dublin: T. & J. Coldwell, 1837), p. 6.

[28] Anon., *The Repeal of the Legislative Union of Great Britain and Ireland, Considered* (London: James Ridgway, 1830), p. 11; 'R. B. G.', *A Repeal of the Union: The Ruin of Ireland* (Dublin: William Curry, 1831), pp. 50–1.

[29] 'The Repeal of the Union', *National Magazine*, vol. 1, no. iv (1830), p. 631.

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periodical that gave expression to the voice of non-O'Connellite radicalism in Ireland.[30] While *The Rush-Light's* central message sounded, to Irish ears, as a rekindling of the United Irishmen's democratic-infused politics, it chimed more with contemporary developments in radicalism in Britain, such as the establishment of Political Unions in major British cities, which self-consciously claimed to speak for 'the People'.[31] The first issue of *The Rush-Light* set out its radical agenda:

> We shall contend, under all circumstances, for universal suffrage and short parliaments but before all, for that great security for independence, that antidote to corruption, perjury, and crime – that sacred shield of freedom, and key to every other political right, the VOTE BY BALLOT.[32]

Universal suffrage, annual parliaments and the secret ballot were the mantras of British radicalism. *The Rush-Light* positioned itself within this milieu, to the extent that it frequently reprinted material from radical periodicals and newspapers across the United Kingdom. The Repeal of the Union was presented not as an 'Irish' demand, but as a manifestation of a right to enlightened self-government.[33] Giving notice of the impending general election in 1831, *The Rush-Light* called for candidates to commit to parliamentary reform and Repeal: 'The man who would contend for a radical reform in a British parliament whilst he will not demand a reformed legislature in his own country, cannot be a real patriot'.[34] With such a forceful assertion, *The Rush-Light* intimately connected the restoration of an Irish parliament with the cause of the franchise and ballot.

The Irish Rush-Light, like the Political Unions, faded away, but its radical agenda remained potent. In 1831, O'Connell eased off the Repeal message to grant the Whigs space to draft the Reform Bill. Marking the first attempt at an O'Connellite-Whig alliance, O'Connell confided in Lord Duncannon (John Ponsonby) that he had turned his followers 'from the overpowering question of the Repeal to the suitable one of Reform'.[35] But the genie was out of the bottle. On launching the campaign for Repeal in the autumn of 1830, O'Connell made a bold claim that periodically came back to haunt him:

[30] Tom Clyde, *Irish Literary Magazines: An Outline History and Descriptive Bibliography* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003), pp. 84–5.
[31] Nancy D. LoPatin, *Political Unions, Popular Politics and the Great Reform Act of 1832* (London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 5.
[32] *Irish Rush-Light*, April 1831, p. 2.
[33] *Irish Rush-Light*, November 1831, p. 231.
[34] *Irish Rush-Light*, April 1831, p. 8.
[35] O'Connell, *Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, iv, p. 370.

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> In plain truth, the Union exists at this moment, only because men foolishly and childishly imagine that it is incapable of being abolished. Yet we have already demonstrated by practical experience, that a great majority of the Irish nation has only to demand, legally and constitutionally, but loudly and determinedly, civil rights – *the rights of nature* – and their demands will and must be complied with.[36]

The force of O'Connell's argument was immense, and it bestowed the ideal of self-government with its own momentum. By the end of 1830, 'Repeal' had become *the* clarion call of Catholic Ireland, and it proved difficult even for the Liberator to resist this.[37] After notable electoral successes in 1831 and 1832, for example, O'Connell, under pressure from young Turks in his ranks (such as Feargus O'Connor, the future figurehead of the Chartist movement), and against his own judgement, issued a Repeal motion in the Commons, which was soundly rejected by 523 votes to 38.[38] Despite the lack of progress at Westminster, Repeal framed the political outlook of many in Ireland during the 1830s and 1840s.

The rhetorical power of Repeal was unquestionable, but what did 'Repealing the Union' envisage? One contemporary critic of Repeal condemned its champions for deploying a 'mere delusive watchword': Repealers talked up the restoration of an Irish parliament, but there was 'a remarkable silence as to what sort of constitution we are to have'.[39] Indeed, Repeal legally implied the restoration of the *unreformed* Irish parliament, turning the political clock back to before 1801, with the resurrection of rotten boroughs, extremely restrictive franchises, and the exclusion of Catholics from the chambers.[40] Such an end result clearly contradicted the general view of a progressively led and fully reformed Irish parliament projected by Repealers. While O'Connell made much political noise about Repeal, he only sporadically sketched out details as to what a self-governing Ireland would look like, rarely straying from a vision based on radical staples of a secret ballot, household suffrage, and a fair distribution of seats throughout the country. He was vague on the ideal relationship between the Irish and British parliaments, but suggested that even a 'subordinate' legislative chamber would produce 'great advantages to

[36] Daniel O'Connell, *Second Letter of Daniel O'Connell, Esq., on the Repeal of the Union* (Dublin: T. O'Flanagan, 1830), p. 17. Emphasis in original.
[37] MacDonagh, *Emancipist*, p. 39.
[38] William O'Neill Daunt, *Personal Recollections of the Late Daniel O'Connell, MP*, 2 vols. (London: Chapman & Hall, 1848), i, p. 18.
[39] 'Civis', *Thoughts on the Repeal of the Union* (Dublin: Richard Moore, 1831), pp. 5, 9.
[40] Ibid., pp. 3–4

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Ireland'.[41] It is telling that his five-hour speech during the parliamentary debate on Repeal in 1834 was dominated by a historicised account of the relations between Ireland and England.[42]

Still, the return of a parliament in Dublin represented a profound renegotiation of British sovereignty and the enshrining of Irish national rights within the constitution. The imagery of '1782' permeated Repeal political works and ephemeral materials, making clear that the termination of the Union would mark a restoration rather than a revolution. Michael Barry's prize-winning essay on Repeal from 1844 presented a narrative that emphasised the economic and cultural improvements in Ireland in the period of the 'independent' parliament between 1782 and 1800, in contrast to the 'miserable dependence' of the earlier part of the century.[43] The 'Volunteers of 1782' were revived in the 1840s (unarmed, it should be said), with elaborate membership forms that included the images of O'Connell and the Patriot MPs Henry Grattan and Henry Flood.[44]

The idealism of '1782' was, however, queried from an alternative historicised viewpoint centring on the record of the old parliament in Dublin. One pamphleteer expressed bewilderment at how the 'annals of the Irish Parliament' could be read as 'one favourable to the happiness of Ireland', noting that it was the London parliament that delivered (albeit belatedly) the Catholic Emancipation and Reform Acts.[45] The Dublin-born Robert Montgomery Martin, a historian of the British colonies, similarly attacked the notion that a 'restoration of the state in which Ireland was previous to the Union' would enhance Irish constitutional liberties. 'Ireland never was so truly and integrally a kingdom as she is at this moment', he argued in 1843.[46] It was a rhetorical paradox that the supporters of what became known as 'simple Repeal' could not quite overcome: the termination of the Union was presented as a liberal measure, but the historical record of the 'old' Irish parliament was far from progressive. Indeed, O'Connell occasionally conceded the existence of this

[41] Bullen, *Five Reports of the Committee of the Precursor Association*, p. v.

[42] *Repeal of the Union: Report of the Debate in the House of Commons on Mr O'Connell's Motion, and its Proceedings in the House of Lords on Earl Gray's Motion for Concurring in the Address of the Commons, April, 1834* (London: William Clowes, 1834).

[43] *Essays on the Repeal of the Union, to which the Association Prizes were Awarded; with a Supplemental Essay, Recommended by the Judges* (Dublin: James Duffy, 1845), pp. 13, 41.

[44] Loyal National Repeal Association of Ireland scrapbook, Thomas Ray papers, John J. Burns Library, Boston College, MS2007-019, file 1/4.

[45] Anon., *Repeal, or No Repeal: Repeal of the Union Considered in its Practical Bearings* (London: James Ridgway and Sons, 1833), p. 21.

[46] R. Montgomery Martin, *Ireland Before and After the Union with Great Britain* (London: Wm. S. Orr and Co., 1843), p. 36.

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tension.[47] If the goal was the restoration of the Irish parliament, somehow this institution had to look very different to its eighteenth-century ancestor. The romanticised depictions of College Green with the text 'it was and shall be' that graced the membership cards of the Loyal National Repeal Association of Ireland during the 1840s did little to reconcile this problem, other than appeal to national pride and hazy memories of an 'independent' parliament.[48]

Some Repealers were drawn to more exotic constitutional ideas to resolve this perceived problem. Federalist ideas began circulating within Repeal circles from 1831 with the publication of several papers by a Catholic priest called Thaddeus O'Malley. Entitled *The Federalist*, the project was a self-conscious effort to appropriate the papers of the same name by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay in the 1780s.[49] O'Malley's work was not quite of the standard of its illustrious American namesake, but it nonetheless represented the first sustained engagement with federalist ideas from an Irish perspective since the passage of the Union. The Irish *Federalist* advocated a form of federalism based on the constitution of the United States. Under this model, Ireland would become a self-governing and sovereign 'state' within a federated United Kingdom, with England and Scotland enjoying equal powers.[50] While federalism quickly gained a reputation (and a largely negative one at that) in Ireland as a middle-of-the-road compromise position between the binaries of centralised Union and Irish self-government, it was, in fact, one of the most radical constitutional frameworks ever invoked for the United Kingdom.[51] Ireland would gain a parliament under the federal scheme proposed by O'Malley, but the price to be paid was the wholesale reimagining of the parliamentary system across Britain, and the likelihood of a written constitution to legally enshrine the rights of each 'state'. Federalism was at heart a *unionist* scheme, as it reconciled the ideal of national self-government with membership of the United Kingdom. O'Malley was explicit about the unionist underpinnings of federalism,

[47] *Repeal of the Union: Report of . . . Mr O'Connell's Motion*, p. 13.

