Introduction

What was Ireland during the nineteenth century? A kingdom, a colony, or a clandestine republic: the answer was in the eye of the beholder. The Irish parliament existed until 1800 but lacked executive independence and represented a political nation that was exclusively Protestant. Ireland became an integral component of the United Kingdom from 1801 yet retained configurations of colonial government that intermingled with British domestic structures, creating a constitutional apparatus that lacked conceptual clarity. While Ireland was not unique in terms of its ambiguous constitutional framework – the 'state fragments' within the Habsburg Empire that the German jurist, Georg Jellinek, analysed offer parallel examples and terminologies – the tensions arising created uncertainty at the heart of the nineteenth-century British world.[1] The island was framed as a victim of unresponsive imperialism; at the same time, even sympathetic British observers such as John Stuart Mill believed that the Irish lacked the political maturity for independent statehood.[2] Province or nation, kingdom or colony, the deceptively simple question of what Ireland 'was' in the nineteenth century remains deeply contested.[3] By excavating the contested visions of government – from the dying embers of the parliament in Dublin to the origins of Home Rule – this book explores the ways in which observers and protagonists engaged with Ireland's puzzling constitutional position, and how Irish ideas concerning the structures of government were articulated and changed over time.

[1] Natasha Wheatley, *The Life and Death of States: Central Europe and the Transformation of Modern Sovereignty* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023), p. 15.

[2] Bruce L. Kinzer, *England's Disgrace? J. S. Mill and the Irish Question* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), p. 34.

[3] As the essays in the provocatively titled collection by Terrence McDonough suggest: *Was Ireland a Colony? Economics, Politics and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2005). Also see Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 37.

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Many Irish, British, and European observers grappled with Ireland's complex status as a kingdom within the Union state that was governed through colonial structures.[4] This has echoed through historiography, with a well-trodden debate asking whether it is paradoxical that the Irish acted as agents of British imperialism abroad while being a colonised people themselves.[5] Colonial and postcolonial models for examining the case of Ireland have become increasingly influential in recent years, inspired by the disciplinary rise of global history, the 'decolonising' moment within wider society, and the end of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland, the latter of which permitted a franker discussion of the applicability of terminology with polemic meanings.[6] Such frameworks can offer valuable insights, but caution is needed to avoid airbrushing the contradictions of Irish life away to 'fit' a colonial prism. The print culture that underpins the research of this book, for example, suggests that the Irish from the late 1790s through to the period of the Union did not necessarily view themselves as a colonised people. Colonial models of examining the Irish past are useful, but a flexible approach remains essential, one that prioritises historical actors' self-perceptions and avoids imposing anachronistic categorisations on Ireland's multifaceted relationship with empire.[7]

Regardless of the framework for interpreting the constitutional position of Ireland, Irish *distinctiveness* from Britain was clearly a defining feature of the period. Nineteenth-century British observers tended to position Ireland as an alien country with very different political and cultural assumptions than Britain.[8] Indeed, given the painful history of conquest, economic subordination, and religious divisions, integration into the British state was always likely to be a challenging feat. The distinctiveness of Ireland did not fade under the Union but was accelerated by Irish legislation that deviated from British 'norms' in law and order, education, and poor relief.[9] Far from

[4] See, for example, Séamus Ó Síocháin (ed.), *Social Thought on Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2009), and the early pioneering work of Nicholas Mansergh, *The Irish Question, 1840–1921*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975).

[5] This is outlined in Kevin Kenny, 'The Irish in the Empire', in Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 92–3.

[6] Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid et al., 'Round table: decolonising Irish history? Possibilities, challenges, practices', *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 45, no. 168 (2021), pp. 303–32.

[7] This chimes with the approach of Ian McBride, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland: The Isle of Slaves* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2009), p. 8.

[8] See, for example, K. Theodore Hoppen, *Governing Hibernia: British Politicians and Ireland, 1800–1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 89.

[9] Roger Swift and Christine Kinealy (eds.), *Politics and Power in Victorian Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), p. 9; K. Theodore Hoppen, *Elections, Politics, and Society in Ireland, 1832–1885* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. vii.

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erasing Ireland's uniqueness, the Union amplified separateness. This sentiment powerfully shaped Irish political thought throughout the nineteenth century. Indeed, the stark distinctiveness of Ireland was internalised by elements within unionism, which emphasised the need to ensure that 'English theories' of government were influenced by 'Irish facts'.[10] 'Union', to such unionists, meant empowering Irish distinctiveness, not eliminating it.

The French political scientist Gustave de Beaumont witnessed the distinctiveness of Ireland firsthand in his travels through the country during the 1830s. He noted that Irish differences with Britain had become more entrenched since the passage of the Union in 1800. The chief reason for this, according to Beaumont, was that the apparatus of government was imbued with the spirit of conquest, with Ireland treated not as an equal partner within a multinational state but as a conquered territory.[11] Alexis de Tocqueville, who toured Ireland with Beaumont, concurred, noting that the aristocratic British state provided the English with 'one of the best governments that exists in the world' while subjecting the Irish to 'one of the most detestable that could ever be imaged'.[12] Beaumont and Tocqueville positioned Ireland as a consequence of the absence of responsible government, linking misgovernment to the wretched poverty that blighted the countryside, the toxicity of sectarianism, and the distinctive Irish political culture that had flourished since 1800.

The ambiguities of Ireland's constitutional status and the problems of integrating the island into the United Kingdom spurred observers to craft imaginative solutions. The amelioration of Ireland through a more responsive and Irish-focused political economy, centring on the need for substantial land reform, was one such powerful reply favoured by European intellectuals.[13] This conclusion partly rested on the widespread belief among international observers (such as Beaumont and Tocqueville) that transferring political power to Ireland via the creation of an Irish parliament was a flawed answer to the question of misgovernment. The reasons for this judgement included the belief that the Irish lacked the necessary political character to govern a polity, that a self-governing Ireland would

[10] *Dublin University Magazine*, December 1835, pp. 682–96.
[11] Gustave de Beaumont, *Ireland: Social, Political and Religious*, ed. and trans. W. C. Taylor (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006; first published 1839), p. 191.
[12] Emmet Larkin (ed.), *Alexis de Tocqueville's Journey in Ireland, July–August 1835* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1990), pp. 80–1.
[13] This is the main theme of James Stafford, *The Case of Ireland: Commerce, Empire and the European Order, 1750–1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

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come into inevitable conflict with the imperial parliament, and that such an outcome was highly unlikely anyway, given the recent incorporation of Ireland into the Union state.[14] A transformation to political economy was, then, proposed as the soundest method to achieve a better, more legitimate government, while also copper-fastening the Acts of Union.

