

# Riding a Tiger: Daniel O'Connell, Reform, and Popular Politics in Ireland, 1800–1847

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THE POLITICAL MOVEMENTS LED BY DANIEL O'CONNELL in early nineteenth-century Ireland encouraged a predominantly Catholic peasant population to adopt — or at least to acquiesce in — demands for liberal reform. Although neither the socio-economic conditions of contemporary Ireland nor, indeed, many of the cultural and organizational characteristics of Irish Catholicism were unique, this, in the European context of the time, was a highly unusual achievement. The context in which it proved possible for such a development to take place was Ireland's singular political condition as a subordinate and peripheral national entity within an increasingly liberal state. It was this combination of circumstances that proved crucial in allowing O'Connell to introduce a reformist programme to a society for which religion provided the fundamental basis of identity, not simply for a class or a community, but for something approaching the nation as such. The contrast with other parts of Catholic Europe makes the point. For example, Polish Catholicism, though also underpinning feelings of national identity, faced so autocratic and anti-liberal a state that reform projects never possessed the credibility of practical implementation, while Rhineland Catholics, though deeply resentful of their incorporation into Prussia after 1815, simply lacked the possibility of maintaining *national* distinctions between themselves and their new rulers.

This is all the more striking because, in many respects, the spiritual and organizational development of early nineteenth-century European Catholicism proved a very general phenomenon in which the Irish Catholic Church participated to the full. The same attempts were made, for example, in Ireland, Germany, and France, to adjust popular religious practices to the norms of an increasingly powerful ultramontanism. That close intermingling of the sacred and the profane so characteristic of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century rural Catholicism — enthusiasm for mass, disorganized,

and often wild pilgrimages, a belief in the efficacy of holy wells and fountains, morally relaxed celebrations of local feast days and of the seasonal passage rites of agricultural societies — was as energetically brought under close clerical control in Ireland as elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> Although such efforts were only slowly successful,<sup>2</sup> a kind of ultramontane *Gleichschaltung*, as regards belief, practice, and organization, undoubtedly took place throughout Europe as a whole. However, while the dominant political ethos of the official Catholic Church in continental countries remained generally conservative and anti-revolutionary, the Irish Church and its adherents were to follow a very different path. And if it was O'Connell who proved instrumental in helping to bring this about, the materials available for him to work upon, though complex and sometimes obscure, lacked neither malleability nor promise.

Whereas in those parts of France most resembling the economic, social, and religious circumstances of contemporary Ireland, many peasants and rural artisans moved decisively towards counter-revolution in the 1790s, in Ireland the revolutionary year of 1798 was marked by developments of an altogether more ambiguous kind. Although the *modus operandi* of violent resistance was similar in both countries, the aims and the enemies in view were not. Many of the scenes commonly witnessed during the Vendée rising of 1793 — such as large numbers of men gathering together 'with guns, forks, scythes, etc., all wearing white cockades and decorated with small square, cloth medals, on which were embroidered different shapes, such as crosses, little hearts pierced with pikes, and other signs of that kind'<sup>3</sup> — might well have occurred in rural Ireland (not only in 1798 but during any of the agrarian disturbances common between 1760 and 1845). But while in the west of France the Catholic participants in such gatherings exhibited a distinctly royalist political orientation, in Ireland their undoubted religious feelings, though not devoid of politically traditional elements, were often expressed in more noticeably radical terms.

Certainly some of those involved in the rising of 1798 seem to have been motivated by a contradictory mixture of sectarianism, rural protest, and a simple belief that 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'. But such 'primitivism' was largely confined to the western province of Connacht (the rising's least successful theatre) where General Humbert's 1,000-strong force of French revolutionary troops was greeted by local peasants anxious to 'take up arms

<sup>1</sup> K. T. Hoppen, *Elections, politics, and society in Ireland, 1832–1885* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 211–24; J. Sperber, *Popular Catholicism in nineteenth-century Germany* (Princeton, 1984), pp. 10–38; T. Nipperdey, *Germany from Napoleon to Bismarck, 1800–1866* (Dublin, 1996), pp. 363–6; Y.-M. Hilaire, *Une chrétienté au XIXe siècle? La vie religieuse des populations du diocèse d'Arras (1840–1914)*, (2 vols, Lille, 1977), 1, pp. 373–416 and passim.

<sup>2</sup> J. Devlin, *The superstitious mind: French peasants and the supernatural in the nineteenth century* (New Haven, 1987), especially pp. 1–42.

<sup>3</sup> C. Tilly, *The Vendée* (London, 1964), p. 317.

for France and the Blessed Virgin'.<sup>4</sup> However, the rebellion obtained an altogether greater purchase in the economically advanced south-eastern parts of Ireland where its progress proved far more than merely chaotic and spontaneous in character. Neither did it emerge primarily out of agrarian or sectarian issues, being instead based upon a widespread politicization brought about by the spread of the United Irish movement and the deliberate creation of a mass revolutionary policy.<sup>5</sup> Although, therefore, the rebellion was eventually crushed, its radicalizing impact upon the political culture of substantial parts of south Leinster and east Munster was very considerable indeed.

Such developments might suggest that the popular political life of Ireland in the decades immediately after the union with Britain in 1800 would follow an increasingly revolutionary path. That this did not happen can be attributed largely to the manner in which O'Connell effectively invented and successfully marketed entirely new types of reform-orientated political discourse and activity. This was no simple process, involving as it did the creation of mass political movements, the integration of the Catholic Church and clergy into the work of those movements, and — most difficult of all — success in mobilizing the more prosperous and 'modern' elements in both urban and rural Ireland (merchants, professionals, larger farmers, and the like) without irretrievably antagonizing (indeed, while drawing a good deal of additional support from) the poorer tenant farmers and landless labourers of the countryside.

O'Connell's first entry into public politics was as one of the few educated Catholics to take a firm line against the passage of the Act of Union shortly after the failure of the rebellion of 1798. But while opposition to the union and demands for its repeal were thereafter never far from his thoughts, the immovable opposition of successive British governments made it difficult (perhaps impossible) to base a continuing political career upon this one object alone. O'Connell was, in any case, perfectly willing to pursue a wider range of issues for more positive reasons, his earliest formation as a student of politics — in particular his reading of Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and Paine — having firmly set him upon the path of reform. For a time, indeed, he even adopted deism in response to such influences. But this proved a passing phase and by 1809, if not earlier, he had returned to orthodox Catholicism, becoming thereafter more devout by the year.<sup>6</sup> By

<sup>4</sup> T. Pakenham, *The year of liberty: the story of the great Irish rebellion of 1798* (London, 1969), p. 306. Pakenham's suggestion that such things were more generally true is no longer convincing.

<sup>5</sup> K. Whelan, 'Reinterpreting the 1798 rebellion in County Wexford' in D. Keogh and N. Furlong, eds, *The mighty wave: the 1798 rebellion in Wexford* (Dublin, 1996), pp. 9–36.

<sup>6</sup> O. MacDonagh, *The hereditary bondsman: Daniel O'Connell, 1775–1829* (London, 1988), pp. 41–2, 60–1, 101, 158.

contrast, his early lessons in politics as such remained fixed in O'Connell's mind, so much so that the chief argument he generally chose to deploy in favour of repeal was that only an Irish parliament could deliver full and adequate *reforms* and above all 'cheap government, and a just administration of the laws'.<sup>7</sup> Looking back over his political career as a whole, one might, indeed, conclude that, while repeal constituted the frame within which that career found its being, the painted canvas which it encompassed chiefly depicted a series of campaigns, negotiations, compromises, and achievements, pursued within the general world of early nineteenth-century Irish (and British) reform.

