

Glimpses of an Irish Republic

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John Toland (1670–1722)

If one overlooks Oliver Cromwell, the first republican “solution” to the “Irish problem” was offered in the most famous of English republican utopias, James Harrington’s *Oceana* (1656). It was a lament for the failure, sixty years before, of the Elizabethan attempt to “depopulate” the country and replace the victims with settlers. Must be something in the air or soil, he suggested, that makes planters come to resemble the Irish and adopt their ways. To prevent such a reversion it would have been better to plant the island with Jews. At a stroke, England would have solved the Irish and the Jewish problem, would have been relieved of a financial and political burden, and would have gained from the prosperity the Jews would have brought (Harrington [1656] 1992: 6). The second edition of Harrington’s work in 1699 was more influential than the first, largely because of the determined propagandizing efforts of the Irish writer John Toland, who, around 1700, intensified his PR campaign on behalf of the English republican cause. At the end of his life, Toland published *An History of the British*

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Druids (1722) in which he displayed his “knowledge of the antient Irish which I learnt from my childhood” (Toland [1722] 1747a: 17). He had been born a Catholic in County Donegal but left his faith and his country at the age of sixteen to pursue his studies at Glasgow. Thereafter he was anxious, to a fault, to proclaim his support for Protestantism, republicanism, and liberty. Indeed, he was so greatly pleased by the Act of Succession (1701), which made it impossible for a Catholic or anyone married to a Catholic to inherit the British throne (still in force today), that he twice explained at some length why Catholics, rather than Dissenters (to whom he was supportive), had to be excluded. Anti-Catholicism is as integral to British republicanism (or parliamentarianism) as Protestantism.

But whatever indulgence may be due to other Persuasions, *Papists* ought not to be tolerated in any free State, because they not only deny Liberty to all others, and pronounce 'em eternally damn'd; but also because they are Subjects to a foren Head whose authority they prefer to that of their native Magistrats, and that their Doctrin of Dispensation leave 'em under no Tyes of Oaths or other Ingagements, as their allowing *no Faith to be kept with Heretics* makes 'em incapable of any fellowship on the Square with such as are not rekon'd *Orthodox* by their infallible Head, another Doctrin inconsistent with all privat Faith or public Society. Sad Experience has put these Things beyond Question in every part of the World; and therefore they can never be too much consider'd by the States of the *reform'd* Religion. We in *England* ought to be doubly Zealous to extirpat this root of perpetual Danger and Disquiet, when we remember their frequent attempts to reestablish themselves by secret Conspiracies, open Divisions, Seditions, Assassinations, Massacres, Murthers, Invasions, and a thousand other treacherous or barbarous Methods, nothing being counted unlawful for increasing the Authority or inlarging the Bounds of Holy Church. We can never be put too much in mind of the Genius of their Persuasion, and what we are always to apprehend from them. (Toland 1701: 101–2)

The physical extermination of Irish Catholics as government policy had been recommended before—by Edmund Spenser, for instance, in 1596 in his *View of the Present State of Ireland*. It might seem on the face of it less surprising coming from a courtier like Spenser than from a republican like Harrington. Yet in the republican vision of a Protestant English Commonwealth leading a European Reformation alliance against the

Catholic France of Louis XIV, a Catholic Ireland was anomalous, at once a domestic and a foreign threat.

If physical extermination of the Catholics remained as an aspiration in some quarters up to and including the mid-nineteenth-century Great Famine, it was that of civic extermination, effected by the Penal Laws passed between 1695 and 1728 and by their various residues and reinforcements deployed in times of crisis, such as 1798, that replaced it as a policy. In that year of the United Irish Rebellion, in effect a republican attempt, led by Wolfe Tone (1763–98), to include Catholics as members of the public polity, anti-Catholic violence and misrepresentation reached a culmination, particularly in the paranoid world of Irish Protestantism. Protestant power had been weakened internally by the antisectarian campaigns of some of its own outstanding leaders, Henry Grattan (1746–1820) and Edmund Burke (1730–97) among them. In addition, the French Revolutionary principles and wars had made the Church of Rome a Christian ally for British governments, and the thought of arming Irish Catholics as soldiers in defense of European civilization (and the British Empire) suddenly came to seem a rational policy. The largely Protestant republican leadership in Ireland in 1798 had been effectively wiped out by executions and exile; the butchery of Catholic rebels was a salutary warning.