This diagnosis was not uniformly accepted in Ireland. The strain of 'misgovernment' prompted the rise of more overt constitutional solutions, especially in the reordering of the structures of government. The chief argument of this book is that Irish political thought from the debate over parliamentary union in the 1790s to the emergence of Home Rule in the 1870s was dominated by competing visions of *representative government*. The ideas considered in this book attempted to reconcile (or terminate) Ireland's unique constitutional status within broader British and imperial frameworks, with the aim of producing a more coherent sense of representative government. If the Union produced poor government, this fact prompted a wave of responses that reimagined the structures of power to create good government accountable (in differing forms) to the Irish (however defined).

The ideological disputes covered in this book owed less to ideas of national allegiance and more to the apparatus of power. Conceptions of government dominated Irish political thought, reflecting the contemporary importance of the question of political representation. Indeed, the ability of the institutions of government to positively shape the character of a society was a ubiquitous Enlightenment idea that lingered well into the nineteenth century. The classical Whig definition of liberty as the extent to which a people were governed by laws of their own also held a special resonance in the age of nationalism.[15] These intermingling conceptions of government had a problematic application in Ireland during the nineteenth century. Legislative programmes centring on Ireland were rarely consensual, with governing passions largely dictated by British moods, as apparent in the abrupt swings between conciliatory and coercive laws.[16] Equally corrosive were the lengthy periods of largely inactive and uninterested government, a political moratorium that left the Irish in limbo, unable to shape their destiny through the orthodox structures of parliamentary power.[17] While

[14] Beaumont, *Ireland*, pp. 363–4; Mansergh, *Irish Question*, p. 90.
[15] Quentin Skinner, *Liberty as Independence: The Making and Unmaking of a Political Ideal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025), p. 90.
[16] Hoppen, *Governing Hibernia*, p. 3.
[17] By this, I draw on the spirit of Ciaran O'Neill's framing of Ireland as a 'palliative state': *Power and Powerless in Union Ireland: Life in a Palliative State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), pp. 4–7.

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a number of observers from Ireland (and beyond) conceptualised the disturbed state of the country during the century primarily as a crisis of government, there was little agreement on whether the British constitution could accommodate the Irish desire for more representative forms of governance.[18]

The political history of Ireland has tended to be told through the drama of parliamentary crises, popular mobilisation, and agrarian unrest. This book shifts the focus to the realm of political thought, exploring how Irish thinkers, protagonists, and polemicists conceptualised Ireland as a polity.[19] Whether Ireland was imagined as fully integrated into the United Kingdom, a semi-autonomous administration, or an independent state, a key consideration was the provision of meaningful *representative government*, a constitutional form that enshrined the Irish demand to influence the direction of political power. Proposals to create representative government for Ireland implied a negotiation (or rejection) of British sovereignty, offering an Irish take on the design of constituent power within a centralised multinational state.[20] Irish political thought in the period covered by this book is, therefore, a window into how contemporaries from a small but strategically important island, with a complex history that mixed epochs of independence, kingdom, and conquest, imagined the ideal constitution to realise Ireland's potential within (or without) the Union.

The shape of competing forms of representative government offers critical insights into the historical Irish mind; but such thinking also problematises certain aspects of the British representative system. Take, for example, the notion of 'virtual representation'. Virtual representation was the theory that pre-reformed Westminster embodied the collective will of the people of all stations in life, regardless of their suffrage status. Members of parliament were believed to 'represent' the interests of the unfranchised, ensuring a connection between non-voters and the structures of power.[21] The exclusion of Catholics from public office under the penal laws was, however, denounced by the Irish-born Edmund Burke as a

[18] Hoppen, *Governing Hibernia*, pp. 66–70; Jay R. *Roszman, Outrage in the Age of Reform: Irish Agrarian Violence, Imperial Insecurity and British Governing Policy, 1830–1845* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), p. 12; Stafford, *Case of Ireland*, p. 258.

[19] Recent work has introduced this strand of thought into the revolutionary period. See Richard Bourke, 'Introduction', in Richard Bourke and Niamh Gallagher (eds.), *The Political Thought of the Irish Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. ix–xli.

[20] Lucia Rubinelli, *Constituent Power: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[21] J. C. D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty, 1660–1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 98; Mónica Brito Vieira and David Runciman, *Representation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), p. 42.

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bastardisation of this principle.[22] For virtual representation to function successfully, a commonality was required to tie together the representative and unfranchised group.[23] The explicit constitutional identification with Protestantism, however, rendered such a bond impossible. The result was that Ireland's denominational majority was cast adrift without *any* political representation, virtual or real – a subversion of a key constitutional doctrine. Burke's argument was that virtual representation was not compatible with the penal laws: the one merely highlighted the theoretical limitation of the other.

The experience of Irish MPs also complicated late Georgian and Victorian theories that parliament 'mirrored' society through the formal representation not of classes but of salient interests. This amounted to a defence of a limited but varied suffrage, which 'mirroring' advocates believed was essential for an inclusive parliament. Mass enfranchisement, in this scenario, created an expanded but potentially more uniform electorate, heralding the victory of crude majoritarianism over balanced deliberation.[24] As Gregory Conti has demonstrated, the 'ideal of the mirroring Commons was the polestar for a sprawling Victorian discussion about political representation'.[25] Ireland's reflection in this mirror was, however, troubling. The debate over parliament mirroring the social realities of society was problematised by the Irish experience of Westminster, particularly from the 1830s. A number of critics believed that parliament did not reflect the interests of Ireland, not because of the franchise but because of the inability of Irish MPs to shape the legislative agenda. The numerical dominance of British MPs in Westminster ensured that a distinctive Irish interest was stillborn in parliamentary terms, a frustration that contributed to the rise of self-government as an aspiration within Ireland. The franchise might have mirrored Irish society but, paradoxically perhaps, the parliament did not.