[48] Loyal National Repeal Association of Ireland scrapbook, Ray papers, Burns Library, MS2007–019, file 1/3.

[49] There are numerous modern editions. See, for example, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

[50] 'A Minister of Peace' [Thaddeus O'Malley], *The Federalist: or a Series of Papers Showing how to Repeal the Union, so as to Avoid a Violent Crisis, and at the Same Time, Secure and Reconcile all Interests, no. 1* (Dublin: the author, 1831). O'Malley intended seven papers, but it appears that only two were published.

[51] For context, see John Kendle, *Federal Britain: A History* (London: Routledge, 1997).

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suggesting that such a perspective offered Repealers a trump card to play in the face of those who argued that Irish self-government threatened the Union. 'Federalists', O'Malley conjectured, 'would be a much better *nom de guerre* for the Repealers than "Anti-Unionists", since it expresses at once, that they are *for* a Union, not *against* one, and what sort of a Union it is they want'.[52] For some critics, this was precisely the problem.

The idea did not catch on in the early 1830s, but federalism became an enduring presence within Irish constitutional thought throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[53] Federalist ideas emerged again in July 1843, when the Ulster liberal William Sharman Crawford advocated such a scheme. O'Connell, reeling from the defeat of his 'monster meeting' strategy (which we'll discuss shortly), jumped on the proposal as a fresh idea to make a political impression. He attempted to woo liberal federalists into the Repeal camp, with some success: while Crawford declined O'Connell's advances (indeed, the relationship between the two had soured some years before),[54] Grey Porter, the sheriff of Fermanagh and the author of a pamphlet on federal union, joined the Liberator's ranks.[55] Porter was an eccentric character (a common trait within Irish federalist circles, it would appear), and his work on federalism was elusive in how he actually understood the concept, beyond occasional references to the 'American states'. For Porter, federalism represented a middle way between unresponsive Union and Repeal, the latter of which had become intimately bound up as a 'Catholic' cause. But Porter's argument for a federal union was underpinned by an assumption that all O'Connellites shared: discontent in Ireland was the consequence of a lack of 'any congenial national political institutions, of any bona fide self-government'.[56] O'Connell, in truth, saw little difference between federalism and simple Repeal, believing that both offered the fundamental goal of self-government.[57] But his courtship of the federalists concerned many in the Repeal movement, including his senior lieutenant, William O'Neill Daunt, who questioned

[52] [O'Malley], *The Federalist*, no. 1, p. 29.
[53] Alvin Jackson, *United Kingdoms: Multinational Union States in Europe and Beyond, 1800–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), p. 254.
[54] Gerald R. *Hall, Ulster Liberalism, 1778–1876: The Middle Path* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011), p. 93.
[55] B. A. Kennedy, 'Sharman Crawford's federal scheme for Ireland', in H. A. Cronne, T. W. Moody and D. B. Quinn (eds.), *Essays in British and Irish History in Honour of James Eadie Todd* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1949), p. 246.
[56] J. G. V. Porter, *Ireland: The Union of 1801 ... A Federal (The Only Fair) Union between Great Britain and Ireland Inevitable, and Most Desirable for Both Islands*, 2nd ed. (London: Fisher, Son & Co., [1844]), p. ix.
[57] *Freeman's Journal*, 15 October 1844.

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'the wisdom of expanding on the basis on which a struggle for local legislation could be made', and thus diluting the movement's aims.[58] Indeed, Crawford condemned O'Connell for 'trying to make the Repealers believe they are Federalists and the Federalists that they are Repealers', and in the end pleasing no one.[59] O'Connell's dabbling may have inadvertently discredited federalism before the premise of the scheme was seriously considered.

One thing on which O'Connell remained consistent was his downplaying of the revolutionary nature of Repeal. O'Connell repeatedly emphasised the *restorative* nature of Repeal, a *return* to a parliament in Dublin. In 1833, he told one of his most trusted confidants, P. V. Fitzpatrick, that repealing the Union meant '[i]n short, salutary restoration without revolution, an Irish parliament, British connection, one King, two legislatures'.[60] After the establishment of the Loyal National Repeal Association and the commencement of a fresh campaign in 1840, O'Connell chaired a committee to examine the shape of a self-governing Ireland, which advocated a lower chamber of 300 members (the same number who sat in the pre-1801 parliament), but without the boroughs disenfranchised by the Union. Counties, cities, and towns were to gain representatives based on population size. For Repealers, this genuinely marked a restoration, albeit with a constitution altered by more recent principles of parliamentary reform.[61]

While O'Connellism contributed to, and chimed with, developments in Irish anti-unionist thought, its underlying notion that 'justice' from Britain could reconcile Ireland to the Union provided the cause of Repeal with political flexibility. While O'Connell frequently advocated interpretations that implicitly or explicitly rejected the legitimacy of the Union, especially during more intense periods of the Repeal agitation, his political mind was not one of a simple binary between unjust *or* Irish government.[62] He held multiple and apparently contradictory beliefs at the same time: namely, the *process* of the Act of Union rendered the

[58] William O'Neill Daunt to O'Connell, 29 October [1844], in O'Connell, *Correspondence of O'Connell*, vii, p. 285.
[59] Quoted in Charles Gavan Duffy, *Short Life of Thomas Davis, 1840–1846* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1895), p. 186.
[60] O'Connell to Fitzpatrick, 21 February 1833, in O'Connell, *Correspondence of O'Connell*, v, p. 11.
[61] Daniel O'Connell, *Irish Parliament: Report of the Committee of the National Repeal Association of Ireland, to who, it was Referred to Suggest a Proposal, to be Converted into a Law, for the Reconstruction of the House of Commons of Ireland* (no publishing details, 1840).
[62] Daniel O'Connell, *Third Letter of Daniel O'Connell, Esq., on the Repeal of the Union* (Dublin: T. O'Flanagan, 1830), p. 26.

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legislation illegitimate; self-government in the form of a restored parliament in Dublin offered the path to Irish liberty; but *if* a more sympathetic governmental machine in Britain was responsive to Irish sensitivities, offering reforms to address a series of perceived injustices – the tithe system, the status of the Church of Ireland, the rights to land ownership, the franchise – then Ireland could be reconciled to the Union. This latter approach became politically possible with the ascension of the Whigs to power in April 1835 on a platform of harmonising the Irish connection.[63] In September that year, O'Connell spoke at a public dinner in Edinburgh, delivering a striking pro-Union message: 'My object in this mission is to excite the people of England and Scotland in favour of my country, and so to render the repeal of the Union unnecessary, by making it a real Union instead of a parchment Union'. If Ireland were elevated to become an equal partner of England and Scotland, O'Connell told his enthusiastic audience, then 'hurrah for the Union'.[64]

How was the most pre-eminent critic of the Union able to embrace unionism? O'Connellism represented a balancing act between the ideal of Irish self-government and the reality of the power of the British state in an imperial age. Just as successive governments oscillated between coercion and conciliation in response to changing political contexts, so too O'Connellism swayed between repealing the Union and nascent unionism. The underpinning theory of Repeal political thought was that Ireland's social and economic problems – sectarianism, absenteeism, lack of industry, rural poverty – stemmed from a negligent government. A restored Irish parliament was the most eye-catching method to redress this, but it was not necessarily the only path.

O'Connellism, then, demanded a degree of political footwork from its adherents. The polemic literature produced on behalf of the Repealer cause, however, tended to lack O'Connell's more flexible approach. One such example was W. J. Battersby's *The Repealer's Manual*, which was first published in 1833. The second edition, which appeared in 1834, bore the vitriolic influence of Jonah Barrington in carrying the title *The Rise and Fall of Ireland: or, the Repealer's Manual*.[65] Battersby was a bookseller and writer of numerous works on aspects of Catholicism. His *Repealer's Manual* grew out of an essay contest in 1830 to highlight the problem of

[63] Roszman, 'Ireland as a weapon', pp. 974–5.
[64] *The Speech of Daniel O'Connell, Esq., MP, at a Public Dinner in Edinburgh, on Thursday, September 17th, 1835* (London: John Limbird, 1835), p. 8.
[65] Barrington's *Rise and Fall of the Irish Nation* (1833) was a dramatic account that emphasised the role of bribery and corruption in the passing of the Union.