The fact that O'Connell entered the wider arena of reform politics through the issue of Catholic emancipation gave his subsequent activities that Janus-faced ambiguity which constituted at once their strength and their weakness. Emancipation was not, after all, a matter purely of reform (as, for example, many whigs liked to believe), but carried with it complex intimations of a religious and sectarian kind. The establishment of the Catholic Association in 1823 and its dramatic growth in 1824 when O'Connell introduced the penny-a-month contribution scheme at once hugely increased the campaign's popularity and (almost by accident) involved the bulk of the Catholic priesthood as collectors and organizers.<sup>8</sup> These developments not only inaugurated the clergy's definitive entry into public politics, but effectively established a set of reciprocal compromises between the church's religious and O'Connell's more secular priorities.

As a result, it became less and less possible for the clergy to maintain that their political activities could (or, indeed, should) be entirely confined to specifically 'religious' issues. The simple logic of events over the next quarter-century meant that they were to be inexorably drawn from involvement in the primarily religious issue of emancipation, through involvement in a range of partly religious and partly secular reforms in the 1830s, into what (for all its Catholic resonances) was the primarily secular matter of repeal in the 1840s. Not that the mass of the clergy needed much encouragement — as can be seen in the failure of the bishops' attempts to withdraw their troops to barracks after the granting of emancipation in 1829.<sup>9</sup> The overwhelmingly Catholic character of the emancipation campaign also, however, tended to encourage O'Connell to emphasize the denominational aspects of his political mentality and in effect muddy the waters of his oft-proclaimed (and, in

<sup>7</sup> *Hansard*, iv, 652 (4 July 1831). All references are to the 3rd series unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>8</sup> J. A. Reynolds, *The Catholic emancipation crisis in Ireland, 1823–1829* (New Haven, 1954), pp. 14–30.

<sup>9</sup> D. A. Kerr, *Peel, priests and politics: Sir Robert Peel's administration and the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, 1841–1846* (Oxford, 1982), p. 68; *Ballyshannon Herald*, 31 Oct. 1834; Hoppen, *Elections, politics, and society in Ireland*, pp. 234–6; J. F. Broderick, *The Holy See and the Irish movement for the repeal of the union with England, 1829–1847* (Rome, 1951), passim.

many ways, perfectly genuine) liberalism. Not only did his repeated emphases upon the inclusiveness of the Irish 'nation' occasionally slide into more sectarian modes — as when in 1833 he denounced certain Protestants as 'foreigners to us, since they are of a different religion'<sup>10</sup> — but the heat of combat could lead him to declare (as he did in 1826) that it was the Catholics who were 'the people, emphatically the people', that, indeed, 'the Catholic people of Ireland are a nation'.<sup>11</sup> In private he was prepared to go further still, telling the future Cardinal Cullen in 1842 that Protestants 'would not survive the Repeal ten years' and that (despite his well-known support for the separation of church and state)<sup>12</sup> the Catholic majority in any Irish parliament would certainly move a long way towards endowing Catholicism out of official funds.<sup>13</sup> What, then, O'Connell seems in part to have been doing was to make use of what remained of the politicization achieved by the United Irishmen to push political life into less clearly inclusive channels and then to develop 'a highly effective form of trench warfare from within them'.<sup>14</sup> While, therefore, the clergy were certainly demonstrating that in Ireland Catholicism and reaction were far from synonymous,<sup>15</sup> the popular image of O'Connell was that of an Old Testament leader shepherding a Catholic nation into its promised and rightful inheritance.

The bondage of those Israelites,  
Our Saviour he did see,  
He then commanded Moses,  
To go to set them free,  
And in the same we did remain  
Suffering for our own,  
Till God has sent O'Connell  
To free the Church of Rome.<sup>16</sup>

That this should have been the case had everything to do with O'Connell's relationship with the rural masses of the time. Although his campaigns undoubtedly attracted a good deal of (not always uncritical) support from urban dwellers, the very fact that, as late as 1841, less than

<sup>10</sup> *Hansard*, xv, 325 (7 Feb. 1833).

<sup>11</sup> F. O'Ferrall, *Catholic emancipation: Daniel O'Connell and the birth of Irish democracy, 1820–30* (Dublin, 1985), p. 144.

<sup>12</sup> O. MacDonagh, *The emancipist: Daniel O'Connell, 1830–47* (London, 1989), pp. 23–4.

<sup>13</sup> O'Connell to Cullen, 9 May 1842, in M. R. O'Connell, ed., *The correspondence of Daniel O'Connell* (8 vols, Dublin, 1972–80), vii, pp. 155–60.

<sup>14</sup> K. Whelan, *The tree of liberty: radicalism, Catholicism and the construction of an Irish identity, 1760–1830* (Cork, 1996), p. 153.

<sup>15</sup> A. de Tocqueville, *Journeys to England and Ireland*, ed. J. P. Mayer (London, 1958), pp. 130–5.

<sup>16</sup> Ballad of c.1830 cited in R. uí Ógáin, *Immortal Dan: Daniel O'Connell in Irish folk tradition* (Dublin, [1995]), p. 104.

14 per cent of the Irish population lived in towns of 2,000 or more inhabitants (and less than 18 per cent even in places with 500 or more)<sup>17</sup> meant that any political leader anxious to mobilize a popular following could hardly avoid a direct engagement with the countryside. And in the early decades of the nineteenth century that half of the countryside lying west of a vertical line drawn from Derry to Cork sustained a demotic culture in which the traditions, rhythms, and language of a Gaelic society had by no means evaporated. Indeed, the kinds of image presented in the ballad cited at the end of the last paragraph owed much to the cultural nexus which such a state of things implied. In this respect O'Connell's well-known statement that he was 'sufficiently utilitarian not to regret' the 'gradual abandonment' of the Irish language — still in his time spoken by perhaps 40 per cent of the population — did not significantly reduce his popularity in what survived of the Gaelic world.<sup>18</sup> Few Irish speakers felt otherwise about their language and even the handful who regretted his views took trouble to emphasize their admiration for his person and their support for his political demands.<sup>19</sup>

What mattered was that O'Connell's anchorage within Gaelic society was so firm and obvious that — quite apart from his own inclinations — there was simply no political need for him to take up issues of cultural nationalism in the way that, for example, his non-Gaelic-speaking critics in the Young Ireland movement would have liked him to do. Indeed, the proof of this particular pudding lay in the eating, it being noteworthy that O'Connell attracted a uniquely large amount of attention in ballads and oral tradition generally — far more, certainly, than other prominent Irish nationalists such as Wolfe Tone, Emmet, Davis, or Parnell.<sup>20</sup> Nor, unsurprisingly, was O'Connell unaware of this, telling his utilitarian mentor, Bentham, that the County Clare freeholders of 1828 were prepared to 'risk their all to vote for me as a fellow Catholic and a man long the theme of *ballads* and conversation'.<sup>21</sup> Given the governing values and traditions of Gaelic Ireland,

<sup>17</sup> 2,000 and more = 13.9 per cent; 500 and more = 17.8 per cent: W. E. Vaughan and A. J. Fitzpatrick, eds, *Irish historical statistics: population, 1821–1971* (Dublin, 1978), p. 27; H. Mason, 'The development of the urban pattern in Ireland, 1841–1881', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Wales, 1969, p. 104.

<sup>18</sup> W. J. O'N. Daunt, *Personal recollections of the late Daniel O'Connell, M.P.* (2 vols, London, 1848), I, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> G. Ó Tuathaigh, 'The folk hero and tradition' in D. McCartney, ed., *The world of Daniel O'Connell* (Dublin, 1980), p. 38; J. A. Murphy, 'O'Connell and the Gaelic world' in K. B. Nowlan and M. R. O'Connell, eds, *Daniel O'Connell: portrait of a radical* (Belfast, 1984), pp. 43–4.