I want here to catch glimpses of what republicanism became in Ireland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, so my treatment of the republican United Irishmen has to be cursory, indeed. Still, it is necessary to emphasize that, while the French Revolution was an immediate and powerful stimulus to them, it was the American Revolution that aroused their deepest admiration and, ultimately, their envy. For here was a colony that had done what they wanted to do, to break the connection with Britain, become a republic, and flourish immensely as a consequence. Ireland, in failing to do so, had lost a great opportunity and faced disaster—tyranny, slaughter, martial law, parliamentary corruption, mass impoverishment and famine, deliberately fomented sectarianism, and all the other ills characteristic of the fatal connection. They had read and often quoted the English republican writers—as had the Americans; but it was the United States of America that dazzled them. Those state prisoners, who had agreed in 1798, in order to escape execution, to leave Ireland forever and go to America—which was the country they chose—found they were delayed at the Fort George prison in Scotland. This delay was due to the efforts of the American ambassador to Britain, Rufus King, to persuade the British to renege on this agreement and not send these men to America, where they might

have a disturbing influence. In one of their furious responses to this attempt by King (which kept them in prison for four years), William J. McNeven (1763–1841) contrasted America to Ireland. It was a country of unbounded prosperity, “whose inhabitants possess liberty, peace and self-government, is not at this moment much more populous than Ireland, and pays little more for those manifold blessings than one third of what it costs the Irish people to live subject to ignominy, disquietude, commercial restraints, and political slavery. Such are the advantages on one side of having shaken off the British yoke, and such the wretchedness on the other of being under its control” (McNeven 1807d: 302).¹

From 1798 almost to the present day, Irish republicanism has looked to the United States as an example of what a great republic could be and to the United Kingdom as the contrasting evil empire. That was definitively the case in the nineteenth century when it was not Harrington nor Sydney but those Americans who had been “branded as traitors to their loyal sovereign . . . deserving of the gallows” that became republican models for the Irish. McNeven lists them: John Hancock, Samuel Adams, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and George Clinton (McNeven 1807b: vi).²

The leading butcher of 1798, the Irishman Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh (1769–1822), was also the brilliant architect of two political systems, one domestic and one foreign: the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (1800) effected by the much-disputed Union of the two islands that formally completed “the English empire of the British isles” (Kearney 1989: 287) and the very opposite of the internal Union of hearts sought by the United Irishmen. The second, after Waterloo, was the Holy Alliance of European Powers, overseen by Britain, policed by Klemens von Metternich, with the Tsar swinging the censor to keep Europe in a fug of incense and ignorance (Schroeder [1994] 2003: 486–91). Perhaps the first serious threat to the alliance, eight years after Castlereagh’s death, was the revolution of 1830 in France (Pilbeam 1994; Ménager 1988). That year also marked the beginning of the French Liberal Catholic crusade in favor of Irish Catholics against the “heretical” and appalling oppression they were enduring. René de Montalembert (1810–70) began this campaign in the short-lived newspaper *L’Avenir* (1830–31), edited by Felicité de Lamennais (1782–1854) and supported by Henri Lacordaire (1802–65); they idolized Daniel O’Connell (1775–1847) (Deane 2011; Montalembert [1831] 2011). This came almost

1. See also McNeven 1807a.

2. See also McNeven 1807c.

a decade after the “Second Reformation” in Ireland, a concerted attempt to convert (or “pervert,” as the Catholic term had it) the Catholic population to Protestantism. The number of converts was small; anti-Protestant feeling soared (Whelan 2005). The price Britain had to pay Ireland for the Union, promised in 1800 but not paid for twenty-nine years, and even then with reluctance and miserliness in the most polarized sectarian circumstances, was the act of Catholic Emancipation (1829) that broke the sectarian structure of the British polity at its most tender part—that occupied by Irish Catholics. This was a triumph for the most specifically Catholic and the greatest of Irish charismatic heroes, Daniel O’Connell the Liberator. He won other victories thereafter—on tithes, for instance—but he failed completely in his second great campaign, that for the Repeal of the Union itself, not broken until 1922.