Irish ideas of representation, then, shed light on the limitations of the British model of parliamentary government and provide an important explanatory factor for the growing tensions within the Union state. Interpreting the difficulties in incorporating Ireland into the United Kingdom as a problem in governing structures and representation, rather than as an identity-driven national dispute, permits a more nuanced

[22] Richard Bourke, *Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 796.
[23] David Judge, *Representation: Theory and Practice in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 99.
[24] Gregory Conti, *Parliament the Mirror of the Nation: Representation, Deliberation, and Democracy in Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 15–26.
[25] Ibid., p. 359.

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investigation into political languages and ideas. There is a danger, as has been suggested in a different historiographical context, that 'the transition to freedom' appears as a linear nationalist narrative that flattens a range of constitutional, political, and economic ideas that waxed and waned during the journey.[26] In Ireland, the articulation of constitutional visions often invoked conceptions of the nation – Home Rule as a 'national' form of government, for example – but it was political power rather than identity formation that concerned many of the writers and protagonists covered in this book.

If we take seriously the constitutional and political arguments made by Irish polemicists, the differences in emphasis made by those broadly designated as 'nationalists' come into sharp focus. Nationalism has been the dominant paradigm for understanding the Irish political experience since the late eighteenth century.[27] If treated without care, however, the ubiquity of nationalism risks smothering a range of constitutional perspectives. The major work on the topic, for example, drifts towards grouping all political positions that championed forms of self-government together as nationalists. 'Eighteenth-century Protestant nationalists' appear alongside 'nineteenth-century Catholic nationalists', while the nineteenth-century Fenians and the twentieth-century Irish Republican Army (IRA) are unified as 'militant Irish nationalists'.[28] The term 'nationalist' is used here in such an elastic fashion that it is conceptually meaningless, echoing Partha Chatterjee's warning that 'as history, nationalism's autobiography is fundamentally flawed'.[29]

More precision and context are needed to understand the constitutional ambitions of an individual, group, or body of texts. Theoretically, Daniel O'Connell, the leader of the Catholic Emancipation and Repeal of the Union campaigns from the 1820s to the 1840s, James Stephens, the founder of the militant Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), and Isaac Butt, the first leader of the Home Rule movement, were all 'nationalists': they led movements seeking self-government for Ireland, one of the most obvious motifs of Irish nationalism during the period. But O'Connell envisaged self-government as the restoration of the pre-1801 Irish

[26] Vikram Visana, *Uncivil Liberalism: Labour, Capital and Commercial Society in Dadabhai Naoroji's Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), p. 2.

[27] See, for example, D. George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1995) and Brian Jenkins, *Irish Nationalism and the British State: From Repeal to Revolutionary Nationalism* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006).

[28] Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland*, pp. 327, 388.

[29] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 6.

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parliament, a quasi-colonial institution with legislative but not executive powers; Stephens desired an independent republic based on the sovereignty of the people and dabbled in internationalist radicalism; and Butt devised a system of federalism to divide sovereignty equally throughout the United Kingdom, with Irish MPs continuing to serve in London to deal with imperial matters. These three examples personified radically different conceptions of Irish autonomy, suggesting that ideas of sovereignty in Ireland were multilayered and contested.[30]

An all-encompassing definition of nationalism, and its use as the primary political framework, fails to capture the stark differences in how these leaders imagined Ireland's future political status. The very different schemes proposed by O'Connell, Stephens, and Butt should not be fused together into an unchanging 'national question' based on the broad premise of self-government.[31] Likewise, enemies of Irish nationalism – chiefly unionists in Ireland – were far from monolithic in their political thinking. The character of debate shifted through time, and political languages and tropes evolved in certain contexts. The potential for prolepsis – imposing a political perspective on past actors that they would not recognise – is increased if constitutional ideas and their underlying rationales are not seriously considered, or if conceptions of Irish self-government are merely reduced to 'nationalist' programmes. Some opponents of the theory and practice of Union in Ireland from the 1790s to the 1880s were no more nationalists than Plato, in his attack on ancient democracy, was a sponsor of totalitarianism.[32]

In shifting the focus away from 'national feeling' and pointing towards political power and representation, the diversity of constitutional ideas that sustained Irish politics is unveiled. Accordingly, this book breaks with a narrowly high-political approach, which has tended to concentrate on the activities of a small elite involved in parliamentary affairs, and instead examines the ideas of what representative government looked like within Irish political thought. How a varied cast of pamphleteers and partisans conceptualised 'government' lies at the heart of the chapters that follow.

[30] This chimes with work on the operation of multiple ideas of sovereignty within the Austro-Hungarian Empire in Wheatley, *The Life and Death of States*.

[31] As an aside, while O'Connell is widely heralded as a founding father of modern Irish nationalism, Joep Leerssen has cast doubt on his nationalist credentials from a European perspective. *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p. 22.

[32] Plato as a proto-totalitarian thinker is, of course, a key component of Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011; first published 1945).

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Rival conceptions of government underpinned many of the constitutional ideas that emerged from across the political spectrum, from Tory notions of conditional unionism to the separatist ideal of the 'sovereign people'. The appropriate form of government for Ireland and the nature of its connection with the wider British world were acute questions for contemporaries, and provoked powerful and imaginative responses. Political conflict in Ireland thus derived from disputes about representative rights and left a deep imprint within the constitutional imagination of generations of Irish thinkers and activists.