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absentee landlordism and the Union, with Battersby's entry suggesting that such social grievances were created and maintained by misrule. It was through '*good government alone*', declared Battersby, that such evils would be removed. Battersby went on to expand on the Repealer logic that a parliament in Dublin represented the best means to secure '*native good government*'.[66] He equated self-government with nationhood; without formal political power, the Irish were a people of some eight million, but not a 'nation'.[67] So far, this was a standard Repealer interpretation, combining a sense of historic grievance with the perceived virtue of self-government. But Battersby lacked O'Connell's chameleonic ability to *reimagine* the Union to provide redress. *Only* an Irish parliament, in Battersby's reading, had the potential to deliver good government for Ireland. He picked up and ran with a favourite O'Connellite theme – the under-representation of Irish MPs in the House of Commons – but his conclusion offered little in the way of hope:

> Since if we had even our original 300 representatives [the number of MPs in the pre-1801 Irish parliament] against upwards of 500 [British MPs], *in a foreign legislature*, we never could expect the same measure of justice we would necessarily obtain, from half the number at home, under the eye, influence, and control of Ireland's own opinion?[68]

This argument had much currency. George Ensor critiqued the lack of influence that Irish representatives held in the House of Commons in the face of 'a supercilious overwhelming majority of foreigners'. Ensor lamented that even if the Irish members spoke with the rhetorical elegance of Pericles, they were doomed to be drowned out by sheer numbers.[69] In this analysis, the Union was structurally flawed: the levers of power were permanently out of the reach of the smaller country, and reliance on the sympathy of a British political party in government was debasing. 'Give the Irish people good government, and they will be peaceable', Battersby affirmed in his *Manual*.[70] But whether this was possible without terminating the Union was a question that separated O'Connell from many of his followers.

Chartism, Democracy, and the Irish People

In 1838, disparate radical forces in England congregated around a political manifesto called the 'People's Charter'. This was the birth of the Chartist

[66] Battersby, *Repealer's Manual*, p. 2. Emphasis in original. [67] Ibid., p. 11. [68] Ibid., p. 151.
[69] Ensor, *Anti-Union*, p. 127. [70] Battersby, *Repealer's Manual*, p. 239.

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movement, a popular organisation that campaigned for radical political reforms, including universal male suffrage, annual parliaments, and the secret ballot.[71] During the early 1830s, O'Connell was revered by some British radicals who later supported the People's Charter for his progressive support for measures to democratise the constitution. The Irishman's apparent volte-face – his support for the limited Reform Act of 1832 and formal embrace of the Whigs in 1835 – however, shattered any unity between the Repealers and working-class radicals in Britain.[72] An irony of this split was that one of the leading figureheads of Chartism, Feargus O'Connor, was a former Repeal MP for Cork County who publicly broke with O'Connell in 1836. The relationship between the two men remained antagonistic until O'Connell's death in 1847, which greatly damaged opportunities for cooperation between the Repeal movement and the Chartists. The personal grievances between O'Connell and O'Connor also encouraged later accounts to remain encased within their distinct national historiographical silos. Recent works have taken a more comparative approach, making a powerful case for viewing the two movements in light of each other, chiefly as expressions of radical ideology, passions, and organisation.[73] There is another point of comparison that is worth stressing: the shared sense within the Repeal and Chartist mind that the political and social woes suffered by their supporters stemmed from formal exclusion from meaningful political power.

Chartism was born from frustration with the limits of the Reform Act of 1832. The movement challenged the mechanisms that enabled aristocratic control over parliament, with radical reform advocated as the means to empower people with the rights of citizenship. William Lovett, one of Chartism's architects, framed such reforming steps as the foundation stone of a utopian alternative to 'Old Corruption'. The 'People's Charter', Lovett proclaimed in a pamphlet co-written with John Collins, 'is calculated to secure to *all classes of society their just share of political power*, and

[71] For the origins of Chartism, see Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 1–19.

[72] Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists* (London: Temple Smith, 1984), p. 19.

[73] See especially the work of Matthew Roberts: *Democratic Passions: The Politics of Feeling in British Popular Radicalism, 1809–1848* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), pp. 207–35; *Chartism, Commemoration and the Cult of the Radical Hero* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), pp. 178–204; and 'Daniel O'Connell, Repeal and Chartism in the Age of Atlantic Revolutions', *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 90 (2018), pp. 1–39. Also see Christine Kinealy, '"Brethren in bondage": Chartists, O'Connellites, Young Irelanders and the 1848 uprising', in Dónal Ó Drisceoil and Fintan Lane (eds.), *Politics and the Irish Working Class, 1830–1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 87–112.

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[offers] one of the most important steps to all social improvement'.[74] Social degradation and destitution were understood by the Chartist strategists such as Lovett not as the consequence of capitalist exploitation, but rather a lack of representative government.[75] Robert Gammage, a Chartist who became the movement's first major historian, emphasised this mentality in his influential study from 1854:

> The masses look on the enfranchised classes, whom they behold reposing on the couch of opulence, and contrast that opulence with the misery of their own condition. Reasoning from effect to cause there is no marvel that they arrive at the conclusion – that *their exclusion from political power is the cause of our social anomalies*.[76]

O'Connellite conceptions of Repeal were grounded in a similar logic. Repealers blamed the lack of manufacture and rise in poverty in Ireland not on global or national economic trends, but on the loss of Irish self-government.[77] For Repealers, the inability to direct legislative and executive power explained Ireland's social problems, chiming with the Chartist analysis of the impact of political exclusion of the unfranchised. In this reading, the Union stripped Ireland of representative government, and socio-economic distress was the result. The Act of Union, affirmed William O'Neill Daunt, a senior O'Connellite figure, 'is the direct source of much of the evil that our country suffers', with the loss of self-government annihilating 'our power of self-protection'.[78] Just as Chartists believed that the realisation of the People's Charter would promote social harmony in Britain through equalising political rights, Daunt believed the restoration of a parliament in Dublin would do the same in Ireland.[79] Both the Repealers and Chartists internalised that the *constitution* was the key to social improvement.

[74] William Lovett and John Collins, *Chartism: A New Organization of the People, Embracing a Plan for the Education and Improvement of the People, Politically and Socially* (London: J. Watson, 1840), p. v. Emphasis in original.

[75] For this, see Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism', *in Jones, Languages of Class: Studies in English Working-Class History, 1832–1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 90–178.

[76] R. G. Gammage, *History of the Chartist Movement, 1837–1854* (Newcastle-On-Tyne: Browne & Browne, 1894; first published 1854), p. 9. My emphasis.

[77] O'Connell, *Fourth Letter*, p. 34; Ensor, *Anti-Union*, p. 141.

[78] W. J. O'Neill Daunt, *Repeal of the Union: A Letter from W. J. O'Neill Daunt, Esq., to the Landlords of Ireland* (Dublin: Loyal National Repeal Association, 1846), p. 2.

[79] Ibid., p. 13. For the Chartist interpretation of this theme, see Peter Gurney, *Wanting and Having: Popular Politics and Liberal Consumerism in England, 1830–1870* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p. xi.

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There are other points of similarity here. While O'Connell's well-known disdain for the Chartists – born from his mistrust of a movement occupying a similar radical political space as the Repealers, and the Chartists' ambivalent attitude to violence – was genuine, the public animosities should not distract us from the intellectual commonalities between the two movements.[80] Both were founded on similar appeals to representative democracy that empowered the 'People', and the transformative promise of inclusion into the political nation. While the campaigns for the Charter and Repeal were grounded in appeals to constitutional traditions (Saxon custom for the Chartists and the more recent constitution of 1782 for the Repealers), both also deployed what one historian of Chartism has labelled a 'democratic idiom'.[81] This was a new departure in British politics. Chartist print culture, most particularly the *Northern Star*, the most prominent newspaper to emerge from the movement, was the site of an explosion of democratic tropes during the 1830s and 1840s. For the most part, appeals to democracy implied ideas of political equality, meaningful representation, and realising the potential of the individual through self-government.[82] For Lovett and Collins, democracy in its modern form was equated with 'popular representation', ensuring that the voices of the hitherto unenfranchised masses were heard.[83]

'Democracy' was as much a rhetorical marker for the O'Connellites as it was for the Chartists, providing a language and method (in terms of mass demonstrations) to lay siege to a political system that formally excluded most people. O'Connell claimed in parliament that the grievances that he personified were legitimate because he was the 'representative of the people'.[84] John O'Connell believed that his father's election as Lord Mayor of Dublin in 1841 would further legitimise the Repeal cause, as the office bestowed 'a legally recognized *lordship* from *the people*'.[85] Repeal dinners, like Chartist social occasions, often heard toasts to 'the People' as the source of political power.[86] In 1834, O'Connell was challenged by Sir

[80] Roberts, 'O'Connell, Repeal and Chartism', p. 1.
[81] For the appeal to the Saxon constitution, see Epstein, 'Constitutional idiom', p. 564, and Josh Gibson, 'The Chartists and the constitution: revisiting British popular constitutionalism', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 56, no. 1 (2017), p. 71. For the 'democratic idiom', see Gurney, *Wanting and Having*, pp. 105–43.
[82] Joanna Innes, Mark Philp and Robert Saunders, 'The rise of democratic discourse in the Reform era', in Innes and Philp (eds.), *Re-Imagining Democracy*, pp. 122–3.
[83] Lovett and Collins, *Chartism*, p. 9. [84] Colantonio, '"Democracy" and the Irish people', p. 164.
[85] John O'Connell to Daniel O'Connell, 9 November 1841, in O'Connell, *Correspondence of O'Connell*, vii, p. 125. Emphasis in original.
[86] See, for example, *Freeman's Journal*, 25 January 1837, 23 April 1841, 20 July 1844.