At this point, the aging Liberator was succeeded by Young Ireland (based on Giuseppe Mazzini’s Young Italy movement), whose attempt at a rebellion in 1848, just at the tail end of the Great Famine, was a predictable fiasco in a country ravaged by the calamity. That failure was balanced by Young Ireland’s relative success in producing a mildly secular, heroic conception of Irish historical consciousness in the period when the Devotional Revolution of the Catholic Church was beginning to fasten its grip on the shocked peasant remnant left by the Famine (Larkin 1972; [1976] 1984: 1–12). The British government’s most characteristic diplomatic venture during the Famine was to send the father-in-law of Prime Minister John Russell, Sir Gilbert Minto, to Rome to “enlist the Pope in restoring order and civil obedience among the peasants in Ireland . . . to make the Pope and his bishops assist an anti-papal English regime and a rabidly anti-catholic English public in keeping the Irish obedient to English authority during a mass famine and emigration of 1846–48 which was the worst in modern European history—at the same time as the British government condemned the Pope for the way in which he ruled his own domains” (Schroeder [1994] 2003: 781).

Through Young Ireland’s campaign in the new public sphere of journals and opinion, the Irish national character began to give way to a national identity, by which the Irish learned to see themselves not as the eternal “other” of the colonizing mentality but as a genuine alternative to it. The movement’s weekly newspaper, *The Nation* (1842–48; suppressed, revived 1849), for which Thomas Davis was a founding editor and contributor, was instantly influential. In the reading rooms of the Repeal Movement and at nightly meetings where the papers were read aloud to the illiterate,

many people learned important lessons. Their poverty was not an ontological but a historical condition. Their near extinction was the consequence of infamous colonial/imperial policies, not of fate; other communities had been wholly extinguished by human design. The misconstrued idea of survival as a struggle was becoming a popular axiom in the discourse of race and politics; it also lent its nefarious prestige to Ireland's battle to survive the Union, the Conquest, the opinions of a Harrington, the crusades of a Cromwell. If Irish republicanism sought a legitimating origin, there it was, plainly displayed, in the record of an English republicanism that had so fatally achieved its "bad eminence" in Ireland more bloodily than it ever had in England.

Thomas Davis (1814–45)

Both Thomas Davis and James Fintan Lalor repeatedly echo the opening lines of part 2 of Rousseau's 1754 essay "On the Origin of the Inequality of Mankind": "you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody" (Rousseau [1754] 1962: 1:169).

The unjust society that had developed so drastically in Ireland was, in Davis's term, "Feudalism," the *infâme* to be crushed in intermittent campaigns from the 1850s through the 1880s, when its demise was declared in Michael Davitt's *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland* (1904). It is during this period, 1848–1904, that the republicanism of the eighteenth century was refashioned in company with Irish nationalism. Following the example of O'Connell, nationalists and republicans (Fenians) under the later and tragic chieftainship of Charles Stewart Parnell (1846–91) attempted to win concessions from Westminster by constitutional means. The Repeal of the Union was replaced by Home Rule as the nationalist aim. Both failed, although the failure of Home Rule was the more catastrophic for Catholic Ireland because for a long time it had seemed to some possible, to many inevitable, before the fall of Parnell in 1890 shattered his Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) and the hopes of a generation. With the outbreak of the First World War, Britain was rescued from the threat of civil war over the issue,³ and in 1916, with the Easter Rising, the republicans entered the scene, *as republicans*, no longer in tacit alliance with the IPP. Drawing on their experience and interpretation of the Famine, they had been working under various

3. The classic history is Dangerfield 1961, but see also Newton 2015.

names—Fenians, Irish Republican Brotherhood, the Irish Volunteers—and had advocated policies of strategic violence, punctuated by parliamentary alliances with nationalists. Their enemy was the British Empire, from which they expected nothing but violence; to weaken it worldwide and overthrow it in Ireland was their policy.

With Davis, feudalism appears as a newly understood phenomenon, “imposed by war, confiscation and the penal laws.” Its new embodiment is “landlordism,” a system entirely foreign to ancient Ireland where “gavel-kind,” not primogeniture, was the practice, where land had been held in common and belonged to the people—what Davis called “Udalism,” once the system prevailing in Europe.⁴ The condition of Ireland, in 1842 when Davis wrote, demonstrated the insanity of demanding that the Irish achieve prosperity from “rail-roads and poor-laws, from manufacturing experiments, and agricultural societies, while the very land, ay, Ireland itself, is not tilled for the people! Redress this, and your palliatives will be needless, your projects will be realized.” Philanthropic schemes for improvement are “a sort of pious Feudalism,” with its recommendations for the return of absentee landlords who have no sympathy for or affiliation with the people and who are anyway part of the problem, not of the solution. The truth is, “they despise the people, the people hate them” (Davis [1843] 1890: 52–89). It used to be the case that “the soil remained the property of the tribe, though the crop was the property of the tiller” (52).