Representative Government

The idea of 'representative government' was a defining theme of Western political thought during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, although its definition remained in flux.[33] Radical ideas of popular sovereignty erupted into the political mainstream with the revolutions in America and France, asserting the natural right of man to control his own political destiny, free from the arbitrary rule of hereditary aristocrats and monarchs, as well as (in the American case) colonial empires.[34] The most suitable constitutional apparatus to enshrine popular sovereignty was, however, fiercely contested.[35] The principle of representation was advocated by prominent radical thinkers (most notably Thomas Paine and Emmanuel Sieyès) as a bridge between the people and power.[36] That said, representative government did not necessarily equate to democratic government: the most common form that emerged gave the people *indirect* power, while their delegates participated in statecraft within fixed constitutional limits.[37]

The world typically could not be made anew within such a governing structure, but the key point was that the institutions of power gained legitimacy through popular participation. The ability of people to choose

[33] James T. Kloppenberg, *Toward Democracy: The Struggle for Self-Rule in European and American Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 655.
[34] Geneviève Nootens, *Popular Sovereignty in the West: Polities, Contention, and Ideas* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 60.
[35] Jonathan Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas: An Intellectual History of the French Revolution from The Rights of Man to Robespierre* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 346; John Dunn, *Setting the People Free: The Story of Democracy* (London: Atlantic, 2006; first published 2005), pp. 74–5.
[36] J. C. D. Clark, *Thomas Paine: Britain, America & France in the Age of Enlightenment and Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 10; Rubinelli, *Constituent Power*, pp. 12–13; Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas*, p. 346.
[37] Rubinelli, *Constituent Power*, p. 20.

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representatives to exercise power was framed by American revolutionaries as the appropriate constitutional apparatus to enshrine a form of popular sovereignty within a complex, modern state.[38] Writing in *The Federalist Papers*, James Madison stressed the theoretical positives of combining aspects of democratic and oligarchic rule. 'It may well happen', he reflected, 'that the public voice, pronounced by the representatives of the people, will be more consonant to the public good than if pronounced by the people themselves, convened for the purpose'. The accountability provided by the public would also restrict 'men of factious tempers, of local prejudices, or of sinister designs' from gaining office.[39] Madison presented representative government in a republican light as an open system that encouraged rule by the wisest. A vivid contrast was made with the limited representative nature of the British system, in which only the House of Commons was made up of elected members from a very restricted franchise.[40] The representative model of government emerged as a viable (and, from a certain perspective, subversive) alternative to the long-established governing norms in the 'old world'.

The representative system was held by advocates during the nineteenth century as one of the great achievements of the American Revolution. The model was depicted by adherents as the most logical means by which to bestow a government with the consent of the sovereign people.[41] Beaumont wrote that a lasting legacy of the American Revolution was the ongoing 'discussions of a free representative government', which he detected in Ireland in 1839.[42] As this suggests, application of the idea of representative government was not confined, as Madison imagined, to republican structures. European liberals were also attracted to the ideal of redesigning parliamentarianism to enshrine a representative component within what were mostly monarchical and oligarchical states across the continent.[43] There was, of course, much resistance from more autocratic

[38] Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 1–3.

[39] James Madison, 'The Federalist No. 10', in Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and James Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 51.

[40] Eric Nelson, 'Prerogative, popular sovereignty and the American founding', in Richard Bourke and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 210.

[41] Richard Tuck, *The Sleeping Sovereign: The Invention of Modern Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 238.

[42] Beaumont, *Ireland*, p. 81.

[43] William Selinger, *Parliamentarism: From Burke to Weber* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 3; Wheatley, *The Life and Death of States*, p. 14.

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interests; the inability to reshape such regimes contributed to Europe's revolutionary moments across the nineteenth century.

While the United Kingdom avoided a revolution akin to France in 1830 or 1848, it was not immune from the contagion of representative government. From a Whig perspective, the debate during the British 'Age of Reform' was concerned with incorporating wider interests – wealth, industry, and intelligence – into the Crown-in-parliament. Responsible government, the Whigs proposed, should be flexible: this was one of the key lessons learnt from the fate of the *ancien régime* in France.[44] Given the importance of successive reform acts in mapping the political evolution of the United Kingdom, historiographical ideas of representative government and modern citizenship in a British context are generally (and understandably) framed by debates over the franchise.[45] But the idea of representative government was much broader than possession of the vote, encompassing as it does the role of the representatives and the structures of power they operate within.[46] As two of the most significant European studies of representative government published during the nineteenth century reveal, contemporary understandings of *representativeness* were malleable and multifaceted.

François Guizot and John Stuart Mill published works written from a classical liberal perspective that attempted to provide a synthesis of the theory and practice of representative government. Guizot was a French liberal who served as Prime Minister on the eve of the revolutions of 1848. In the early 1820s, he delivered a series of lectures that were published three decades later as *Histoire des origines du gouvernement représentatif en Europe*. In 1852, an English translation – *History of the Origin of Representative Government in Europe* – was released. Guizot positioned representative government not as rule by a majority, but as a coalition between established institutions of a state and the interests of the people. He pointed to the early reforming impulse of the revolution of 1789, which he claimed attempted to create 'the alliance of free institutions with hereditary monarchy'. The political violence and oscillations from one regime to another that followed were fatal results of a deviation from this

[44] Angus Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture: "Habits of Heart & Mind"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 83.

[45] For example, see Robert Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote in British Politics, 1848–1867: The Making of the Second Reform Act* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Matthew Roberts, *Popular Movements in Urban England, 1832–1914* (London: Macmillan, 2009); Norman Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel: A Study in the Technique of Parliamentary Representation, 1830–1850* (London: Longman's, 1966; first published 1953).

[46] Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 227.