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Henry Jervis, an officer in the Royal Navy from Wexford, to define the 'People' he (O'Connell) claimed to represent. In response, O'Connell equated the 'People' with the politically voiceless:

> All those not possessed of prerogative or privileged capacities. *Not* the King in his corporate capacity – *not* the peers in their privileged state – but all those who are neither King nor peers. In short, the Commons, for whose benefit the King *ought* to reign; and for whose benefit alone the privileges of the peers *ought* to exist.[87]

But the 'People', in the Repeal imagination, were dually disenfranchised, being excluded from representative government through the formal denial of voting rights (there was one voter per 116 inhabitants in the Irish boroughs *after* the Irish Reform Act of 1832),[88] and by virtue of their Irishness. The *Citizen*, a short-lived non-O'Connellite radical journal, pointedly made the case that all of the offices that governed Ireland were headed by 'foreigners', nullifying any advantages that might flow from the Reform Act.[89] Coupled with the disproportionately low number of Irish MPs, Repeal was presented by *The Citizen* as an alternative to the existing 'virtual exclusion of the people of Ireland from the right of representation'.[90]

Indeed, Repeal sentiment stressed the 'national' question over the franchise as the chief grievance. In 1843, John O'Connell made the case that if the franchise was radically reformed, Irish interests would continue to suffer. 'What real influence over legislation can a people have', O'Connell asked, 'whose representatives are a miserable minority in the legislative body?' Without a change to the weighting of Irish representation and influence over political power, O'Connell lamented that an extension of the suffrage 'is but an extension of a mockery'.[91] Such an outburst encapsulated the ideological battles *within* radicalism over the case of Ireland; for John O'Connell, a self-proclaimed democrat, franchise reform would not in itself address Irish exclusion from political power.

The Repeal agitation escalated during the 1840s, with O'Connell deliberately bringing the 'People' more to the fore in political argument. The most striking example of this was, of course, the 'monster' meetings of

[87] Fitzpatrick, *Correspondence of O'Connell*, i, p. 397.
[88] K. Theodore Hoppen, *Elections, Politics, and Society in Ireland, 1832–1885* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 2.
[89] 'Result of the election', *Citizen*, vol. 4, no. 23 (1841), p. 109.
[90] Bullen, *Five Reports of the Committee of the Precursor Association*, pp. 5, 10.
[91] John O'Connell, *Letters to Friends in Connaught, Respectfully Addressed to Various Parties in that Province* (Dublin: J. Browne, 1843), p. 33.

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1843, dubbed at the time by the O'Connellites as the 'Repeal Year'. These outdoor rallies, attended by hundreds of thousands of people in some cases, have been described as a mode of 'constitutional intimidation' by one historian, and a 'people's festival' by another, both of which illuminate different aspects of the tactic.[92] The monster meetings gave a visible form to the 'People', bolstering the popular legitimacy of the Repeal movement within Ireland. This was, however, a top-down process. Indeed, O'Connell and the Repeal Association were wary of the taint of the 'wild democracy', a frequently used term deployed by hostile observers (such as the young Tory, Isaac Butt) to imply mob rule and anarchy.[93] Repeal wardens were given signs to wear on their hats to transform them into 'O'Connell's Police' at the monster meetings, ensuring that order was maintained within the crowd.[94] Democracy, as preached by the Repealers, was respectable in nature, with the 'People' led by responsible men. Much of O'Connell's disdain for the Chartists stemmed from his belief that the people of England were being mobilised by *irresponsible* men. 'The Chartists are the best allies of the Tories', O'Connell bitterly complained in 1839, because they 'drive from the support of the popular cause all the timid, almost all the wealthy, and very many of the middle classes'. Chartist attempts to organise in Ireland were, in his view, an attempt to contaminate Repeal with criminality and violence.[95] O'Connell's assertion that the agitation for Repeal should be 'peaceable and legal' – 'there should be no threat, no menace' – stood in stark contrast to the Chartist mantra of 'peacefully if we can – forcibly if we must'.[96]

As these differences suggested, the Repeal Association's thinking on the electoral franchise was profoundly shaped by ideas of respectability. The O'Connellites formally favoured a franchise based on household suffrage (thus maintaining a property bar on voting), which brought the movement closer to the middle-class liberals of the Anti-Corn Law League than the Chartists.[97] The Association thus balanced appeals to democratic sentiment

[92] McCaffrey, *O'Connell and the Repeal Year*, p. 51; MacDonagh, *Emancipist*, p. 229.
[93] Isaac Butt, *Repeal of the Union: the Substance of a Speech Delivered in the Corporation of Dublin, on 28th February, 1843, on Mr O'Connell's Motion to Petition for a Repeal of the Legislative Union* (Dublin: William Curry, Jr. and Co., 1843), p. 28.
[94] Loyal National Repeal Association of Ireland scrapbook, Ray papers, Burns Library, MS2007-019, file 1/11.
[95] *Morning Post*, 20 August 1839. For the difficulties that Irish Chartists faced, see Kinealy, 'Brethren in bondage', pp. 91–4.
[96] Daniel O'Connell, *First Series of Reports of the Loyal National Repeal Association of Ireland, with a Dedication to the People of Ireland* (Dublin: J. Browne, 1840), p. vii.
[97] Ibid., p. 5.

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with opposition to universal suffrage, with a prominent place given to respectability. An instructional booklet for Repeal wardens (the grassroots organisers of the national campaign across Ireland, tasked with organising the collection of the Repeal Rent) stated that the first qualification for the job was the possession of a 'good moral character', and the second was the necessity of clergy support.[98] The involvement of the clergy in O'Connellite politics was one of its most contentious features – the northern publisher, William McComb, for one, deployed the popular mantra that Repeal was an unscrupulous attempt to create a Catholic ascendancy[99] – but clerical support aided the optics of respectability.

While O'Connell was criticised by opponents for his demagoguery, his leadership was an exercise in tempering the excess of a mass movement that challenged the status quo. Democracy was, in O'Connell's mind, a political arrangement in which a wide franchise was in operation, but the structure of power remained centred on a small number of representatives. A political movement with a strong leader, centralised power, and clergy support was, therefore, entirely consistent with O'Connellite democratic principles. In his insightful study of Ireland from 1838, the French politician and writer Gustave de Beaumont recorded that O'Connell exercised 'a sort of dictatorship' over the Irish people, despite not possessing any state power. An astonished Beaumont wrote that 'I do not know if, in the history of nations, a single example of such a destiny could be found'. The Repeal movement was an 'empire of a single man'.[100] This was the achievement of O'Connell: he became (and self-identified as) the personification of Irish popular sovereignty. Such was O'Connell's grip over the popular mind in Ireland that Beaumont affirmed the revolutionary potential of the Repeal movement. 'The purpose is to prepare a petition to parliament', mused Beaumont, 'but what would be the result if, instead of asking for petitions, the association demanded bayonets?'[101] He did not provide an answer.

For all the revolutionary potential of the crowd in 1843, the rhetoric used by senior figures in the movement channelled the democratic idiom away from expressions of popular sovereignty and towards an ideal of a

[98] *Instructions for the Appointment of Repeal Wardens and Collectors of the Repeal Fund* (Dublin: J. Browne, 1843), p. 5.
[99] William McComb, *The Repealer Repulsed! A Correct Narrative of the Rise and Progress of the Repeal Invasion of Ulster*, ed. Patrick Maume (Dublin: UCD Press, 2003; first published 1841), p. 4.
[100] Gustave de Beaumont, *Ireland: Social, Political and Religious*, ed. W. C. Taylor (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006; first published 1839), pp. 224, 228.
[101] Ibid., p. 220.

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meaningful mixed constitution. O'Connell regularly spoke warmly of the institution of the monarchy, and especially the person of Victoria.[102] His *History of Ireland*, published in 1843, was dedicated to 'the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland', and affirmed the determination of the Irish people 'to preserve their allegiance to the Throne', despite continued British misrule.[103] Explicit loyalty to the Crown was also coupled with an appeal to another component of the mixed constitution, namely the aristocratic element. While landlordism in Ireland was equated with conquest, Repealers hoped that the Irish gentry would take their place as natural leaders of the nation within an Irish parliament. O'Neill Daunt argued that the 'national spirit' of the Irish aristocracy had waned because of a lack of a domestic parliament, which had deprived Ireland of powerful and connected political advocates.[104] If the aristocracy aligned themselves with the wider population of Ireland, they could claim a sense of popular legitimacy, offering the potential for more harmonious class-based relationships on the land.[105]

The creation of an Irish mixed constitution was most developed by John O'Connell in a pamphlet from 1844. Irish Repealers desired 'a full and free representation of the people', he asserted, but this was balanced by a devotion to constitutional monarchy and the ideal (if not the current practice) of a paternalistic aristocracy. A restored legislature would provide checks and balances to the different component parts, be it the democracy, lords, or Crown. Indeed, O'Connell posited this vision of Repeal as potentially the only constitutional method that could restrain the political anger of the masses. 'A most certain means of preventing the spread of extreme democracy in Ireland' could only be realised, O'Connell argued,

> By the wealthier and titled classes putting themselves at the head of the popular movement. This once done, and done heartily, they would soon find their legitimate influence far more than sufficient to check the tendencies so dreaded, and to keep the popular mind within limits that the most timid could desire.[106]

[102] For the pro-monarchist sentiment within Repeal politics, see James H. Murphy, *Abject Loyalty: Nationalism and Monarchy in Ireland during the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001).

[103] Daniel O'Connell, *A Memoir on Ireland: Vol. 1: 1172–1660* (Dublin: Charles Dolman, 1843), p. vi. This was the only volume that was published.