This distinction, also central in Lalor’s public *Letters*, is the volatilizing element in all radical schemes of land reform thereafter suggested. For Davis’s claim to the ancient or “primitive” European system of gavel-kind not only assigns it to earlier times or tribes but very specifically to the Celts. The Celt has a relationship to the soil—that first, and that fundamentally. This exotic intimacy operates as a political force only in the light of an idea of some vast transformation—of the system of property ownership, in this instance—through which, in the name of that purity of an ontological claim for the Celt as existent being, the Celt also secures material possession of the soil. So the landlords own the land, the people possess the soil. This “gavelkind” argument, and slight variations thereon, repeated, for instance, by James Connolly in his 1897 essay “Erin’s Hope” ([1897] 1973: 6–28), especially in the version revised for American publication in 1909, is an attempt to assert an ancestral hostility on the part of the Irish to the

4. The dissolution of feudalism was famously announced six years later in Marx and Engels (1848) 1988 (36–42).

modern capitalist system that had had such appalling results for them. It is also an important element in bringing the republican and nationalist notions on land and property into harmony with one another. Connolly's essay is a key text in explaining the coalition of forces that appeared in the streets of Dublin in 1916.

James Fintan Lalor (1807–49)

James Fintan Lalor asked the question directly in his public letters to *The Irish Felon* newspaper and to *The Nation*. "What," he asked, "constitutes occupancy?" The landlords claimed a right of property that was to them senior to the right to life of their tenantry. For Lalor, these "hating and hated" landlords had to be denied that "right of property in eight thousand persons . . . which takes away all rights of property, security, independence and existence itself, from a population of eight millions . . . which takes away the food of millions and gives them a famine . . . founded only on the code of the brigand, and enforced only by the sanction of the hangman" (Lalor [1848] 1947b: 59).

The refusal of the property code is one element in the wider revolution. Lalor wants "Not to repeal the Union . . . but to repeal the Conquest . . . not to disturb or dismantle the empire, but to abolish it forever . . . not to resume or restore an old constitution, but to find a new nation . . . based on a peasantry rooted like rocks in the soil of the land" (59).⁵

Thus, Lalor gives the Irish landlords a choice; join up with the people or get out. If not, *they* are the savages who must be excluded. Exclusion is not from the land but from the soil. The land was created by the landlords, as was the Famine. Land and landscape are no more than figurative extensions of the idea of occupancy. But now the naked soil itself is occupied by the naked people—without food or rights, skeletal and ghostly figures whose blood has become part of the soil, of a soil that has become part of their blood. Repeal of the Union as a policy must now be joined to a land war against the payment of rent and against evictions. A negotiated settlement must ultimately aim at a federated union between Britain and Ireland. "For a revolution is beginning which will leave Ireland *without a people*, unless it be met and conquered by a revolution which will leave it without landlords." Lalor wants something "better founded in moral right" and more effective than "either agitation or military insurrection." He names it "*moral insurrection*."

5. See also Lalor (1848) 1947b (63, 81, 101).

The difference between it and *true military* amounts to nothing more in practical effect than the difference between the *defensive* and the aggressive use of physical force—a difference, however, which is often important, whether as regards moral right or mechanical efficiency. . . . The right of moral insurrection is worthless without a military force to sustain it, and unless you be prepared and willing to use that force. Its principles are:

I. That no man has any right to assume or claim any species of authority or jurisdiction whatever over any other man, against the will, or without the consent of that other.

II. That should he attempt to exercise such authority over another man without his consent, that other is not bound to obey.