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middle path. Guizot believed that there was not a singular blueprint for representative government and that its form should alter from state to state. While 'representative governments' looked very different across the map, the common goal of such a structure of power was to harmonise 'order and liberty'.[47] Guizot framed representation as the way in which the collective constructs of 'reason, justice, and truth' within society are incorporated into the body of the state. 'In other words', he reasoned,

> it is required to discover all the elements of legitimate power that are disseminated throughout society, and to organise them into an actual power; that is to say, to collect into one focus, and to realise, public reason and public morality, and to call them to the occupation of power.[48]

Representation was, therefore, in Guizot's reading, more than the sum of 'individual wills'; it was a 'natural process by which public reason, which alone has a right to govern society, may be extracted from the bosom of society itself'.[49]

Guizot advocated a conception of representation that stressed the importance of incorporating society's collective wisdom and judgement into political deliberation. John Stuart Mill's *Considerations on Representative Government* built on this premise but conceded that democratic politics were inevitable, meaning that the institutions of power had to change to contain its excesses. In Mill's reading, the role of the representatives was as crucial as that of the represented; the former should temper the instincts of the latter.[50] Mill defined the elements of 'good government' as the possession of the 'virtue and intelligence of the people' and the 'degree in which it tends to increase the sum of good qualities in the governed, collectively and individually'.[51] Like Guizot, Mill warned of the toxic dangers of majoritarianism in a democratic system: the principle of equality in terms of the franchise could result in 'one part of the people rul[ing] over the rest'.[52] Such an arrangement threatened to crush minority interests, consigning the representatives of any groups opposed to the majority consensus to political passivity. A wide and inclusive franchise was, therefore, not

[47] François Guizot, *History of the Origin of Representative Government in Europe*, trans. Andrew R. Scoble (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1852), pp. vii–viii.
[48] Ibid., pp. 347–8. Also see Jeremy Jennings, *Revolution and the Republic: A History of Political Thought in France since the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 175.
[49] Guizot, *Representative Government in Europe*, p. 348.
[50] Vieira and Runciman, *Representation*, p. 50; Selinger, *Parliamentarism*, p. 164.
[51] John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1861), p. 30.
[52] Ibid., p. 133.

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in itself the path to a truly representative polity (and indeed, an expansive voting base was no guarantee of an inclusive form of government).[53] Mill proposed a range of constitutional safeguards to curtail the impact of majoritarianism, including replacing property with education and career status as the criteria for possession of the vote. The higher the 'intelligence' of the citizen, the greater the number of votes they should receive.[54]

The handling of representative government by Guizot and Mill demonstrates the diversity of the idea. 'Representative government' did not mean one thing; rather, its appearance altered according to the philosophical perspective of the observer. Given its multifaceted applications and the rich contemporaneous engagements it provoked, representation has emerged as a vibrant research area within the history of political thought.[55] At its core, the topic of representative government concerned questions of inclusion and exclusion from political power. But just as representation meant more than merely possessing the vote, political exclusion was experienced in different ways. The ideas of Mill and Guizot found a distinctive Irish inflection, where theories of representation collided with the realities of colonial governance, religious exclusion, and the difficulty of integration into the British state.

As the case of Irish political thought during the nineteenth century demonstrates, exclusion was felt by many people who enjoyed the suffrage. With the penal laws, the abolition of the Irish parliament, and the later perception of being a minority bloc within the English-dominated House of Commons, Irish engagement with ideas of representative government was profoundly shaped by a detestable sense of political impotence. While Ireland sent representatives to parliament, this was not the same as representative government. Irish Tories, naturally sympathetic to unionist aspirations, were often disillusioned by the realities of poor government from London. Such impressions did much to fuel the crisis of government that blighted the operation of the Union, underpinning periods of political instability, agrarian violence, and sectarian enmity.

'Misgovernment' was a perennial theme within Irish political discourse, but its manifestations need a careful contextual approach. Daniel O'Connell's

[53] Judge, *Representation*, p. 30.

[54] Mill, *Considerations*, pp. 173–4. Also see Chris Barker, 'Mass and elite politics in Mill's *Considerations on Representative Government*', *History of European Ideas*, vol. 41, no. 8 (2015), pp. 1143–63.

[55] For a historiographical review article, see Max Skjönsberg, 'The history of political thought and parliamentary history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', *Historical Journal*, vol. 64, no. 2 (2021), pp. 501–13.

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son, John, included 'misgovernment' as an entry in his *Repeal Dictionary* of 1845: he presented the example of the ambitions of Irish MPs being permanently 'swamped by the votes of English and Scottish members' in parliament as a definition.[56] While the Irish enjoyed representation in parliament, O'Connell asserted, they did not enjoy representative government. Tory unionist enemies of O'Connell also drew on the language of 'misgovernment'. A candid moment was captured in the pages of the *Dublin University Magazine*, an Irish Tory periodical, in 1833 when it noted that Catholic discontent with the Union was not the result of Anglophobia, but 'English misgovernment'.[57] As Ireland lurched through the Famine years, the conditional nature of Tory unionism became more visible, with prominent figures such as Sir Samuel Ferguson briefly calling for the restoration of the Irish parliament.[58] Irish Tory ideas about representation and the relationship between the individual and the state fluctuated according to circumstance, a fluidity that was shared by other ideological positions on the island.

Thinking Politically

Irish writing during the nineteenth century was saturated with politics. Malcolm Brown has written that Ireland 'provides us with the classic case of an impressive literature brought to birth by politics', implying that an explicitly political narrative can be derived from the history of fiction, poetry, and creative autobiography.[59] But while Shelley's idea of the poet as 'legislator' found expression in generations of Irish creative writing from Young Ireland onwards, formal political writing, from a historiographical perspective, appears to be hiding in plain sight.[60] Studies of Irish writing rarely examine the vast array of political tracts, pamphlets, and treatises published throughout the nineteenth century. There are several ironies at play here, not least the prominent place of political prose and speeches in nineteenth-century literary anthologies, which placed politicians such as Henry Grattan, Daniel O'Connell, and Isaac Butt on the same intellectual

[56] John O'Connell, *Repeal Dictionary, Part One* (Dublin: J. Browne, 1845), p. 249.
[57] *Dublin University Magazine*, November 1833, p. 592.
[58] Eve Patten, *Sir Samuel Ferguson and the Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), pp. 128–9.
[59] Malcolm Brown, *The Politics of Irish Literature: From Thomas Davis to W. B. Yeats* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972), p. vii.
[60] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, ed. Mary Shelley, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, PA: Lea and Blanchard, 1840), i, p. 62.