<sup>20</sup> *ui Ógáin, Immortal Dan*, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> O'Connell to Bentham, 26 Oct. 1828, in O'Connell, ed., *Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, VIII, p. 208 (O'Connell's emphasis). It is significant that the period 1829–48 marked the high point of official concern about the seditious nature of popular ballads as a political genre (M. Murphy, 'The ballad singer and the role of the seditious ballad in nineteenth-century Ireland: Dublin Castle's view', *Ulster Folklife*, 25 (1979), p. 80).

O'Connell's obviously 'Gaelic' character and origins helped to assign him a position of admired leadership by sheer force of a personality made manifest by confidence, courage, success, a golden tongue, by a host of intuitive gestures which persuaded very large numbers of people to see in him the incarnation of their aspirations and hopes.

When residing on his own County Kerry estate, O'Connell was inclined to behave much as an Irish chieftain might have been expected to do, and this reinforced such attitudes. Montalembert called on him at Derrynane in 1830, found '100 to 150 peasants waiting at his door for his advice', no less than thirty-four members of O'Connell's extended family in the house, and was then entertained at a large dinner party and by the playing of traditional Irish music.<sup>22</sup> 'He delighted', recorded William Fagan of O'Connell in the 1840s, 'in playing the Irish Tanist among his dependents. He was Judge, Jury, and Executive in all their disputes... Often, on the top of a mountain crag, while the hounds were at fault, would he sit on one of nature's rude imperishable benches, to hear and determine the disputes'.<sup>23</sup> Although O'Connell did not often use the Irish language in his speeches, he did not hesitate to deploy scattered phrases designed to emphasize his identification with those listening to him. At the enormous assemblages which gathered to hear him speak throughout the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s, banners were carried emblazoned with Irish texts while addresses in Irish were delivered by his supporters at meetings concerning emancipation, reform, and repeal.<sup>24</sup> What, however, seemed to count for most in the construction of the relationship between O'Connell and Gaelic Ireland was not so much his attitude to it as its attitude to him. While he had little time for the nostalgia of traditional Aisling poetic fantasies in which Ireland was depicted as a virtuous and wronged maiden waiting to be rescued from Saxon clutches by a heroic deliverer (possibly with foreign help), those who still thought in such tropes preferred to remain unaware of the fact and simply ignored his denunciations of violence, his belief in liberal reform, and his support for a continuing (though devolved) connection with the British empire and crown. For them O'Connell, at bottom, was envisaged as the hero who was going to favour Catholics and destroy the privileges of the 'descendants of lying Luther and crooked avaricious Calvin' and to do so by banishing 'English-speaking boors, English-speaking

<sup>22</sup> J. Hennig, 'Continental opinion' in M. Tierney, ed., *Daniel O'Connell: nine centenary essays* (Dublin, 1948), p. 252.

<sup>23</sup> W. Fagan, *The life and times of Daniel O'Connell* (2 vols, Cork, 1847-8), II, p. 180.

<sup>24</sup> Murphy, 'O'Connell and the Gaelic world', pp. 37-8; S. P. Ó Mórdha, 'An anti-tithe speech in Irish', *Eigse*, 9 (1960-1), pp. 223-6; B. Ó Buachalla, 'A speech in Irish on repeal', *Studia Hibernica*, 10 (1970), pp. 84-94; G. J. Lyne, 'Daniel O'Connell, intimidation and the Kerry elections of 1835', *Journal of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society*, 4 (1971), p. 84; O'Ferrall, *Catholic Emancipation*, pp. 128 and 194; úi Ógáin, *Immortal Dan*, p. 42. O'Connell may — unusually — have been able to read as well as speak Irish (*ibid.*, p. 21).

churls'.<sup>25</sup> And this, it was constantly affirmed, would be achieved by means of blood and the sword. Tomás Rua Ó Súilleabháin (a Kerry poet patronized by the O'Connell family) saw him in exactly these terms.

Dónall, the strapping fellow, is in form and ready,  
The sword of blood in his fist ready for slaughter,  
And his mouth affirmed that before the end of autumn  
He would lift the sorrow from the Irish people.<sup>26</sup>

And the same was true — to an even more fanciful extent — of an anonymous balladeer whose productions were sent by an anxious County Cork magistrate to Dublin Castle in 1833.

A large fleet is coming over from France,  
With young O'Connell with them as their leader,  
And then we will have bonfires over the country for joy,  
And beat them to hell.<sup>27</sup>

To a considerable extent O'Connell's Gaelically generated status as chieftain was acknowledged well beyond the west. In the east of Ireland, too, the folklore that came to surround him found its most characteristic expression, not in precise references to reform, emancipation, or repeal, but in a concern for cosmic deliverance, on the one hand, and for the hero's immediately personal attributes and successes — his ability to outwit oppressive landlords, magistrates, and treacherous Englishmen — on the other. And, indeed, the intense demonstrations which broke out in north-east Munster to celebrate emancipation's 1828 electoral triumph in County Clare were largely orchestrated by local factions determined to sink their own long-standing differences into a single, militant, and universal campaign.<sup>28</sup> Above all, O'Connell's unsurpassed skill and cunning as a lawyer were so widely celebrated that the title accorded him by the rural masses was more commonly that of 'Counsellor' than that of 'Liberator'.<sup>29</sup> And to a very large extent it was precisely this disjunction between the details of O'Connell's programme and the generalized manner in which that programme and

<sup>25</sup> Murphy, 'O'Connell and Gaelic Ireland', pp. 44–5 (translated from the Irish).

<sup>26</sup> úi Ógáin, *Immortal Dan*, p. 102 (translated from the Irish).

<sup>27</sup> National Archives Dublin (NAD), Outrage Papers 1833/2454/1.

<sup>28</sup> Ó Tuathaigh, 'The folk hero and tradition', pp. 33–4; idem, 'Gaelic Ireland, popular politics and Daniel O'Connell', *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, 34 (1974–5), pp. 21–34; G. Owens, 'A "Moral Insurrection": faction fighters, public demonstrations and the O'Connellite campaign, 1828', *Irish Historical Studies*, 30 (1997), pp. 513–41.

<sup>29</sup> D. Ó Muirthe, 'O'Connell in Irish folk tradition' in Nowlan and O'Connell, eds, *Daniel O'Connell*, p. 55; also N. Ó Ciosáin's review of *Immortal Dan* in *Irish Historical Studies*, 30 (1996), pp. 282–4.



its author were perceived that made it possible for him to retain widespread popularity even when — as was not infrequently the case — the implications of his statements and views were anything but neutral as between the various social and economic groups which gave him their support.

The agrarian situation which O'Connell — as indeed all contemporary Irish politicians — faced was at once disturbed and unstable. Since the 1760s large parts of rural Ireland had experienced the violent activities of various secret societies bent upon redressing what they perceived to be injustices regarding the occupation, availability, and price of land.<sup>30</sup> These societies varied considerably as to membership and aims. The rents demanded from farmers; 'landlord attempts at reorganization; conacre rents; labourers' wages; the abandonment of tillage for pasture; the employment of "strangers" from outside the immediate locality; tithes, taxes, and tolls at fairs', any or all of these could 'become the cause of violence and intimidation in a society where the rural poor sought desperately to maintain a foothold in an increasingly overcrowded agrarian system'.<sup>31</sup> Three aspects of the make-up and activities of such societies bear especially upon their relationship with O'Connell's wider political priorities: first, the appearance of an overtly millennial frame of mind among many of those involved; second, the manner in which divisions between the various secret organizations reflected economic divisions within agricultural society in general; and third, a clear difference between their members' behaviour in distressed times (when discontent encompassed a very wide range of farmer and labourer interests) and in better times (when violence tended to be dominated almost entirely by the landless and the land-poor).<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> J. S. Donnelly Jr, 'The Rightboy movement 1785–8', *Studia Hibernica*, 17/18 (1977–8), pp. 120–202; idem, 'The Whiteboy movement 1761–5', *Irish Historical Studies*, 31 (1978), pp. 20–54; idem, 'Irish agrarian rebellion: the Whiteboys of 1769–76', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, Section C, 83 (1983), pp. 293–331; M. J. Bric, 'Priests, parsons and politics: the Rightboy protest in County Cork, 1785–1788', *Past & Present*, 100 (1983), pp. 100–23. See also note 32 below.