III. And that, should he take proceedings for enforcing obedience, such proceeding may be lawfully, and ought to be, resisted by any and every means and mode of force whatever. . . . And the principle, so expressed, is the nucleus around which a nation gathers and grows. . . . The principle I state is this—that every distinct community or nation of men is owner of itself; and can never of right be bound to submit or be governed by another people. ([1847] 1947a: 74–76)

Lalor then recommends a campaign of civil disobedience and withdrawal that would lead to a de facto “national government,” which could negotiate on equal terms with the British government and look for a federal solution. “The steps are independence, negotiation and federal union” (80). This is the first republican solution of the century for the Irish-English relationship. And Lalor would have had his worst fears confirmed had he read Lord Dufferin’s declaration, quoted in Marx’s *Capital*, that “Ireland is still overpopulated and the stream of emigration flows too sluggishly. To be perfectly happy, Ireland must get rid of at least one third of a million working men.” Moreover, Marx claimed, the population has to be reduced further so that Ireland “may fulfil her true destiny, that of an English sheep-walk and cattle-pasture” (Marx [1857] 1962: 1:288–89).

John Mitchel (1815–75)

The rebellion of 1848 was a failure in the eyes of the Young Irelanders because it should have taken place earlier, during the Famine, and not at the end of it, when death, disease, and demoralization had done irretrievable damage—had in fact abolished a whole world with a completeness comparable in modern times to the disappearance of the world of

Jewry in central Europe. It was the Catholic clergy, claimed John Mitchel, who persuaded their helplessly obedient flocks to accept the Famine as an act of God, against which it would be impious to rebel. Further, Mitchel claimed, the British government took the opportunity offered by the potato blight to get rid of a troublesome peasantry. "Almighty God sent the potato-blight, but the English created the Famine" (Mitchel [1860] 1920: 49). But so servile were the people that they went meekly to their deaths rather than disturb the existing system by violence. Ireland had a reputation for being rebellious, but it had also developed the habits of the servile that infiltrated the common consciousness as fatally as informers slide into political conspiracies. The degree and extent of servility in an oppressed community appalled Mitchel, as it had Lalor and Davis during and before the Famine; Mitchel had found himself silenced in conversation with Cuban radicals by their reference to the unique Irish readiness to lie down and die (Mitchel [1854] 1913: 361).⁶ Davitt also believed that there had been a breakdown of "manliness" during the Famine, from which only dedicated political activism could help provide a recovery. Ultimately, they all hoped that it might be countered by the creation of an ethic of "manliness"—the characteristics of a "warlike race," like the Celts—not yet fully imagined.

Ireland now had two constituencies—that of the exiles, mostly in the United States but also in the other English-speaking settler colonies of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and in the island itself, although divided as it was into two confessional blocs with increasingly divergent politics. The exiles (apart from the political exiles, including the descendants of the 1798 rebels) were, generally speaking, of the lower classes and of meager education. The enforced emigration had been of the landless and the deprived. They had further cause for bitterness on finding that the Anglophone world that had swamped their language still derided their religion and their poverty, entwined as ever. But the Irish emigration to the States was, as Cardinal Newman and Fernand Braudel both recognized, a singular success story, a world-significant assimilation of Catholicism into a Protestant community and of a peasantry into an industrialized society (Braudel [1987] 1993: 478).⁷ It also weakened the stereotype of Irish incapacity for moder-

6. Mitchel visited Cuba in 1853, where his host said that Cuba under Spanish rule may indeed be "another Ireland" except that "among the white inhabitants of the earth" the Irish are unmatched in one respect: "No people will lie down and die of hunger by myriads and millions, save only the natives of that gem of the sea. In reply, I could but bite my tongue" (Mitchel [1854] 1913: 361).

7. On Newman, see Deane 2005.

nity, and it opened the way for the other great Catholic migrations from Germany and Italy that so decisively affected American society. In a strange sense, Ireland, as it reasserted its existence as a nation, but long before it had any existence as a state, already had begun to develop a species of foreign policy, through the American Fenian organization. The Famine had destroyed traditional Ireland, but it also created a body of public opinion in the United States sufficiently organized to act as a vocal threat to the Union of Great Britain and Ireland and as a stay upon the British government's more egregiously violent policies. In *Capital*, in which Marx saw the United States as the upcoming challenge to the British Empire, he wrote: "With the accumulation of rents in Ireland, the accumulation of the Irish in America keeps pace. The Irishman, banished by sheep and ox, re-appears on the other side of the ocean as a Fenian, and face to face with the old queen of the seas rises, threatening and more threatening, the young giant republic" (Marx [1857] 1976b: 290).