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plane as creative writers such as Maria Edgeworth, Thomas Moore, and James Clarence Mangan.[61]

A vast number of pamphlets were published in and about Ireland during the nineteenth century, but as a source, they seem to fall between the two chief methodological stools used to study political culture: the 'high' politics of parliaments, politicians, and institutions, and the 'low' politics of popular mobilisation, provincial newspapers, and regionalised activism.[62] Pamphleteering does not quite fit into either category, but remained a ubiquitous feature of Irish life in the period covered in this book.[63] In 1910, the ever-insightful *Irish Book Lover* recorded that pamphlets during the nineteenth century 'were the political educators of the time'.[64] Stephen Small's innovative study of late eighteenth-century Irish political thought expands on this point. Small records that 'political disputants, theorists, and propagandists saw pamphlets as the chief medium of serious, public political debate'.[65] The pamphlet was expansive enough to permit detailed discussion, while its ephemeral nature encouraged rapidly written responses. Pamphleteers were often not professional writers or politicians, ensuring that certain debates over pressing political questions contained a more diverse range of voices than a narrower methodological focus on, say, parliamentary speeches or newspaper editorials. Like the pamphlet debate over the French Revolution, some of the writers examined in this book are well known, but many remain obscure. All of them, however, are valuable for recovering the political values of their age.[66] To adopt Gregory Conti's

[61] Margaret Kelleher, 'The Cabinet of Irish Literature: a historical perspective on Irish anthologies', *Éire-Ireland*, vol. 38, no. 3 (2003), pp. 68–89.

[62] For recent examples of 'high' approaches, see Paul Bew, *Ancestral Voices in Irish Politics: Judging Dillon and Parnell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023); Paul Bew, *Enigma: A New Life of Charles Stewart Parnell* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2011); Patrick M. Geoghegan, *King Dan: The Rise of Daniel O'Connell, 1775–1829* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2008); Patrick M. Geoghegan, *The Liberator: The Life and Death of Daniel O'Connell, 1830–1847* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2010);Hoppen, *Governing Hibernia.* For 'low' approaches, see Paul Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation in Ireland, 1890–1910* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Fergus Campbell, *Land and Revolution: Nationalist Politics in the West of Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005);Marie-Louise Legg, *Newspapers and Nationalism: The Irish Provincial Press, 1850–1892* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998).

[63] A very brief overview of pamphlets and their prominence at times of crisis and controversy can be found in Charles Benson and Siobhán Fitzpatrick, 'Pamphlets', in James Murphy (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Irish Book, vol. iv: The Irish Book in English, 1800–1891* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 139–43.

[64] *Irish Book Lover*, no. 9 (1910), p. 119.

[65] Stephen Small, *Political Thought in Ireland, 1776–1798: Republicanism, Patriotism and Radicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 10.

[66] Kenneth Margerison, *Pamphlets & Public Opinion: The Campaign for a Union of Orders in the Early French Revolution* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1998); William H. Sewell Jr.,

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mantra, nineteenth-century Irish political thought was 'an ensemble rather than a star-driven production' and is no less stimulating for this.[67] Such material introduces new voices into the study of political life and disrupts narratives founded on the affairs of high-profile figures.

The neglect of pamphlets and other apparently ephemeral printed materials also provides an explanation for the relative dearth of studies of the history of political thought in nineteenth-century Ireland. While some of the best recent work on Irish political history has engaged with ideas in a more sophisticated manner than hitherto has been the case, we still lack a sustained exploration of published polemical texts akin to Bernard Bailyn's pioneering study of the American Revolution.[68] Political engagement meant more than the affairs of parliamentary elites and the tactical considerations of ideologically motivated movements: the written word provided political legitimacy for actions, ensuring that authors were as essential to the functioning of politics as politicians. Writers of political texts had certain goals in mind, and they deployed particular vocabularies, tropes, and rhetorical justifications to achieve them. As such, the long-form essay that often lay at the heart of pamphlets and other published material stood at the interface between the development of political ideas and ongoing debate.[69]

Published political writings perform an essential role in mapping the languages used by contemporaries to write (and speak) about politics.[70] These political languages – the rhetoric, tropes, and vocabulary used to define ideological positions – evolved to articulate what was deemed legitimate in the realm of politics. This does not mean that political languages were deeply theorised; on the contrary, they were often constructed on a magpie-like basis, drawing on parts of political theory and

A Rhetoric of Bourgeois Revolution: The Abbé Sieyès and What Is the Third Estate? (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994); Gregory Claeys, *The French Revolution Debate in Britain: The Origins of Modern Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[67] Conti, *Parliament the Mirror of the Nation*, p. 6.

[68] Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017; first published 1967). For recent work on Ireland, see, for example, John Bew, *The Glory of Being Britons: Civic Unionism in Nineteenth-Century Belfast* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009); David Dwan, *The Great Community: Culture and Nationalism in Ireland* (Dublin: Field Day, 2008); Matthew Kelly, *The Fenian Ideal and Irish Nationalism, 1882–1916* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006). For works with a more explicit history of political thought methodology, see Richard Bourke, *Peace in Ireland: The War of Ideas* (London: Pimlico, 2003) and S. J. Connolly (ed.), *Political Ideas in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).

[69] Amanda Goodrich, *Debating England's Aristocracy in the 1790s: Pamphlets, Polemics and Political Ideas* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), p. 13; Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, pp. 3–4.

[70] Quentin Skinner, *The Foundation of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), i, p. xiii.

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experience that legitimised – and delegitimised – particular perspectives. The choices made in the construction of political languages offer a window into the thinking of an age. Irish engagement with ideas of representative government was at times informed by theory, international parallels, or bitter experience. In understanding how contemporaries made sense of their political predicament, we move a step closer to excavating more of the historical world.