[104] William J. O'Neill Daunt, *Mr Daunt's Speech at the Repeal Association, in Refutation of the Anti-Repeal Fallacies Adopted from Spring Rice and Others by Lord Shrewsbury, also Mr Daunt's Speech at the Meeting Held in Edinburgh for Repeal* (Dublin: J. Browne, 1843), p. 9.

[105] William J. O'Neill Daunt, *Ireland and Her Agitators* (Dublin: John Browne, 1845), p. 140.

[106] John O'Connell, *An Argument for Ireland* (Dublin: John Browne, 1844), p. 27.

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The attraction of a mixed constitution for a self-governing Ireland, led by aristocrats and property owners, gave Repeal a civic humanist tinge, more in line with the thought of Polybius, the ancient Greek authority on the Roman constitution, than the radical democratic ideas of Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès (or, indeed, in an Irish context, Theobald Wolfe Tone).[107] The images of O'Connell, Grattan, and Flood on the revived 'Volunteers of 1782' membership certificate were joined by hereditary rulers from the distant past, including the semi-fictitious High King Nath Í mac Fiachrach and the Earl of Tyrone, Hugh O'Neill.[108] The Repeal cause was built on the ideal of democracy but pined for ancient lineages and aristocratic patronage.[109]

Young and Old Ireland

Daniel O'Connell drew on the language of the 'nation' in asserting the case for the Repeal of the Union. He was fond of repeating Barrington's critique of the Union, which equated self-government with nationhood; anything less rendered a country merely a province.[110] O'Connell, however, had little time for mythic and romantic conceptions of nationhood that were coming increasingly into vogue throughout Europe during the 1830s and 1840s. While the Repeal of the Union was presented as righting a historical wrong – chiefly a centuries-old conquest, which culminated in the extinguishing of national parliament – it is striking how little O'Connell deployed arguments based on the *distinctiveness* of the Irish as a nation. During his four-hour keynote speech on Repeal at the Dublin Corporation in 1843, O'Connell's use of the 'nation' was as a collective term for the 'people'. He drew on a form of ancient constitutionalism, based on English notions of liberty, rather than the notion of timeless nationality to explain the aspiration for Repeal:

> As fast as men congregated under the standard of the English in this country, the privilege of being represented was an essential part of their rights. That was the universal custom that prevailed ... Ireland had a

[107] For Polybius and the idea of a balanced constitution, see Donald Walter Baronowski, *Polybius and Roman Imperialism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), pp. 154–5.

[108] Loyal National Repeal Association of Ireland scrapbook, Ray papers, Burns Library, MS2007-019, file 1/4.

[109] So too did elements within Chartism: see Chase, *Chartism*, p. 13.

[110] Daniel O'Connell, *Repeal of the Union: Mr O'Connell's Address to the Jury in the Case of the King vs Barrett, Proprietor of the Pilot; Delivered in the Court of King's Bench. On Tuesday, November 26th, 1833* (Dublin: P. Byrne, 1833), p. 37; *Instructions for the Appointment of Repeal Wardens*, p. 3.

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> parliament as old as England; it rose spontaneously from the congregation of freemen . . . It had existed, not, as I have said, as a favour, a concession, or a grant, but the inherent right of freedom.[111]

The right to a domestic parliament, therefore, came from Ireland's timeless constitutional inheritance, not its nationality *in of itself*.

A new newspaper associated with the Repeal Association, called the *Nation*, glowingly reported on O'Connell's speech, praising the Repeal chief's detailed case against the Union.[112] The *Nation* was established in 1842 by three youthful members of the Repeal Association: Thomas Davis, an enigmatic Trinity College Dublin educated Protestant; Charles Gavan Duffy, an industrious Catholic newspaper editor; and John Blake Dillon, a recently qualified Catholic lawyer. This was the nucleus of the grouping that became known as 'Young Ireland', which also included talented writers and orators such as John Mitchel and Thomas Francis Meagher.[113] The Young Irelanders used the *Nation* and other publications to glorify Irish nationality, stressing its mythic and historic qualities.[114] This was a rather different interpretation of history from that deployed by O'Connell, one that emphasised the self-contained legitimacy of the ancient Irish nation rather than the existence of English liberties in Ireland.[115] Irish sovereignty radiated naturally from the nation, but the nation demanded training to harness its potential. The Young Irelanders self-consciously aimed to fulfil this role within Irish society. As Duffy recorded with characteristic modesty in his memoir, 'the *Nation* was not a journal designed to chronicle the small beer of current politics, but to teach opinions'.[116]

The main 'opinion' advanced by Duffy and his initial partners in the venture of the *Nation*, Davis and Dillon, was that the Irish were an ancient nation with a historic right to self-government rooted in the distinctiveness of the people. While the campaign to Repeal the Union promised the resumption of a parliament in Dublin, the Young Irelanders were concerned about the capacity of the Irish genius to fulfil its national potential

[111] Levy, *Three Days' Discussion in the Dublin Corporation*, p. 21. [112] *Nation*, 4 March 1843.
[113] T. F. O'Sullivan, *The Young Irelanders* (Tralee: Kerryman Ltd., 1944) is indispensable for biographical details on individuals associated with the movement.
[114] For an excellent overview, see Ann Andrews, *Newspapers and Newsmakers: The Dublin Nationalist Press in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), pp. 18–130.
[115] James Quinn, *Young Ireland: The Writing of Irish History* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2015). David Dwan, *The Great Community: Culture and Nationalism in Ireland* (Dublin: Field Day, 2008), pp. 32–5.
[116] Charles Gavan Duffy, *My Life in Two Hemispheres*, 2 vols. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898), p. 65.

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in such a scenario. The first edition of the *Nation* protested a creeping Anglicisation that was eradicating the unique aura of the Irish character, creating a sycophantic national mindset.[117] In this analysis, political self-government was not enough; intellectual self-government was required to truly realise Irish freedom. The Young Ireland mission explicitly connected education to freedom, with the recovery of a national culture critical to Irish political regeneration.[118] For Davis and the Young Irelanders, the nation was the fundamental building block of political and cultural life, an idea that would resonate well beyond the 1840s.[119]

The influential ideas of the Italian nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini – culture as part of the national struggle, the importance of education, the openness to the use of violence – are commonly associated with Young Ireland.[120] Certainly, the Young Irelanders empathised with the Mazzinian impulse to cultivate the national self as a precursor to meaningful government. For Thomas Davis, political freedom meant the development of a distinctive consciousness, underpinned by the revitalisation of the 'native' language, the writing of a lionised history, and the sponsoring of national art and literature. The library was as much a political space to ferment national liberation as the chambers of a parliament. While the Repeal Association was Ireland's primary national movement, Davis believed that it should be sponsoring cultural revitalisation as part of its political mission, setting up reading rooms around the country, and publishing a bilingual newspaper.[121]

The priority that Davis placed on such cultural-based activism has been traditionally interpreted as a manifestation of 'romantic nationalism', but an over-reliance on this concept can obscure the Young Irelanders' understanding of, and contribution to, contemporary political ideas.[122] The Young Ireland-inspired 'cultural turn' in Irish writing was an attempt to assert the sovereignty of the Irish nation within the spiritual realm, a rather different thing from the O'Connellite focus on Ireland's appropriate

[117] *Nation*, 15 October 1842.
[118] Charles Gavan Duffy, *Young Ireland: A Fragment of Irish History, 1840–1845* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1896), p. 53.
[119] Christopher Morash, *Young Ireland: A Global Afterlife* (New York: New York University Press, 2023), p. 193.
[120] Michael Huggins, 'The *Nation* and Giuseppe Mazzini', *New Hibernia Review*, vol. 17, no. 3 (2013), pp. 15–33, esp. p. 20.
[121] Thomas Davis, *The Prose Writings of Thomas Davis*, ed. T. W. Rolleston (London: Walter Scott, n. d. [1890]), pp. 208–11.
[122] A point made in David Dwan, 'Romantic nationalism: history and illusion in Ireland', *Modern Intellectual History*, vol. 14, no. 3 (2017), pp. 717–45.

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constitutional apparatus, but no less *political*.[123] This body of work was underpinned by certain assumptions concerning the rights of citizens, political economy, and popular sovereignty. Davis should not be viewed only through his dreamy writings on ballads, poems, and songs: he, and other Young Irelanders, wrote hard-headed commentaries on day-to-day political matters that at times clashed with opinion within the wider Repeal movement. The Young Irelanders rebuked O'Connell for his flirtation with federalism.[124] Davis developed a French-inspired form of political economy that prioritised small landholders, rejecting the free-trade doctrines popular within the O'Connellite leadership.[125] There were, then, clear lines of demarcation on key political questions between the Young Irelanders and 'Old Ireland'. The final split that occurred between the Young Irelanders (who regrouped as a formal organisation called the Irish Confederation) and the Repeal Association in 1846 should not be read as the logical outcome of irreconcilable 'romantic' and 'enlightenment' ideologies, but as profoundly *political* disagreements.