<sup>31</sup> S. J. Connolly, 'Union government, 1812–23' in W. E. Vaughan, ed., *A new history of Ireland, V: Ireland under the Union, 1: 1801–70* (Oxford, 1989), p. 58. Conacre consisted of very small parcels of land let by tenant farmers to otherwise landless labourers for intensive potato cultivation, usually at very high rents.

<sup>32</sup> J. S. Donnelly, Jr, 'The social composition of agrarian rebellions in early nineteenth-century Ireland: the case of the Carders and Caravats, 1813–16' in P. J. Corish, ed., *Radicals, rebels and establishments*, Historical Studies, xv (Belfast, 1985), pp. 151–69; idem, 'Pastorini and Captain Rock: millenarianism and sectarianism in the Rockite movement of 1821–4' in S. Clark and J. S. Donnelly, Jr, eds, *Irish peasants: violence and political unrest, 1780–1914* (Manchester, 1983), pp. 102–39; P. E. W. Roberts, 'Caravats and Shanavests: Whiteboyism and faction fighting in east Munster, 1802–11' in *ibid.*, pp. 64–101.

The growth of millennial feeling during the first quarter of the century was associated particularly with the so-called 'prophecies' of 'Pastorini', the latter a pseudonym adopted by the eighteenth-century English Catholic bishop, Charles Walmesley, to disguise his authorship of an apocalyptic *General History of the Christian Church* which went through numerous editions in Ireland in the years after 1790. Popularized versions caused considerable excitement among the rural masses and persuaded many that a dramatic and cataclysmic event would take place in the 1820s by means of which the oppressed Catholics of Ireland would be freed from English Protestant domination. Although O'Connell publicly belittled the impact of Pastorini, his own sudden manifestation as the major focus of Catholic aspirations in the mid-1820s drew upon himself many of the hopes of the millennialists.<sup>33</sup> For a time, indeed, he succeeded in transferring some of the energies previously devoted to the agrarian conspiracies of groups such as the Rockites (widely active in east Munster in the early 1820s) into the emancipation campaign, in part at least because millennial expectations came to infuse the latter no less urgently than they had the former.

However, at first sight, one major obstacle might still be seen as having stood in the way of O'Connell's achieving a *sustained* mobilization of rural Ireland: namely, the deep economic inequalities which divided its constituent parts: large, middling, and small farmers, cottiers, labourers with conacre land, labourers without access to land of any kind. In the years immediately before the Great Famine of 1845–9 the general relativities with regard to adult males (each of whom was usually required to support a large number of dependants) was roughly as shown in the table on p. 131.<sup>34</sup> O'Connell himself, who often (if somewhat inaccurately) called himself a utilitarian, had few personal doubts that economic progress and political stability could only be attained if the more substantial and successful agriculturalists were allowed to achieve a position of dominance in rural life. Although he ran his own property in Kerry along rather casually paternalistic lines,<sup>35</sup> on the wider stage he favoured what he called the agrarian 'middle classes' and as a result denounced the Sub-Letting Act of 1826 in terms that would have done credit to Samuel Smiles, insisting it should more properly be called an act 'to prevent a farmer from becoming a gentleman, [and] to prevent a gentleman

<sup>33</sup> *Minutes of evidence taken before the select committee . . . appointed to inquire into the state of Ireland*, House of Commons paper 1825 (181), IX, 167; O'Ferrall, *Catholic emancipation*, p. 39. See also P. O'Farrell, 'Millennialism, messianism and utopianism in Irish History', *Anglo-Irish Studies*, 2 (1976), pp. 45–68.

<sup>34</sup> K. T. Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: conflict and conformity* (2nd edn, London, 1999), p. 38 adapted from Donnelly, Jr, 'The social composition of agrarian rebellions', p. 152.

<sup>35</sup> MacDonagh, *The emancipist*, pp. 281–2; O'Connell to J. Primrose, 3 Mar. 1834, in O'Connell, ed., *Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, v, p. 109.

|   | <i>No.</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|---|------------|-------------------|
| Rich farmers<br>(mean holdings 80 acres)  | 50 000     | 2.9               |
| 'Snug' farmers<br>(mean holdings 50 acres)  | 100 000    | 5.9               |
| Family farmers<br>(mean holdings 20 acres and<br>rarely employing outside labour) | 250 000    | 14.7              |
| Cottiers<br>(mean holdings 5 acres)   | 300 000    | 17.7              |
| Labourers<br>(mean holdings 1 acre, though<br>often without any land)             | 1 000 000  | 58.8              |

from acquiring Property'.<sup>36</sup> In areas where farmers of 'industrious habits' abounded, he told the House of Commons in 1830, there Whiteboyism found little purchase because such men 'have something to lose, and are therefore the friends of good order'.<sup>37</sup> O'Connellite activists were encouraged to inform labourers of the *Liberator's* hatred of combinations in general and of agricultural combinations in particular. In 1837 O'Connell's General Association even reproved a branch in Kildare for wanting to allow poor labourers to sit on its committee, while in the county constituencies generally the supporters of repeal tended to be depicted by headquarters as consisting largely of 'honest and respectable *farmers*'.<sup>38</sup>

A number of reasons can be put forward as to why such things did not prevent the rural masses from flocking to O'Connell's banner. Clearly O'Connell's status as Gaelic and millennial chieftain proved especially attractive to the poorest members of rural society, many of whom believed — however unrealistically — that their hero was about to lead them into an armed revolt, perhaps even that, as a ballad put it in 1831, 'Bony [sic] and O'Connell will set old Ireland free'.<sup>39</sup> Not only that, but millennialism, which attracted both farmers and labourers, provided a connection of expectation between groups otherwise separated by purely economic considerations. Again (as has already been pointed out) the onset of hard times had the effect of submerging the divergent interests of

<sup>36</sup> O'Connell to the Knight of Kerry, 27 Feb. 1828, in O'Connell, ed., *Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, III, p. 377.

<sup>37</sup> M. F. Cusack, ed., *The speeches and public letters of the Liberator* (2 vols, Dublin, 1875), I, p. 52.

<sup>38</sup> *Dublin Evening Post*, 24 Jan. and 18 May 1837; *Kilkenny Journal*, 4 Jan. 1837.

<sup>39</sup> Donnelly, Jr, 'Pastorini and Captain Rock', p. 136; Ó Muirithe, 'O'Connell in Irish folk tradition', p. 63.

labourers, cottiers, and farmers into a generalized discontent which then provided a kind of reservoir from which O'Connell could draw the waters of mass mobilization.<sup>40</sup> And hard times were frequent enough, with especially serious and widespread depressions occurring in 1800–1, 1813–16, 1821–4, and in the early 1830s. In particular, discontent about the payment of tithes for the support of the Protestant Church of Ireland proved especially effective in attracting larger farmers into common cause with lesser agriculturalists. Legislation in 1824 extended the requirement to pay tithes from arable land (where small farmers predominated) to pasture (generally the preserve of the more substantial operators), while the so-called Tithe War of the 1830s enjoyed overwhelming support from virtually all sections of the rural community.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time O'Connell, whether deliberately or not is far from clear, maintained so high a level of vagueness with regard to the 'land question' as such that he usually managed to avoid giving offence to any of the disparate groups enrolled under his command.<sup>42</sup> For a long time such thoughts as he addressed to economic matters in general tended more to the grandly banal than the usefully specific, as when in 1828 he laid it down that 'the greatest part of Ireland does not contain one-tenth of the population it could and ought to support in comfort'.<sup>43</sup> It was not until 1844–5 that he put any real flesh upon the bones of his agrarian rhetoric and even this amounted to no more than a series of modest proposals concerning matters such as compensation for improvements, an absentee tax (a particular — and politically safe — passion of his), the provision of agricultural schools, and the reclamation of unproductive land.<sup>44</sup>

None of this was designed to make any category among O'Connell's following feel either especially privileged or especially disadvantaged or to interfere with their amalgamation into what were primarily political (rather than economic or social) campaigns. Of course from time to time particular groups did come to the conclusion that emancipation, reform, or repeal had

<sup>40</sup> Donnelly, Jr, 'The social composition of agrarian rebellions', pp. 154–5.