The Structure of the Book

The book follows six episodes showcasing Irish engagements with ideas of representative government between 1798 and 1879. The chapters are sequenced broadly chronologically but focus thematically on important ideological debates or platforms that defined the Irish political world. Published texts, especially pamphlets, form my major source base, as political works provide a guide to the constitutional languages and mentalities of the age. This means that, for the most part, figures who played influential public roles but did not write political texts are not included in the book. For example, Bishop James Warren Doyle is discussed, while Cardinal Paul Cullen is omitted, because the former was the author of political treatises and the latter was not. Cullen was one of the most important figures in nineteenth-century Ireland, but it is Doyle's status as a writer that makes him of interest in a study of political thought. While Daniel O'Connell is usually not positioned as a 'thinker', he commissioned and wrote several texts that offer insights into Irish conceptions of government. It is this side of O'Connell that is explored here. Michael Davitt is covered not for his Land League activism, but for his writings on the failure to export the British constitution to Ireland. When the speeches of politicians are examined, it is usually because they were published in pamphlet form (as was common during the debate over an incorporating union between 1798 and 1800). The speechmaker became, therefore, an author.

As the footnotes reveal, the genre of political writing in Ireland was heavily dominated by men. As elsewhere across the world during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, women were often excluded from inclusive-sounding notions such as the 'People', which tended to refer to a gender-defined political nation.[71] While Irish women at times subverted

[71] Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 5.

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gender norms and carved out a place within political works, their contributions were often more literary-focused, as the example of Ellen O'Leary, the Fenian poet, testifies.[72] Women also found space within the politics of the crowd within O'Connellism.[73] But this is not the same, alas, as political writing – the primary means by which to assess thought. Maria Edgeworth is a rare example within this period of an Irish female writer who finds a place in a study of political thought. The richness of *Castle Rackrent* (1800) partly rested on its ambivalent political messaging, but Edgeworth also edited the works of her father, a former member of the Irish parliament. She stands, then, as a unique presence within the sphere of Irish political thought in this period. The source base to seriously assess the political thought of Irish women only manifested itself by the late nineteenth century; it is much more difficult to find examples earlier in the century relating to ideas of government.[74] The sources I have used reflect the unfortunate imbalance of political writing in Ireland, which was (in this period) a near-exclusively male space.

The starting point for the book is the aftermath of the 1798 rebellion, as a heated debate about Ireland's future constitutional status emerged from the mist of military suppression. The battlelines drawn in the resulting pamphlet war sketched the ideological skeleton of competing ideas of unionism and anti-unionism, which would gain momentum during the nineteenth century. Chapter 1 follows the contours of this pamphlet debate that broke out in 1798 over the utility of parliamentary union between Ireland and Britain. A central component of this debate was the clash between the proposal of incorporating union and rival Irish theories of political representation. Would Ireland be better served by retaining a domestic parliament, or by sending a much-reduced number of members to the imperial parliament in London? This question hinged on the definition of 'Ireland': should representatives serve the existing political nation (the Protestant minority, who sat in the Irish parliament) or be radically expanded to formally include the entire (mostly Catholic) population? The debate also highlighted competing ideas of sovereignty, as the act of transferring the jurisdiction of one parliament to another was fiercely

[72] Rose Novak, 'Ellen O'Leary: a bold Fenian poet', *Éire-Ireland*, vol. 43, nos. 3–4 (2008), pp. 58–84.
[73] Mary O'Dowd, 'O'Connell and the lady patriots: women and O'Connellite politics, 1824–1845', in Allan Blackstock and Eoin Magennis (eds.), *Politics and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland, 1750–1850: Essays in Tribute to Peter Jupp* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2007), pp. 283–303.
[74] Senia Pašeta, 'Feminist political thought and activism in revolutionary Ireland, c.1880–1918', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 27 (2017), pp. 193–209.

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disputed. As the anti-union pamphlets reveal, many defenders of the Irish parliament had internalised that the institution was autonomous and free; their inability to appreciate the precarious nature of Ireland as a dependent polity was a striking but little-acknowledged aspect of the debate.

While the Union became the crucible of political conflict during the nineteenth century, its commencement in 1801 did not mark a decisive break with eighteenth-century frameworks. The 1790s were distinguished by the intensity of discussion about parliamentary reform and the shape of the political nation; the imperfections of Union, if anything, perpetuated this contestation. Political thought in Ireland, as in Britain, during the first three decades of the Union was dominated by the reforming and anti-reforming impulses. But there was no fixed meaning to the term 'reform', contributing to the seeming intractability of the issue. In addition, there were profound structural differences that resulted in rather different inflections in political language in Ireland. While reforming ideas in Britain centred on franchise expansion, especially providing representation for new centres of population, the situation in Ireland was rather different. Catholic Emancipation did not arrive at the same time as the Union, which was the intention of the Prime Minister, William Pitt. Irish reforming culture after 1801 thus retained a decidedly denominational character, with the resumption of the campaign for Catholic political rights. This had wider political ramifications, most notably the perpetuation of a distinct Catholic 'interest' in Ireland. Proponents may have championed the Union as a mechanism to import 'English liberties' into Ireland, but the reality of a politically sanctioned anti-Catholicism damaged the credibility of the constitution. Chapter 2 therefore considers the evolution of Irish political thought in the opening decades of the nineteenth century, which unfolded against the backdrop of a prolonged and heated debate over Catholic Emancipation. For many supporters of Emancipation, the question was viewed through the lens of political citizenship: inclusion in the representation of the polity was a right of the enfranchised. Opponents of Emancipation often connected political liberty to Protestantism, fearing a politicised Catholicism that stood outside this rubric. This was also an age when political citizenship was marked by ideas of 'character', and Irish debates were not immune to this.

The mass mobilisation that resulted in the achievement of Catholic Emancipation in 1829 overtly deployed the language of democracy. When Daniel O'Connell launched the movement to repeal the Act of Union on the back of the successes of the Catholic Association, the democratic impulse once again moved into the political mainstream in Ireland.