Davis, like Mazzini, pushed the idea of 'culture' as a unifying force; like the Italian, he also articulated a form of popular sovereignty that reimagined the relationship between the citizen and the state. Mazzini affirmed in 1832 that the ideal of representative government rested on the 'nation', the 'only sovereign' in a political society. A national government was one that reflected and represented the diversity of the nation itself.[126] The contents of the *Nation* chimed with this sentiment. The first issue rejected all political and religious labels that divided the Irish people. The paper denounced the Irish aristocracy for abusing their position of privilege and creating a 'master and slave' relationship with their tenants, but also echoed O'Connellite hope for the propertied class to align themselves with, rather than against, the nation.[127] The defection of William Smith O'Brien, a Conservative MP for Limerick County and member of one of the most ancient families in Ireland, to the Repeal cause in 1843 was a real coup in this regard. On making the shift, O'Brien lamented that Ireland

[123] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 6, 9.
[124] *Nation*, 2 November 1844.
[125] James Stafford, *The Case of Ireland: Commerce, Empire and the European Order, 1750–1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 240–1.
[126] Giuseppe Mazzini, 'On the superiority of representative government', in Stefano Recchia and Nadia Urbinati (eds.), *A Cosmopolitanism of Nations: Giuseppe Mazzini's Writings of Democracy, National Building and International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 50.
[127] *Nation*, 3 December 1842.

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had 'sunk into a feeling of settled despair of obtaining good government for their country through the instrumentality of British legislation', and believed that other members of the aristocracy would follow suit.[128] Davis, however, was more downbeat on the potential for Irish landlords to assume leadership roles, pointing out that a classical republican framework – in which the aristocracy found purpose within 'local institutions' and 'corporate rights' – had little basis in the Irish historical experience.[129]

Despite this, classical republicanism was a critical component of the Young Ireland mentality. In his address to the Historical Society at Trinity College in 1840, Davis made the very Davisian point that students can study 'difficult literature of any foreigners, ancient or ancient', but understanding can only occur through the embrace of 'native literature'. The latter taught students how to 'think and feel'.[130] That said, Davis's writings are replete with flourishes from Aristotle and Cicero, emphasising the need to cultivate civic virtue for the common good of a polity. In the same address at TCD, Davis quoted Cicero in advocating a republican conception of citizenship:

> You must act as citizens, and it is well, 'non nobis solum nati sumus, ortûsque nostra partem patria vindicat' ['we are not born for ourselves alone, but our country claims for itself one part of our birth'].[131] Patriotism once *felt* to be a *duty* becomes so. To act in politics is a matter of duty everywhere; here, of necessity. To make that action honourable to yourselves, and serviceable to your country, is a matter of choice . . . You now abound in patriotism, and are sceptical of public corruption . . . You will be solicited to become the barking misleaders of a faction . . . Be jealous of your honour and your virtue *then*; yield not.[132]

The *Nation* frequently published articles that drew on other classical republican themes, such as the ideal of the armed citizen (the supreme defender of liberty) and the binary condition of the freeman and slave.[133] 'Ireland has been a land of slaves', the *Nation* pronounced in 1843, 'we step within it unfettered, the first generation of partial freemen'.[134] The *Nation's* unwavering support for the right of Irish people to bear arms was not a precursor of Young Ireland militancy, but a manifestation of a

[128] William Smith O'Brien, *Speeches of William Smith O'Brien, Esq., on the Causes of Discontent in Ireland*, 2nd ed. (Dublin: J. Browne, 1843), p. 7.
[129] Davis, *Prose Writings*, p. 280. [130] Ibid., p. 16.
[131] I have taken the translation from Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1:22.
[132] Davis, *Prose Writings*, pp. 39–40. Emphases in original.
[133] See, for example, *Nation*, 28 November 1842. [134] *Nation*, 30 September 1843.

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republican ideal of liberty. 'To carry arms is the first right of man', Davis wrote, 'for arms are the guardians of property, honour, and life'.[135]

The use of such classical republican tropes was, of course, not new in Ireland, nor was it unique in a contemporaneous global context.[136] There was, however, an obvious difficulty with the practical application of the political ideas associated with ancient city states in the modern world, and, indeed, classical republicanism was superseded by liberalism as the ideological expression of liberty *par excellence* during the nineteenth century.[137] But what made the writings of the Young Irelanders so compelling was the ability of Davis and other writers to blend this political tradition, based on rights and duties, with the ideal of the nation, creating a civic and political form of Irishness. Davis's most famous ballad, 'A Nation Once Again', written in 1844, constructed the national ideal as a renewed expression of classical patriotism:

> When boyhood's fire was in my blood,
> I read of ancient freemen,
> For Greece and Rome who bravely stood,
> Three hundred men and three men.[138]
> And then I prayed I yet might see
> Our fetters rent in twain,
> And Ireland, long a province, be
> A nation once again.[139]

The nation, as an entity constructed on classical republican norms of duty, had little time for religious differences or exclusive claims by any denomination to an Irish identity. Young Ireland's dogged assertion of the need for secular education in Ireland, which ran afoul of the O'Connell-Catholic clergy alliance and caused a major split in the movement in 1845, should also be seen in this republican light.[140]

[135] Davis, *Prose Writings*, p. 282; *Nation*, 1 July 1843.
[136] For Irish manifestations, see Stephen Small, *Political Thought in Ireland, 1776–1798: Republicanism, Patriotism and Radicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 83–112. The classic text charting the spread of classical republicanism is J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003; first published 1975).
[137] Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 1–2.
[138] This refers to the 300 Spartans who fought to the death at the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BC, and the three Romans who held the Pons Sublicius bridge in 509 BC.
[139] Thomas Davis, *The Poems of Thomas Davis: With Notes, Historical Illustrations, etc., and an Introduction by John Mitchel* (New York: P. M. Haverty, 1860), p. 93.
[140] Quinn, *Young Ireland*, pp. 87–8.

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Davis died at the age of thirty-one in 1845, just as the first ominous signs of the Famine came to light. The project of the *Nation* continued with what Duffy called the 'new men', with Thomas Francis Meagher, Thomas D'Arcy McGee, Thomas Devin Reilly, John Martin, and John Mitchel coming to the fore as journalists and Repeal activists.[141] Mitchel became the *Nation's* chief writer following the death of Davis. He, more than any of his contemporaries, was enraptured by the writings of Thomas Carlyle, which revolted against liberal and Benthamite notions of 'progress'. While Carlyle depicted Irish migrants to British towns in ghastly racist terms, his real target was industrialisation and the ubiquity of Ricardo-inspired laissez-faire doctrines of political economy, both of which he believed debased humanity through the prioritisation of material gain.[142] In this sense, Carlyle was speaking the language of Mitchel and other Young Irelanders, who were also at war with liberal modernity in their pursuit of reinvigorating the Irish national character.[143]

Mitchel, inspired by Carlyle, attacked the economic power of the British as a contributing factor in the degradation of Irish national character. As the world's most successful purveyor of mechanisation and industrial capitalism, Britain was, in Mitchel's reading, a modern Hades, sapping the creativity and dignity of the population.[144] The new 'science' of political economy, according to Mitchel, provided cover for the propagation of opulent materialism, with cheap foreign goods weakening local production and undermining national distinctiveness.[145] While laissez-faire doctrines were very much in vogue with the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, the Young Ireland interpretation positioned such a take on political economy as an extension of British control over Ireland. The leading advocate of free trade, David Ricardo, believed that the 'pursuit of individual advantage is

[141] Charles Gavan Duffy, *Four Years of Irish History, 1845–1849: A Sequel to 'Young Ireland'* (London: Cassell, Petter, Galpin, and Co., 1883), p. 7.

[142] The classic depiction of Carlyle as an anti-Irish racist is L. Perry Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*, revised ed. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996; first published 1971). This has been contested by John Morrow, 'Thomas Carlyle, "Young Ireland" and the "condition of Ireland question"', *Historical Journal*, vol. 51, no. 3 (2008), pp. 643–67.

[143] R. F. Foster, *Words Alone: Yeats and His Inheritances* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 49.

[144] James Quinn, 'John Mitchel and the rejection of the nineteenth century', *Éire-Ireland*, vol. 38 (2003), p. 92.

[145] Michael Huggins, 'A strange case of hero-worship: John Mitchel and Thomas Carlyle', *Studi Irlandesi*, no. 2 (2012), pp. 329–52.

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admirably connected with universal good of the whole'.[146] Mitchel, however, rejected such a reading. Chiming with eighteenth-century critics of free trade, he argued that so-called universalist political economic theories hid a power dynamic that merely perpetuated the power of rich countries.[147] Mitchel asserted that political economy, as espoused by Britain, was the language of aggression, and, far from serving 'universal good', it possessed a jingoistic national identity.[148]

The logic of Mitchel's stance was that, if laissez-faire doctrines were 'British', then protectionism was an 'Irish' form of political economy. Indeed, such protectionist logic, associating free trade with British dominance, was a wider European concern. French protectionists infused economic argument with 'Anglophobia', fearing the dominance of Britain in a free-trade era.[149] Mitchel's sentiments also chimed with the German theorist Friedrich List, who made the case that every nation should be allowed to decide the protectionist framework to develop its distinctive productive powers.[150] While there were protectionists within pockets of British and Irish political economic thinking (such as George Poulett Scrope, who argued that Irish agriculture risked annihilation in a free-trade scenario), it was Mitchel who most starkly presented the incompatibility of Britain and Ireland.[151] At the height of the Famine, Mitchel published a short edition of writings by Jonathan Swift and George Berkeley under the sardonic title *Irish Political Economy*. The tone of his preface was bitter: 'Now, as then [the 1720s], if Irishmen are hungry, it is that Englishmen may be filled'. England did not starve, Mitchel asserted, because it was governed by Englishmen. The cause of the Famine, the reason why Ireland's rural population was wretched and destitute, was that the Irish had submitted to be 'ruled by strangers' who imposed foreign

[146] David Ricardo, *The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (London: John Murray, 1817), p. 156.
[147] Istvan Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith*, ed. Béla Kapossy and Michael Sonenscher (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 128.
[148] Thomas A. Boylan and Timothy P. Foley, *Political Economy and Colonial Ireland: The Propagation and Ideological Function of Economic Discourse in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 8.
[149] David Todd, *Free Trade and Its Enemies in France, 1814–1851* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 14–15.
[150] Keith Tribe, *Strategies of Economic Order: German Economic Discourse, 1750–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 55.
[151] George Poulett Scrope, *How is Ireland to be Governed? A Question Addressed to the New Administration of Lord Melbourne in 1834, with a Postscript, in which the same question is addressed to the Administration of Sir Robert Peel in 1846* (London: James Ridgway, 1846), p. 40.