American Fenians were particularly prominent in the bombing campaigns in Britain (1881–85) and in the earlier episode of the Manchester Martyrs in 1867, the year of the feeble Fenian rebellion in Ireland. This aroused a storm of anti-Irish and anti-Catholic feeling across Britain. Predictably, the government and judiciary refused to regard the event in Manchester as political, deeming it criminal only. The American Fenians brought military capacity to the Fenian organization, since many of them had fought for the North as officers in the American Civil War. Because of widely publicized advances in technology—Alfred Nobel had patented dynamite in 1867—bombs could now be small, powerful, and portable, like the one that killed Tsar Alexander II in 1881 (Engels [1882] 1976: 264–65).⁸ Thus, the appearance of Irish republicanism in print in 1848 and of terror in the street from the 1860s to the 1880s raised the temperature around the issues of Irish dissent, anarchism, and political detention. These were now inflammatory questions, open to episodic but concentrated propaganda campaigns. Eventually, they did crystallize in a notable literary work, Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907), set in 1886.

In the first chapter of Mitchel's *Jail Journal*, he tells how, after he was sentenced to fourteen years' transportation, in May 1848, the jailer came into his cell in Newgate Prison in Dublin, carrying a suit of "coarse gray clothes in his hand" and said he was to put them on "directly." He did. Then someone shouted from the foot of the stairs, "Let him be removed in his

8. For an overview of recent work on Fenianism, see Jackson 2011.

own clothes.” He was ordered to change again and did so. Two days later, in Spike Island, Cork, waiting to board ship, the governor of the jail came into the cell and asked him to put on “a suit of brown convict clothes” so that the governor of Smithfield Prison in Dublin could report that he had seen Mitchel in them. Later he was told by the Cork governor that, on direction from Dublin Castle, he could wear his own clothes. “[E]ither I am or am not a felon,” writes Mitchel. Actually, he was both. So began this long dispute over the clothes of the prisoner, his status as a criminal or political prisoner, and the condition of Ireland as a country, naked, without laws, only the appearance of them—which itself could be at any time dispelled (Mitchel [1854] 1913: 1–15).

Mitchel was the first victim of the Treason Felony Act of 1848: he and his Young Ireland friends were its intended targets. It is a lengthy piece of legislation that still stands, despite an effort by the *Guardian* newspaper in 2001 to have it, or at least Section Three of it, which makes it a felony to advocate republican views, repealed. Between them, the courts and the House of Lords, decided not to repeal the act, although it was erroneously reported at first that they had in fact repealed Section Three. After much red-top tabloid screeching about the danger this posed to the Queen, it was affirmed that the legislation stood. It had been used, inevitably, in Ireland on scores of occasions before 1900, and, with equal inevitability, it was used in Northern Ireland at least into the 1950s. Perhaps the initial indecision about what clothes Mitchel should wear during his transportation to Van Diemen’s Land arose from the novelty of his status. Was he indeed a felon? Although clearly a political prisoner, for whom a parliamentary act had been framed and a jury notoriously packed (although this was common enough in Ireland), Mitchel and his defense counsel effectively publicized the “packed jury as the palladium of English Justice” (Mitchel 1848). Could this be officially acknowledged?

Was it a felony to be a republican? The answer was yes, according to the letter of the law, but according to its application, it was a felony only to be an Irish republican in the United Kingdom. The law still stands. Toland might usefully have been recalled here, for no one had so persistently maintained that republicans (in 1701) could accept a monarchy—“the Republicans enjoy Liberty under a King, tho they once thought them Things dissociable and scarce to be reconcil’d” (Toland 1701: 83). On the other hand, no Irish republican group of any era would support a monarchy, particularly of the British Protestant species. The Fenian hatred of “priestcraft” was one link with Toland that survived in Irish republicanism, although, in a

most unrepublican fashion, he lauded the established Anglican Church in England with almost as much enthusiasm as the Fenians did its disestablishment in Ireland in 1869.

Michael Davitt (1846–1906)

Michael Davitt's *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland* (1904) is dedicated "To the Celtic Peasantry of Ireland and their Kinsfolk beyond the Seas." In his account, among the moments of feudalism's steady decline were the land reforms of 1881–85 and the creation of the Congested Districts Board of Ireland, "with large powers for the application of the principles of state socialism, as a remedy for industrial conditions begotten of the worst evils of landlordism, in the West of Ireland," and the introduction of a Home Rule bill in 1886. The culmination of "seven generations or more of intermittent agrarian warfare" is now "the repossession of the soil of the country" through a campaign waged with "a persistency of purpose and a continuity of racial aim not associated by English or other foreign critics of Celtic character with the alleged mercurial spirit and disposition of the Irish people" (Davitt 1904: xiii–xvii).