<sup>41</sup> O'Ferrall, *Catholic emancipation*, pp. 48–9; G. Ó Tuathaigh, *Ireland before the famine, 1798–1848* (Dublin, 1972), p. 177.

<sup>42</sup> It is noteworthy that the United Irishmen in the 1790s had also been cautious about developing any kind of detailed — or indeed revolutionary — land policy for fear of upsetting particular interests (N. J. Curtin, *The United Irishmen: popular politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791–1798* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 120–1 and 128–9).

<sup>43</sup> O'Connell to P. Mahony, 17 Sept. 1828, in O'Connell, ed., *Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, III, p. 406.

<sup>44</sup> J. Lee, 'The social and economic ideas of O'Connell' in Nowlan and O'Connell, eds, *Daniel O'Connell*, p. 71; also MacDonagh, *The emancipist*, pp. 26–7; O'Connell to C. Buller, 9 Jan. 1844, in O'Connell, ed., *Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, VII, pp. 234–7; O'Connell to P. Mahony, 25 Apr. 1845, *ibid.*, VII, p. 313; R. B. McDowell, *Public opinion and government policy in Ireland, 1801–1846* (London, 1952), pp. 238–9.

yielded very little in terms of improved conditions or hard cash. As one cottier forcefully asked in 1832, 'What good did emancipation do us . . . Are we better clothed or fed, or our children better clothed and fed?'<sup>45</sup> But, in general, all sections of the rural population of Catholic Ireland were — sometimes to a greater, sometimes to a rather lesser extent — swept along by the O'Connellite tide. Thus labourers, for reasons that must have had more to do with communal emotion than economic self-interest, collaborated with farmers in agitating on O'Connell's behalf.<sup>46</sup> At the County Clare election of 1831 the Terry Alts (another agrarian secret society) even turned out shouting 'Hey for O'Connell and hey for Clare'.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, O'Connell repeatedly attracted enormous crowds at the vast meetings called to publicize his cause; and, although contemporary estimates ranged as high as a million for that held at Tara in August 1843, more sober calculations of 500,000 in the case of Tara and 300,000 or so in that of many others are impressive enough.<sup>48</sup> At what were, in effect, huge popular festivals, numerous altars were set up upon which priests said mass as the people arrived, platforms were provided for eminent clerics and politicians, songs were sung, and 'warm-up' speakers enthused the crowds before the Liberator himself arrived. O'Connell, though his own voice could presumably only be heard by a small number of those present, enlivened his more formal remarks with a kind of relaxed bantering that today would be condemned as mere stage-Irishry. At the famous Clare election of 1828 called because his opponent, Vesey Fitzgerald, had been appointed president of the board of trade, he was, for example, phonetically recorded as lapsing into what Oliver MacDonagh accurately enough calls 'proto-Kiltartanese': 'Arrah, bhoys, where's Vasy Vjarld at all, at all? . . . sind the bell about for him. Here's the cry for yez:—

Stholen or sthrayed,  
Losht or mishlaid,  
The President of the Boord of Thrade!<sup>49</sup>

And those who heard him responded with a matching enthusiasm. They shouted and groaned and sang and cheered, and when on one occasion a singer rendered a 'melody' by Thomas Moore about a slave freeing himself from chains, O'Connell leaped to his feet, raised his arms wide and exclaimed

<sup>45</sup> G. C. Lewis, *On local disturbances in Ireland, and on the Irish church question* (London, 1836), p. 109. See also Lady Gregory, ed., *Mr Gregory's letter-box, 1813–1835* (2nd edn, Gerrards Cross, 1981), p. 167.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Report of Chief Constable Hutton, 13 Feb. 1832, NAD Outrage Papers, 1832/2175/255; Report of Chief Constable Wright, 29 Dec. 1834, *ibid.*, 1835/47/152.

<sup>47</sup> Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800*, p. 51.

<sup>48</sup> MacDonagh, *The emancipist*, pp. 227–30.

<sup>49</sup> MacDonagh, *The hereditary bondsman*, p. 253.

'I am not that slave!', upon which those present themselves again and again shouted 'We are not those slaves! We are not those slaves!'<sup>50</sup> Nor was such enthusiasm at all surprising at a time when priests too could sometimes adopt a similar kind of approach in front of their congregations which, in turn (recorded a visitor), expressed 'their sympathy with the preacher, as the Methodists in England do, by a deep and audible breathing'.<sup>51</sup> Although, therefore, O'Connell never found the process of mobilization an easy one — he had particular difficulties in identifying the precise location of his support in the still very restricted electorate of the time<sup>52</sup> — at the moments of his greatest impact he undoubtedly displayed a quite remarkable skill in holding together forces of a distinctly disparate kind. As the Irish-speaking draper and schoolmaster, Humphrey O'Sullivan, remarked, 'It is on O'Connell's advice this renewal of friendship and this peace is being made among the children of the Gael but the English do not like it; for they think it easier for them to beat people at variance than people in friendship'.<sup>53</sup>

And what — equally remarkably — these forces were being held together *for* was, at least in O'Connell's view, the furtherance of a programme of liberal and utilitarian reform. Thus, while religion, national feelings, and a shared sense of disadvantage provided the engines powering the O'Connellite machine, the destination towards which the driver was pointing was, above all, a reformist one. Religious matters and, indeed, questions of national identity tended to be confined to the realms of rhetoric and broad-brush generalization; but when it came to reform O'Connell was much more often prepared to enter into details and occasionally (though by no means invariably) to do so with a surprising degree of consistency. In this respect the early influence of Godwin provided him with an extensive — and at times even an extreme — programme of individual rights, both in the negative sense of 'freedoms from' and, more positively, in a firm adhesion to the pursuit of civil equality.<sup>54</sup> The influence of Bentham was less substantial, despite O'Connell's linguistically extravagant relationship with the great utilitarian during the last years of the emancipation campaign: 'BENEFAC-TOR OF THE HUMAN RACE' began one of O'Connell's letters, 'Dear, honest, supremely public-spirited, truly philanthropic, consistent, persevering, self-devoting Friend' began one of Bentham's.<sup>55</sup> Yet, however often he

<sup>50</sup> MacDonagh, *The emancipist*, p. 230.

<sup>51</sup> J. E. Bicheno, *Ireland and its economy* (London, 1830), p. 173.

<sup>52</sup> K. T. Hoppen, 'Politics, the law, and the nature of the Irish electorate, 1832–1850', *English Historical Review*, 92 (1977), pp. 773–6.

<sup>53</sup> O'Ferrall, *Catholic emancipation*, p. 228.

<sup>54</sup> MacDonagh, *The emancipist*, p. 19.