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economic ideas on the country.[152] The connection between representative government and political economy was also taken up by Mitchel's Young Ireland colleague Thomas Francis Meagher. In 1846, Meagher claimed that the inability of the Irish to wield political power left the country vulnerable to the toxic influence of 'foreign' economic ideas. This produced a crippling anomaly: 'the Irish belong to Ireland' but 'Ireland does not belong to the Irish'.[153] The lack of representative government was the reason why, in the minds of those behind the *Nation*, Ireland was starving.

Mitchel and Meagher swiftly became the most prominent militant voices within Young Ireland. The tone of the *Nation* became more Anglophobic.[154] Rather than follow O'Connell in making constitutional peace with the British, Mitchel, increasingly radicalised by the dreadful scenes of Famine and the grotesquely inadequate Whig government response from 1846, preached the message of hatred.[155] His contribution to the political discourse was a potent fusion of anti-modern romanticism and intense nationalism driven by a thirst for vengeance.[156] The politicisation of hatred created a space within the imagination of Young Ireland for violence. As early as November 1845, Mitchel advocated destroying railways to hinder the British Army in Ireland and used the word 'ambush' in reference to troops. The following year, Meagher proclaimed that the 'patriot's sword' was a 'sacred weapon' that never should be disowned, a direct refutation of O'Connell's vehement opposition to violence.[157] While Davis was canonised by his Young Ireland peers, including Mitchel, as a prophet of national rejuvenation, his quixotic idealism and classical inflections were largely jettisoned in favour of a more robust and confrontational style.[158] But for all their increasing belligerency, the Young Irelanders largely remained wedded to the ideal of Repeal of the Union as a framework for self-government. In 1846, the *Nation* published an article entitled 'Repeal vs the Repeal Association', which cast those in favour of

[152] John Mitchel (ed.), *Irish Political Economy, by Jonathan Swift, Dean of St Patrick's and George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne* (Dublin: Irish Confederation, 1847), pp. iv–v.
[153] Thomas Francis Meagher, *Speeches on the Legislative Independence of Ireland* (New York: Renfield, 1853), p. 40.
[154] Morash, *Young Ireland*, p. 37.
[155] Peter Gray, *Famine, Land and Politics: British Government and Irish Society, 1843–1850* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1999) is the most lucid account of the government's response to the Famine.
[156] Michael Huggins, 'John Mitchel and his biographers', *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 38, no. 150 (2012), p. 255.
[157] *Nation*, 22 November 1845; ibid., p. 89.
[158] See, for example, Mitchel's introduction to Davis, *Poems*, and the celebratory Charles Gavan Duffy, *Thomas Davis: The Memoirs of an Irish Patriot* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, and Co., 1890).

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the theoretical right of physical force (i.e. the Young Irelanders) as the true Repealers, with the 'moral force' side (the 'Old Irelanders') dismissed as unpatriotic 'place hunters' who had lost their way by cosying up to the Whig party.[159] As late as September 1847, Thomas D'Arcy McGee delivered a lecture that pressed for a new political dispensation that resembled the classic O'Connellite vision, with the 'restoration' of the Irish constitution and recognising the British monarch as the 'Queen of Ireland'.[160] In a rebuff to the Whig Prime Minister, John, Lord Russell, in 1846, the *Nation* stressed that it did not advocate 'separation [between Ireland and Britain] as its end, but National Independence'.[161] Critically, there was still a distinction between the two, despite the increasing pugnacity of the Mitchelite wing of Young Ireland. Duffy later recorded that, for all the fury of Mitchel in 1847, he was not thinking of 'separation or a republic'.[162] The turn to separatism *as* national independence came only in 1848, as revolution swept across Europe.

While the need for self-government was pressed throughout the Famine years, the design of such a scheme was lost in the noise surrounding the debate over the legitimacy of political violence and the subsequent split within the Repeal movement. With O'Connell's death in 1847 and the seemingly unstoppable spread of hunger and disease in the countryside, the Repeal cause essentially became defunct. O'Connell had supported the Whigs as the surest way to deliver positive changes to Irish policy on their return to power in 1846, but was confronted by the brutal truth of laissez-faire. After John O'Connell spoke of his hope for reconciliation between Young and Old Ireland – on the proviso that the *Nation* renounced the right to resort to violence – Mitchel issued a characteristically barbed response:

> The physical force that won the freedom of France, Greece, and Belgium, in his [John O'Connell] own memory, cost fewer human lives than the Whigs have sacrificed to Political Economy, since the day of the Secession.[163]

The fateful irony was that Young Ireland itself split over the issue of violence at the end of 1847. Mitchel advocated a radical programme of passive resistance and the withdrawal of rents, with the possibility of physical force held in reserve. A vote was taken in the Confederation and Mitchel lost: he was removed from his position of prominence in the

[159] *Nation*, 31 October 1846. [160] *Nation*, 2 October 1847. [161] *Nation*, 27 June 1846.
[162] Duffy, *Four Years*, p. 170. [163] *Nation*, 10 April 1847.

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Nation. The more moderate Young Irelanders, such as Duffy and Smith O'Brien, were appalled by Mitchel's scheme, worrying that it would provide a green light for a crackdown on their circle. While they could accept the *theoretical* right to use violence in 1846, the turn to *actual* violence was of course more testing, at least at this time.[164]

The revolution in France in February 1848 changed everything. Despite fracturing over the appropriate role of passive resistance and violence only months before, a Young Ireland delegation visited the Second Republic to secure backing for a rebellion. They received the disappointing news that the French were unwilling to engage in an offensive against the United Kingdom.[165] Nonetheless, from April, the *Nation* commenced a regular series of articles called 'The Irish Revolution', which collected news of pike training and drilling from around the country.[166] After his dismissal from the *Nation*, Mitchel founded the *United Irishman* newspaper, which, with its name and political message, cultivated a cult of '1798'. It was in the pages of the *United Irishman* that the uncompromising tone of Mitchel's future works, such as *Jail Journal* (1854) and *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)* (1860), was debuted. The *United Irishman* claimed to speak for 'pauper public opinion', and published columns headed 'Our War Department', which gave instructions on drilling and using pikes.[167]

Mitchel's transformation into 'the voice of the poor' may have been in part the influence of a relative newcomer to the Young Ireland circle, James Fintan Lalor. Lalor was the son of a prominent Repealer but rejected his father's faith in O'Connell during the Famine. Lalor articulated an ideal of national independence that fused political self-government *and* popular ownership of the land throughout 1847 and 1848. This was a strikingly original perspective at the time; but Lalor was not, however, a straightforward separatist. While he condemned 'simple Repeal' as constitutionally absurd, as he was certain that two unequal legislatures under the Crown would inevitably reproduce a familiar pattern of dominance and submission, Lalor advocated a federalist scheme based on the US model.[168] So, while he emotively suggested that 'Tone and Lord Edward [Fitzgerald]

[164] Andrews, *Newspapers*, p. 114.
[165] Christine Kinealy, *Repeal and Revolution: 1848 in Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 146.
[166] *Nation*, 1, 15, 29 April, 6 May 1848. [167] *United Irishman*, 15 April 1848.
[168] James P. Bruce, *Ireland's Hope: The 'Peculiar Theories' of James Fintan Lalor* (Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, 2020), p. 23.

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died' to destroy the tie between Ireland and Britain, Lalor was not, like his heroes from 1798, calling for an Irish republic.[169]

Lalor was in fact closer to the agrarian reformer, William Connor, than Theobald Wolfe Tone. Connor published *The True Political Economy of Ireland*, a radical call for legislative intervention to abolish 'rank-rent', 'the great master evil in Ireland', in 1835.[170] Both Connor and Lalor used the eighteenth-century authority on English common law, William Blackstone, for radical means, detaching his mantra that the earth was 'the general property of all mankind' from his later (conservative) assumption that the first occupier was the legitimate owner of the land.[171] Connor reasoned that the 'industrious man' was the legitimate occupier of the soil, not the 'indolent' aristocrat; Lalor went further, rejecting the premise that the first occupier could be defined.[172] What was left in this critique of Blackstone was a model of land ownership constructed on natural rights and justice. But what made Lalor's writings unique was their coupling of popular ownership of the land and self-government, a vision of national independence that fused the political and the social. Through a series of articles, first in the *Nation*, and then in the provocatively named *Irish Felon*, Lalor robustly asserted that the Repeal of the Union was meaningless unless the 'conquest' was also repealed.[173] Such a seismic change could only be secured through arms, but Lalor legitimised the use of revolutionary violence as the pathway to the creation of a land tenure system based on consent rather than conquest. As it was the right of man to possess land, which was God's creation, reasoned Lalor, man had the duty to resist the breach of this natural law.[174]

In his detailed account of these years, Duffy claimed that Mitchel was 'fascinated' by the radical ideas of Lalor.[175] Mitchel's overt appeals to the rural peasant in the *United Irishman* to reclaim 'Ireland for the Irish' certainly had echoes of Lalor's combativeness, while also revealing that Mitchel had overcome a Carlylean (and wider Young Irelander, it should be said) appeal for the aristocracy to assume their natural position as the

[169] *Irish Felon*, 1 July 1848; reprinted in L. Fogarty (ed.), *James Fintan Lalor, Patriot and Political Essayist, 1807–1849* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1918), pp. 78–80.