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Repeal implied a restoration of the Irish parliament rather than a new departure, albeit with a franchise based on the recently expanded political nation. The fusion of democracy with this 'ancient constitutionalism' is a feature of Chapter 3, as are the classical republican theories of political representation of the Young Ireland group. The Young Irelanders were part of the Repeal movement, but their conception of representative government was more republican in nature than the mainstream O'Connellite organisation. Democratic and republican conceptions of government during the 1830s and 1840s did not exist in a vacuum but constantly evolved in reaction to rapidly changing circumstances, not least the trauma of the Famine. This chapter plots the shifting ideas of legitimate government within Repeal political thought before and after the horrors of the 1840s, probing the intellectual justifications for the restoration of self-government, such as natural right, contractarianism, and historical precedent. The varied arguments of the Young Irelanders – particularly relating to the idea of the 'nation' as a political entity and the idea of a distinctive *Irish* political economy – are also given prominence in this chapter.

From the perspective of the first half of the nineteenth century, the Union was a new constitutional experiment that had to prove its worth to Ireland. Chapter 4 explores Irish Tory political thought, which was grounded in unionism, during the 1830s and 1840s. Through the dilemmas faced by this grouping, a picture emerges of constitutional and national ideas that were much more fluid than those associated with their brethren later in the century. The Act of Union abolished the Irish parliament, the institution that had provided Irish Tories with an obvious platform to exercise national leadership. The new constitution was, therefore, something of a rupture for this group, who found themselves in an age of democratic uncertainty without a clear purpose beyond support for the British connection. Many Tories fell back on ideas of a Protestant constitution shared across the United Kingdom, connecting the idea of liberty to Protestantism. Still, Irish Tories were not oblivious to the changes that had occurred since the 1820s. A striking feature of political culture in the age of O'Connell was Irish Tory attempts to modernise their platform, mirroring the mass mobilisation tactics of the Repeal movement. Yet, with the coming of the Famine, some of the most profound criticisms of the Union came from these Tories, who were appalled at the lack of a credible response from the government. This chapter teases out these tensions to construct a picture of the complexities of Irish Tory political thought, and its conflicted visions of representative government against the backdrop of human tragedy.

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Chapter 5 examines the political thought of the clandestine IRB. This secret society was established in 1858, with the aim of overthrowing the British state in Ireland through revolutionary means. While nineteenth-century republicans were notoriously coy in advocating a particular constitutional design for a future independent Ireland, the 'Fenians' (the term commonly used for the IRB) proclaimed themselves the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic. Fenianism was, therefore, a subversive manifestation of Irish popular sovereignty, a bold assault on the established parliamentary traditions of representation and deliberation. There were strong undercurrents of Rousseauian thought within the IRB, particularly its articulation of an Irish general will and its claim to the allegiance of the people of Ireland. Fenian political thought thus provided a radical alternative to the more mainstream ideological platforms that were rooted in a constitutional idiom informed by British and Irish precedent.[75]

Chapter 6 examines the origins of Home Rule. As a political slogan in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, 'Home Rule' was used by contemporaries to signify various schemes of self-government, from devolution to virtual independence. This chapter examines the genesis and evolution of the Home Rule idea in the context of the late 1860s and 1870s. The Home Rule label was first applied to a federal plan that aimed to perfect the Union by creating a United Kingdom-wide network of national parliaments to administer 'local' affairs. A central rationale of this was to create a stronger sense of representative government within the peripheries of the whole kingdom; but the scheme also explicitly expressed a desire to transform Westminster into a genuine 'imperial parliament' to administer the affairs of the Empire. The federalist Home Rule framework was, therefore, *unionist* in intention; but this detail became obscured under the weight of the more separatist-inclined rhetorical trappings that were added to the notion of Irish self-government. This chapter charts the fortunes of the unionist case for self-government, with particular attention paid to the languages used by pro-Home Rule thinkers to rationalise radical changes to the constitution, and the confusion it caused within wider Irish and British political life. Crucial to this chapter is Isaac Butt's pioneering *Irish Federalism* (1870), which, despite its name, presented the case for a United Kingdom federation. It quickly became apparent, however, that many advocates of Home Rule in Ireland were not federalists,

[75] For the constitutional idiom, see 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.

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and conceived of self-government from a more radical, anti-unionist political mindset.

The book ends with the rise of Charles Stewart Parnell to the leadership of the Irish Parliamentary Party. With the collapse of federalist Home Rule and the fusing together of radical agrarianism and a vision of self-government that emphasised Irish national rights, political culture in Ireland became more rigid and polarised, resulting in less fluidity within the collective political imagination of the island. In response to the appearance of a more muscular and less compromising nationalist bloc in Westminster, unionism became increasingly unconditional and inflexible. The modern binary framework of Irish politics was established during the 1880s, ensuring that, as the subsequent histories were written, the nuances of the various Irish ideological perspectives in the preceding decades became increasingly obscured. Articulations of political exclusion, and the constitutional proposals that this grievance generated, became subsumed into an unchanging and static notion of *the* 'Irish Question'.

If the voices of the pre-1880s generations of political writers in Ireland are heard, if their rhetorical points are understood, and if their contexts are appreciated, it becomes clear that the Irish political imagination was more mercurial than hitherto recognised. The most important aspect of the debate about union during the late 1790s hinged on conceptions of government, not national identity. There was scope to imagine a successful Irish polity within and without the Union. The ideal of Catholic Emancipation was often articulated in a universal language of political inclusion and liberty, rather than a particular Irish discourse. The Repealers were not Parnellite Home Rulers, the Tories of the era of the Famine were not the unionist diehards of 1912, and the mid Victorian IRB were not the IRA of the twentieth century. We should listen with empathy to the various political languages articulated in Ireland to grasp how past generations grappled with the issues that shaped their world. In the end, Ireland's turbulent nineteenth century was not merely a battle over identity or national rights, but a reckoning with the most fundamental questions of political life: who are the people; who speaks for the people; and how are the people represented in a multinational state?

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