<sup>55</sup> O'Connell to Bentham, 30 July 1829, in O'Connell, ed., *Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, VIII, p. 216; Bentham to O'Connell, 15 Feb. 1829, in J. Bowring, ed., *The works of Jeremy Bentham* (11 vols, Edinburgh, 1843), XI, p. 12.

declared himself a utilitarian, O'Connell could never hide his distrust of 'big government', with the result that he opposed both the new English poor law of 1834 and the Irish poor law of 1838, not because he believed that a better *system* had existed before, but because both would lead to higher taxation and excessive state intervention and because he could not overcome an intuitive belief that they would also do 'away with personal feelings and connexions'.<sup>56</sup> In so far, therefore, as he was a Benthamite, O'Connell was so in an ethical rather than a doctrinal sense. Thus, while opposing the poor laws, he none the less favoured a wide-ranging reform of the legal system and was by no means as inimical to either factory reforms or the granting of certain strictly limited privileges to trade unions as he is sometimes supposed to have been.<sup>57</sup> And in the end, of course, the two men fell out, largely because Bentham had little sympathy with the kind of liberal Catholicism which O'Connell espoused or, indeed, with any policy that involved giving priority to Irish affairs.<sup>58</sup>

Whatever his deficiencies as a Benthamite, O'Connell's support for most of the central tenets — as well as some of the lesser aims — of contemporary British radicalism was extraordinarily tenacious, even sometimes to the extent of permanently antagonizing those who might otherwise have supported him. Although initially his trimming over the concessions demanded in the 1820s in return for emancipation (the disfranchisement of the forty-shilling freeholders for example) irritated radicals like Cobbett and Hunt, O'Connell took pains to mend his fences by addressing a meeting of Westminster electors in May 1829 in order to confirm his political credentials before an English audience. 'First, then, Englishmen', he began a rousing speech on the franchise question, 'I appear before you as a reformer, a radical reformer'.<sup>59</sup> The following year he spoke in the Commons in favour of extending the right to vote and again announced that he was doing so as 'a radical reformer' appealing 'to the great principle of democratic liberty which made England the great and productive country which she had been for centuries'.<sup>60</sup> And this was to prove a parliamentary song he was to sing

<sup>56</sup> *Hansard*, xxiv, 1060 (1 July 1834); O'Connell to Archbishop MacHale, [c. 18 Feb. 1838], in O'Connell, ed., *Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, vi, p. 136; A. Macintyre, *The Liberator: Daniel O'Connell and the Irish party, 1830–1847* (London, 1965), pp. 201–26; J. Lee, 'The social and economic ideas of O'Connell', pp. 75–6.

<sup>57</sup> J. Lee, 'The social and economic ideas of O'Connell', pp. 76–7, 80; F. D'Arcy, 'The artisans of Dublin and Daniel O'Connell, 1830–1847: an unquiet liaison', *Irish Historical Studies*, 17 (1970), pp. 242–3; R. B. McDowell, *Public opinion and government policy in Ireland*, p. 127.

<sup>58</sup> J. E. Crimmins, 'Jeremy Bentham and Daniel O'Connell: their correspondence and radical alliance, 1828–1831', *Historical Journal*, 40 (1997), pp. 359–87.

<sup>59</sup> F. D'Arcy, 'O'Connell and the English radicals' in D. McCartney, ed., *The world of Daniel O'Connell* (Dublin, 1980), p. 62.

<sup>60</sup> *Hansard*, 2nd Series, xxii, 720 (18 Feb. 1830).

without ceasing, no less at the end than at the beginning of his career as an MP.<sup>61</sup>

Gladstone's recollections of O'Connell published in 1889 are, in this respect, entirely to the point.

He was an Irishman, but he was also a cosmopolite. I remember personally how, in the first session of my parliamentary life [1833], he poured out his wit, his pathos, and his earnestness, in the cause of negro emancipation. Having adopted the political creed of Liberalism, he was as thorough an English Liberal, as if he had had no Ireland to think of. He had energies to spare for Law Reform, for Postal Reform, . . . for secret voting, for Corn Law Repeal, in short for whatever tended, within the political sphere, to advance human happiness and freedom.<sup>62</sup>

O'Connell's reformist interests were perhaps wider than those of any other leading politician of his day, encompassing, as they did, concerns of a British, Irish, and at times even a world nature. Unusually for a devout Catholic in good standing with early nineteenth-century ecclesiastical authority — and despite occasional equivocations in the 1840s — he generally supported both the separation of church and state and individual liberty of conscience.<sup>63</sup> If, on the issue of parliamentary and franchise reform he did not agree with the Chartists on every point, he agreed with them on most things. He urged English radicals to mobilize 'pressure from without' in favour of the ballot, short parliaments, and an increase in the number of voters. During a debate on the Charter in May 1842 he declared himself 'a decided advocate of universal suffrage' because he believed that no one could properly fix 'where the line should be drawn which determines that servitude should end and liberty commence'.<sup>64</sup> And he bitterly denounced the House of Lords for resisting reform, asking

What prospect had the working classes, who had no votes for electing Members of Parliament, of finding redress? Who took care of their interests? They had no representatives . . . You have deprived them of the franchise, and you suppose that they will be contented and satisfied under that system. They would not deserve to be Englishmen if they were satisfied. They are a slave class, and you a master class; and so long as this state of things existed, it was their right and duty to be dissatisfied.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, *Hansard*, LXXXI, 1097 (23 June 1845).

<sup>62</sup> W. E. Gladstone, 'Daniel O'Connell', *Nineteenth Century*, 25 (1889), pp. 156–7.

<sup>63</sup> Cusack, ed., *The speeches and public letters of the Liberator*, II, p. 285; MacDonagh, *The hereditary bondsman*, pp. 99–100; idem, *The emancipist*, pp. 19–23, 266–7; Macintyre, *The Liberator*, pp. 38–9.

<sup>64</sup> O'Connell to J. A. Roebuck, 23 Sept. 1837, in O'Connell, ed., *Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, VI, 86; *Hansard*, LXIII, 85 (3 May 1842).

<sup>65</sup> *Hansard*, XLIX, 961 (29 July 1839).



References to 'slavery' and its opposite, 'freedom', constituted key usages in O'Connell's rhetoric and argumentation, not least because they allowed him to universalize the Irish case into something of more than merely Irish significance. In no important manner, however, was he extending their relevance beyond Ireland on merely pragmatic grounds. He believed in 'freedom' for all men and (when he thought of it) for all women too.<sup>66</sup> He relentlessly opposed the existence of formal slavery throughout the world and never wavered even when it became clear that he was thereby doing his cause no good among important sections of opinion in the United States. In 1843 a black man stood up at a meeting of the Repeal Association in Dublin to thank O'Connell before a cheering crowd for saving 'the life of black people'. Having been — he went on to even greater cheers — 'brought up a Protestant, I am now a Catholic, and will die in that religion for the sake of Massa Dan O'Connell'.<sup>67</sup> Regardless, therefore, of the racist views of many Irish-Americans, O'Connell's abolitionism remained firm enough to earn him the title of 'the single most important supporter that American anti-slavery' had in the Europe of his day.<sup>68</sup>

The same notions of personal liberty drove O'Connell to embrace the cause of all those damaged by the spread of western colonialism. In denouncing the exploiters he burst into one of his (comparatively few) public attacks upon the British as such: 'There', he declared, 'are your Anglo-Saxon race! your British blood! . . . the vilest and most lawless of races. There is a gang for you! . . . the civiliziers, forsooth, of the world'.<sup>69</sup> That he espoused a modified form of 'free trade' (he came to favour some protection for infant Irish industries) was perhaps both unsurprising and — in most radical circles — popular.<sup>70</sup> That he promoted, with even greater vigour, the cause of Jewish emancipation inevitably produced more brickbats than applause. 'I think', he told Isaac Goldsmid in 1829, 'every day a day of injustice until that civil equality is obtained by the Jews'.<sup>71</sup> And while it might be considered logical that a supplicant for Catholic emancipation should extend a similar demand on behalf of Jews, there were not a few contemporaries who saw no necessary connection between the liberties of Christians (however benighted) and those of the rest of humanity. O'Connell, however,

<sup>66</sup> O'Connell to L. Mott, 20 June 1840, in O'Connell, ed., *Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, iv, pp. 337–40.

<sup>67</sup> L. J. McCaffrey, *Daniel O'Connell and the repeal year* (Kentucky, 1966), pp. 74–5.