[170] William Connor, *The True Political Economy of Ireland: or, Rank-Rent the One Great Cause of all her Evils: with its Remedy* (Dublin: W. F. Wakeman, 1835), p. xii. For Lalor's connection to Connor, see Marta Rámon's excellent introduction to James Fintan Lalor, *'Faith of a Felon' and Other Writings*, ed. Marta Rámon (Dublin: UCD Press, 2012), pp. 8–11.

[171] William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1765; first published 1763), ii, p. 2.

[172] Connor, *True Political Economy*, p. 12; Lalor, *'Faith of a Felon'*, p. 137.

[173] Lalor, *'Faith of a Felon'*, p. 102. [174] Ibid., pp. 100–1. [175] Duffy, *Four Years*, p. 476.

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leaders of the people.[176] Duffy, who loathed Mitchel, mocked the idea that starving Irish peasants could be transformed into a revolutionary army.[177] Lalor, for his part, penned a lengthy think piece in the *Irish Felon* on 1 July, which suggested that the only alternative to armed resistance was the obliteration of the peasant. The Famine had started a revolution on the land, Lalor warned, but it threatened to 'leave Ireland *without a people*, unless it be met and conquered by a revolution which will leave it without landlords'.[178]

The irony was that when the rising in the countryside came in late July 1848, it was led not by Mitchel (whose writings saw him convicted of treason-felony two months previously), nor Lalor (who was arrested days before), but Duffy's faction of Young Ireland, under the 'military' leadership of William Smith O'Brien. O'Brien issued a proclamation on behalf of the Confederation in May that asserted the right to arm to protect Ireland 'from all foes'.[179] In July, Russell's government cracked down on perceived seditious movements in Ireland, authorising the raid of the office of the *Nation*, the suppression of various Irish radical newspapers, and the arrest of prominent Young Irelanders, including Duffy. Habeas corpus was suspended on 25 July. The remaining Young Irelanders scattered, regrouping in the south to prepare for a rising. The first (and final) shots of rebellion occurred at the end of July, when O'Brien marched to Ballingarry, County Tipperary, with some 1,500 men; after a skirmish with the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), the rebels fled.[180] Thus ended Ireland's '1848'. In retrospective accounts, O'Brien and another prominent Young Irelander, Michael Doheny, blamed the Catholic clergy in the south and west for undermining the rebellion by urging the peasantry not to get involved.[181] The lesson that Doheny took from the experience was that revolutionary success required 'preparation under cover of secrecy', which became a defining aspect of the Fenian movement that he went on to co-found in the following decade.[182]

[176] *United Irishman*, 29 April 1848; Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1843), p. 289.
[177] Duffy, *Four Years*, p. 477.
[178] *Irish Felon*, 1 July 1848; reprinted in Fogarty, *James Fintan Lalor*, p. 81. Emphasis in original.
[179] *Nation*, 6 May 1848.
[180] There is an excellent overview of the rising in Kinealy, *Repeal and Revolution*, pp. 183–210.
[181] John Mitchel, *Jail Journal: or, Five years in British Prisons* (New York: *The Citizen*, 1854), p. 277. Michael Doheny, *The Felon's Track: or, A History of the Late Attempted Outbreak in Ireland* (New York: H. Holbrooke, 1849), p. 92.
[182] Doheny, *Felon's Track*, p. 167.

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The oddity of the rebellion was not the incompetence of the leaders, nor the lack of a popular uprising, but how *inarticulate* Ireland's '1848' was. The politics of Young Ireland fermented in newspapers, ballads, and essays, to the extent that the term 'literary rebellion' has been used to describe the events of 1848.[183] But despite the presence of some of the most gifted writers in Ireland, there was no textual proclamation of the Irish Republic as there had been in 1803 (and, more obviously, as there was in the rebellions of 1867 and 1916). Indeed, it was not clear what the rebels wanted: the leaders felt they had no choice in the face of the suspension of habeas corpus, but this does not mean there was a coherent vision for a revolutionary state. Inspired by the French Revolution earlier that year, the use of the term 'Irish Republic' became more prominent in the public utterances of the Young Irelanders in 1848. At a rally in Clonmel, Co. Tipperary, in April, Smith O'Brien announced to a cheering crowd that

> he only had to state at present, so far as his own personal opinion was of weight, he was in favour of Ireland being governed by the Queen, Lords, and Commons of Ireland. If that was not conceded, his alternative was – an Irish Republic.[184]

This was hardly an ideological preference for a republican form of government. The constitutional vision for a future self-governing Irish polity remained fluid within the Young Ireland mind and continued to follow British constitutional norms.

That said, O'Brien's separatism provides an arresting insight into the radicalisation of Irish opinion that occurred during the Famine. At a meeting of the Irish Confederation the previous month, Duffy warned that this was the last chance for the British government to concede Repeal: withholding self-government was inflaming opinion in Ireland, and 'men will not spill their blood to cement the connexion with England, but to lie like a dead sea between us forever'.[185] Despite this threatening rhetoric, Duffy, like O'Brien, would have been content with 'simple Repeal', with Ireland gaining the same constitutional institutions as Britain. The 'Irish Republic' became a trope deployed by an increasingly volatile separatist impulse within Young Ireland at the height of the tragedy of the Famine. The shape of that Republic, however, remained undefined in the minds of its protagonists.

[183] Richard Davis, *The Young Ireland Movement* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1988), p. 164.
[184] *Nation*, 15 April 1848. [185] *Nation*, 25 March 1848.

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The Persistence of Traditions

In 1846, Robert Holmes published a popular pamphlet with the provocative title, *The Case of Ireland Stated*, a deliberate homage to William Molyneux's famous tract from 1698. The title page was prefaced by a quote from the *Second Treatise of Government* by John Locke that suggested that the 'liberty of man' could only be curtailed by a 'legislative power' that is 'established by consent in the commonwealth'.[186] Holmes married into the Emmet family (he appeared to have no knowledge of the 1803 rebellion, although was arrested on its eve) and became a prominent figure at the Irish Bar, defending a number of Irish political prisoners, including John Mitchel in May 1848.

During Mitchel's trial, Holmes articulated a Lockean contractual theory of the Union to justify his defendant's alleged seditious words. 'Ireland is an enslaved country', Holmes told the jury. He carried on:

> A great mistake, in my opinion, is entertained by persons that there cannot be slavery, that no man can be a slave, except he is actually in chains, or is subject to the lash of the planter who flogs the negro . . . Slavery, gentlemen, the slavery of a people consists in this – that they do not make the laws themselves by which they are governed, but those laws are made for them either by another nation or another individual.

As Holmes conceded, the term 'slavery' had obvious parallels with the worst excesses of the American republic, but he was eager to reclaim the term with its classical humanist connotations.[187] This enabled Holmes to bolster Mitchel's defence with an appeal to natural rights: 'an enslaved people, enslaved contrary to the laws of Providence, has a right, if necessary, by force of arms to obtain liberty even at the hazard of life itself'.[188] This echoed Locke's *Second Treatise*, which colourfully asserted that 'he who makes an attempt to enslave me thereby puts himself into a state of war with me'.[189] Physical force in this instance was a Lockean imperative to combat the unnatural state of political slavery.

Holmes's intervention serves as a useful reminder that Irish political language during the era of the Famine was multifaceted and borrowed

[186] Robert Holmes, *The Case of Ireland Stated*, 5th ed. (Dublin: James McGlashan, 1847), title page.
[187] The irony of deploying such a rhetorical trope in defending Mitchel cannot, however, go without comment.
[188] John George Hodges, *Report of the Trial of John Mitchel for Felony* (Dublin: Alexander Thom, 1848), pp. 42, 45.
[189] John Locke, *Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 2003), p. 269.

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from a number of traditions. Holmes was not an outlier in his embrace of Locke, as O'Connell was fond of quoting from the *Two Treatises* to 'prove' the illegitimacy of the Union. The persistence of such Lockean themes is a reminder that the vocabulary of politics in Ireland during the era of the Famine cannot simply be boiled down into a 'unionist' and 'nationalist' binary. The fact that Holmes deployed ideas from the pages of the *Two Treatises* to defend the violent anti-Englishness of John Mitchel in a court of law speaks volumes for the diversity of Irish political thought. But this should not mask the centrality of one vital assumption within the Irish political mind in the age of O'Connell, shared by all advocates of Repeal. Holmes powerfully concluded his *The Case of Ireland Stated* with a forceful expression of this premise:

> Famine is a scourge which visits nations rarely, and but for a season. The scourge of misgovernment is more frequent, more general, more lasting, and more fatal to the happiness of man.[190]

Many enemies of Repeal, as we shall see, also agreed.

[190] Holmes, *Case of Ireland Stated*, p. 101.

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