<sup>68</sup> D. C. Riach, 'Daniel O'Connell and American anti-slavery', *Irish Historical Studies*, 20 (1976), p. 24.

<sup>69</sup> Cited G. Osofsky, 'Abolitionists, Irish immigrants, and the dilemmas of romantic nationalism', *American Historical Review*, 80 (1975), p. 892.

<sup>70</sup> J. Lee, 'The social and economic ideas of O'Connell', p. 81.

<sup>71</sup> O'Connell to Goldsmid, 11 Sept. 1829, in O'Connell, ed., *Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, iv, p. 95.

followed a clearly different line of thought, one in which it was precisely the imperatives of his religious beliefs that underpinned the universal nature of the cause of liberty. 'Christianity', he told the Commons in May 1830, 'bade him do as he would be done by, and he only fulfilled that duty when he gave this [Jewish Relief] Bill his most hearty support'.<sup>72</sup>

Yet though O'Connell was so prominent among the advanced liberals of his time — he welcomed the collapse of the Bourbons in 1830, the success of the Belgian revolt in the same year, he grieved over the failures of the 'cause of liberty' in Poland and Spain and over the excessive use of capital punishment at home<sup>73</sup> — after 1829 he received little in the way of return from the leaders of radicalism in Britain. Only three English MPs (William Cobbett, Henry Hunt, and Thomas Wakley) ever gave any kind of public support to repeal, and only one of them ever voted in its favour.<sup>74</sup> Altogether more typical was G. F. Muntz, first vice-president of the Birmingham Political Union and MP for that city between 1840 and 1857, who in 1843 prefaced his contribution to a debate on an Irish Arms Bill with the observation that he 'had not the slightest intention to take part in the present debate merely respecting the Arms Bill, of which he knew nothing, such a measure never having been connected with the Government of England'.<sup>75</sup> Not long after O'Connell's death Richard Cobden was asked about his seven-year silence in the Commons on Irish affairs. 'I will tell you the reason', he replied,

I found the populace of Ireland represented in the House by a body of men, with O'Connell at their head, with whom I could feel no more sympathy or identity than with people whose language I did not understand. In fact, *morally* I felt a complete antagonism and repulsion towards them. O'Connell always treated me with friendly attention, but I never shook hands with him or faced his smile without a feeling of insecurity; and as for trusting him on any public question where his vanity or passions might interpose, I should have as soon thought of an alliance with an Ashantee chief.<sup>76</sup>

And yet, even during his period of closest alliance with the whigs between 1835 and 1841, O'Connell was still prepared to go against Melbourne's ministry on radical-raised issues such as the ballot, flogging in the army, the sentences passed on the Tolpuddle Martyrs, and the abolition of newspaper stamp duty. That occasionally he failed to do so (on, for example, the Canadian question and on the details of tithe legislation) seems very small

<sup>72</sup> *Hansard*, 2nd Series, xxiv, 796 (17 May 1830).

<sup>73</sup> O'Connell to his wife, 5 July 1823, in O'Connell, ed., *Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, II, p. 498; to C. Fitz-Simon, 11 Sept. 1830, *ibid.*, IV, pp. 203–4; to Lord Duncannon, 2 Oct. 1834, *ibid.*, V, p. 187; MacDonagh, *The emancipist*, p. 62.

<sup>74</sup> D'Arcy, 'O'Connell and the English radicals', p. 65. Wakley voted for repeal on a motion introduced after O'Connell's death by Feargus O'Connor in 1848.

<sup>75</sup> *Hansard*, LXX, 139 (19 June 1843).

<sup>76</sup> J. Morley, *The life of Richard Cobden* (2 vols, London, 1881), II, p. 27.

beer indeed in comparison with the refusal of most British radicals to offer him even a tenth of what he gave to them.<sup>77</sup>

All the more remarkable, therefore, was O'Connell's persistence — and comparative success — in eliding the two causes most closely associated with his name — emancipation and repeal — into a general agenda of liberal reform. Already on the Clare hustings in 1828 he had connected emancipation with 'every measure favourable to radical Reform'.<sup>78</sup> The following year he was more specific still and produced an election address in which emancipation was presented as a kind of lever that would help to bring about parliamentary reform, the repeal of the Vestry and Sub-Letting Acts, the removal of restrictions on monastic orders, a charitable trusts act, a reform of grand jury assessments, codification of the law, improved internal communications, free trade, and much else besides.<sup>79</sup> But especially did he then rejoice — in words that some at least among his mass following would hardly have appreciated — that emancipation was 'a bloodless revolution more extensive in its operation than any other political change that could have taken place. I say *political* to contrast it with *social* changes which might break to pieces the framework of society'.<sup>80</sup> And in much the same manner was repeal of the union also put forward as a matter of *political* reform: 'in short, salutary restoration without revolution, an Irish parliament, British connection, one king, two legislatures'.<sup>81</sup> 'I do not', he declared in 1832, 'urge on the Repeal when it could interfere with Reform'.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, as the repeal movement developed in the early 1830s, O'Connell ensured that it became more and more closely linked with 'the full radical reform programme'.<sup>83</sup> Like emancipation, so repeal too was envisaged as making possible a vast array of practical improvements in everything from taxation to the rents paid by farmers and the wages received by agricultural labourers.<sup>84</sup>

However devoted O'Connell was to repeal as an issue, that reading which divides his career into two 'authentic' episodes — emancipation in the 1820s and repeal in the early 1830s and the 1840s — separated by a period of reluctant reformist pragmatism in the middle and late 1830s when O'Connell allied himself with the whigs and suppressed the repeal campaign in return for concessions on specific questions such as patronage, tithes, and local government, obscures more than it reveals. Although on the surface

<sup>77</sup> McDowell, *Public opinion and government policy in Ireland*, pp. 168–9.

<sup>78</sup> Reynolds, *The Catholic emancipation crisis in Ireland*, pp. 131–2.

<sup>79</sup> McDowell, *Public opinion and government policy in Ireland*, pp. 127–8.

<sup>80</sup> O'Connell to E. Dwyer, 14 Apr. 1829, in O'Connell, ed., *Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, iv, p. 45.

<sup>81</sup> O'Connell to P.V. Fitzpatrick, 21 Feb. 1833, *ibid.*, v, p. 11.

<sup>82</sup> O'Connell to J. Dwyer, 17 May 1832, *ibid.*, iv, p. 417.

<sup>83</sup> MacDonagh, *The emancipist*, p. 81.

<sup>84</sup> McDowell, *Public opinion and government policy in Ireland*, p. 126.

O'Connell's parliamentary course in the early 1830s might possibly be seen as an alternative to the whig alliance eventually formalized by the Lichfield House compact of 1835, in truth it constituted merely a 'variation in the method of consummating it'.<sup>85</sup> Long before 1835 O'Connell was putting out feelers to the whigs and there is no real evidence to suggest that he entered into an alliance with them reluctantly, hesitantly, or as a consciously perceived second-best. Indeed, in 1835 he let it be known that he was even ready to take office in Melbourne's new administration.<sup>86</sup> Nor, in the event, did he experience any great difficulties in carrying the mass of Irish public opinion with him.<sup>87</sup> More remarkable still, given the disappointments and difficulties of the next six years (though there were gains too as far as O'Connell was concerned), was his overall loyalty to the whigs as long as they remained in office.<sup>88</sup>

What changed everything was the return to power of Peel in 1841; but not simply because the tories refused to grant repeal — the whigs, after all, were no less antagonistic — but because they seemed also to oppose any and every Irish reform. If, however, in the short run O'Connell was now left with no alternative but to mount a mass campaign for repeal, he never abandoned hope that eventually the whigs might again help him to revert to more clearly reformist paths. In the last months of 1841 local O'Connellites were still organizing meetings of 'the clergy and other reformers' in the constituencies, and by September 1843 O'Connell was once again dropping hints to the effect that he might welcome a new alliance with the whigs. Indeed, in January 1844 (only three months after Peel's proclamation of the great repeal meeting planned for Clontarf) O'Connell was beginning to float the idea that a distinct programme of further reforms might yet enable a future whig administration to shunt repeal into the sidelines of political concern.<sup>89</sup> Nor should any of this be seen as surprising, for O'Connell's own understanding of repeal was highly elastic, not to say kaleidoscopic. While he undoubtedly imbued the concept (or, perhaps more properly, the term) with a certain mantra-like symbolism, he as frequently seemed willing to use repeal as little more than a device for the extraction of specific reforms. As he put it in 1840 — 'If we get the justice we require, then our Repeal Association is at an

<sup>85</sup> O. MacDonagh, 'O'Connell in the House of Commons' in McCartney, ed., *The world of Daniel O'Connell*, p. 50.

<sup>86</sup> McDowell, *Public opinion and government policy in Ireland*, pp. 153–4, 156–8, 160–1, 164–5.

<sup>87</sup> Macintyre, *The Liberator*, p. 145.

<sup>88</sup> McDowell, *Public opinion and government policy in Ireland*, p. 176; S. H. Palmer, 'Rebellion, emancipation, starvation: the dilemma of peaceful protest in Ireland, 1798–1848' in B. K. Lackner and K. R. Philp, eds, *Essays in modern European revolutionary history* (Austin, 1977), p. 20.

<sup>89</sup> O'Connell to Lord Campbell, 9 Sept. 1843, in O'Connell, ed., *Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, VII, p. 223; O'Connell to C. Buller, 9 Jan. 1844, *ibid.*, VII, pp. 234–7.

end'; though, intent as always to keep his options open, he immediately added that the chances of this happening were slim.<sup>90</sup> One option that was, however, firmly closed was any kind of effective co-operation with the Tories, not least because of the deep personal antagonism that existed between O'Connell and Peel. When, therefore, Peel began in 1844 to inaugurate a policy of 'killing repeal by kindness' O'Connell found it both personally and (in the event) politically impossible to respond.<sup>91</sup>

The failures of his last years, exacerbated as they were by the onset of the Great Famine and by increasing personal infirmity, should not, however, be allowed to place O'Connell's achievements in any but the most brilliant of lights. His combination of religious devotion and liberal principles gave both his personality and his politics a public European dimension that was, for its time, unusual, perhaps unique. For many (though not all) continental liberals he provided a much-discussed model. Above all, for Catholic liberals, in Germany no less than in France, he seemed to offer a third way between the extremes of revolution, on the one hand, and reaction, on the other.<sup>92</sup> Certainly Prussian officials had, by the late 1830s, become distinctly agitated about the frequency of the contacts between O'Connell and Catholic liberals in the Rhineland. Indeed, according to one authority, the mere mention of the name 'O'Connell' in the Rhineland or Westphalia was capable, at this time, of awakening '*in der Bevölkerung ebensosehr wie auf der Regierungsseite die Vorstellung der Gegenschafft zum bestehenden Staate*'.<sup>93</sup> Not only that, but liberals calling for a unified Germany had come to see Ireland's demands for religious and political freedom almost as a 'holy cause'.<sup>94</sup> Their admiration reached its peak in the early 1840s when, for example, the politician and journalist, Ludwig Wittig, produced his poem 'Der Harfner' published in *Vorwärts! Volkstaschenbuch auf das Jahr 1845*, whose editor was the well-known liberal, Robert Blum, later executed by order of a court martial during the 1848 revolution in Vienna:

<sup>90</sup> P. O'Farrell, *Ireland's English question: Anglo-Irish relations, 1534-1970* (London, 1971), p. 100.

<sup>91</sup> Kerr, *Peel, priests and politics*, passim.

<sup>92</sup> P. Joannon, 'O'Connell, Montalembert and the birth of Christian democracy in France' in M. R. O'Connell, ed., *Daniel O'Connell: political pioneer* (Dublin, 1991), pp. 98-109; P. Alter, 'O'Connell's impact on the organisation and development of German political Catholicism', *ibid.*, pp. 110-18; G. F. Grogan, *The noblest agitator: Daniel O'Connell and the German Catholic movement, 1830-50* (Dublin, 1991).

<sup>93</sup> K. Holl, *Die irische Frage in der Ära Daniel O'Connells und ihre Beurteilung in der politischen Publizistik des deutschen Vormärz* (Johannes-Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, printed PhD thesis, 1958), p. 83.

<sup>94</sup> Alter, 'O'Connell's impact on the organisation and development of German political Catholicism', p. 114.

Der Harfner is ein alter Mann,  
 Doch blitzt sein Auge hell;  
 Kennt ihr ihn nicht als König Dan,  
 So nenn[et] ihn O'Connell.  
 Grün Erin ist die Harfe sein,  
 Und meisterhaft sein Spiel,  
 Voll durch der Treuen dichte Reihn  
 Erschallt sein Lied: 'Repeal!'<sup>95</sup>

But in the end the continental political environment of the time made it impossible to translate O'Connell's particular marriage of Catholicism and liberalism into a dominant European force. In the first place, continental state power functioned very differently from the modes characteristic of the contemporary United Kingdom. In the second place, too many continental liberals despised Catholicism (and often, indeed, religion generally), while too many Catholics (and especially ecclesiastics) despised liberalism. And in this latter respect, it is, for example, notable that even so *theologically* advanced a figure as Ignaz von Döllinger deeply disapproved of O'Connell's repeal campaign because, just like Metternich, he feared the revolutionary potential of mass movements of any kind.<sup>96</sup>

In Ireland, however, O'Connell's pioneering agenda created resonances at once powerful, lasting, and unexpected. No observer of the Irish scene in 1800 could possibly have foreseen the manner in which O'Connell would succeed in galvanizing the Catholic people of Ireland into mass political action along constitutional and fundamentally reformist lines. And this in a country at the edge of Europe: poor, rural, in many ways backward, and occupying a distinctly inferior and ancillary position within a wider polity which many of its inhabitants regarded as at best alien, at worst oppressive.<sup>97</sup> By making use of the unique place which Catholicism occupied in Ireland, by playing so skilfully upon his own cultural affinities with those he sought to represent, by furnishing a politics of both spectacle and organization, O'Connell was able to introduce into Irish life a tradition of popular, non-violent, and constitutional action that was as novel as it was to prove significant. And he did all this by the deployment of what were, in conception at least, fundamentally pre-romantic ideas of individual rights and individual liberties. The critic Walter Benjamin once described the nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman* as 'integrating the social process with the development of a

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p. 114: 'The harpist is an old man,/ But his eye still flashes brightly;/ If you don't recognize him as King Dan,/ Then call him O'Connell./ Green Erin is his harp,/ And masterly his playing,/ Right through the dense ranks of the true/ His song resounds "Repeal!"'

<sup>96</sup> Grogan, *The noblest agitator*, pp. 21–2.

<sup>97</sup> K. T. Hoppen, 'A double periphery: Ireland within the United Kingdom, 1800–1921' in H.-H. Nolte, ed., *Europäische innere Peripherien im 20. Jahrhundert*, Historische Mitteilungen im Auftrag der Ranke-Gesellschaft: Beiheft 23 (Stuttgart, 1997), pp. 95–111.

person'.<sup>98</sup> For his part, O'Connell was able to integrate the social and economic processes of early nineteenth-century Ireland into a new form of politics by, in effect, integrating them first into his own unique and extraordinary personality.

<sup>98</sup> W. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. H. Arendt (London, 1970), p. 88 ('The Storyteller'). I was led to Benjamin by a reference in R. F. Foster, *The story of Ireland: an inaugural lecture delivered before the University of Oxford on 1 December 1994* (Oxford, 1995), p. 5.