His introductory chapter continues the phrasings of Davis and Lalor: the "struggle for the soil of Ireland"; the "vandal warfare upon Celtic homes by the Irish landlords which made so provocative an appeal to opposing violence in every agrarian movement" (xii–xiv). That is an oddly tormented sentence. Its aim is to denounce the "opposing violence" that is elicited by "the vandal warfare." The syntax goes into spasm to avoid saying so directly. Even in the aftermath of the mass extinction and export of so many, he and his colleagues must claim that, by virtue of some land reforms, they have "won the day." Yet Davitt can only say that they did so by a "practically passive" resistance, or that it was "more or less on the lines of passive resistance" that the Irish endured the "ferocious methods of England's policy and laws of repression" (xiii).

This strained denial of violence is recurrent. A nonviolent campaign, Davitt says, won all these reforms, and *that* was what brought down the landlord system—not the violence of the earlier agrarian organizations or of their successors, the Fenians. Davitt's membership of the Irish Republican Brotherhood had cost him dearly: years in prison and damage to his health. But, while he did not discount violence in principle, especially against such a violent State as the United Kingdom, he thought it should be abandoned simply because it could not succeed. He cites Parnell at length on the irrele-

vance and wrongness of any recourse to violence, although Parnell, speaking in 1880, more than thirty years later, still sounds like Lalor, although this is a landlord speaking:

We preached the eternal truth . . . that the land of a country, the air of a country, the water of a country, belongs to no man. They were not made by any man, and they belong to the human race. We believe that . . . if the people of Ireland really desire to settle the land question, that they must strike at the root of the evil—the system of landlordism under which the land of Ireland was first confiscated and robbed from its original holders. (657)

Friedrich Engels, courageously outspoken throughout the anti-Fenian uproars in England, gave a more balanced account of the so-called choice between violence and constitutionalism. In 1882, he wrote,

And in quelling revolts John Bull is known for his unmatched brutality. *An Irish revolt has not the slightest hope of success unless there is a war or danger of a war externally.* . . . For this reason the Irish have only the constitutional way open to them of gradually winning one position after another; in this, however, the mysterious background of Fenian armed conspiracy may remain a very effective element. But the Fenians themselves are being drawn increasingly to a type of Bakuninism; the assassination of Burke and Cavendish could have pursued the sole aim of thwarting the compromise between the Land League and Gladstone. Yet this compromise would have been the best way out for Ireland in the present circumstances. (Engels [1882] 1976: 265)

This was the best description of Davitt's position that anyone, including Davitt, ever gave; perhaps he could not have afforded to be so explicit, although a very similar general point was made by Fenians, such as John O'Leary in his *Recollections* of 1896 (O'Leary 1896: 2:228n). The external war came in 1914, and the rebellion followed in 1916.

In his final chapter, "A Future Racial Programme," Davitt deplors the effects of the Union of 1800 and demands "a complete severance of the parliamentary connection between Great Britain and Ireland" through which Ireland is "slowly dying from the poison of imperialism." Along with the demonstrable need for "independent nationhood," he specifies the other lesson of the campaign—the exemplary achievement of urban workers and landless laborers in Ireland and in Great Britain in organizing against

their common enemy, those who have “a monopoly of the chief sources of employment,” as the Irish landlords once had. “We have broken the bonds of that monopoly and completely crushed its political power” (Davitt 1904: 725). He ends by quoting the historian W. E. H. Lecky (1838–1903) on the role of the Irish Party in Britain: “It is probably not too much to say that their presence in the British Parliament has proved the most powerful of all agents in accelerating the democratic transformation of English politics” (Davitt 1904: 726; Lecky 1890: 5:405). It is certainly too much to say, but Davitt—himself a member of Parliament—was anxious to show how highly a famous unionist historian rated the importance of the IPP. Moreover, Lecky’s remark does point to the effort on Davitt’s part to combine elements of Henry George’s (1839–97) socialism with the aims of the Land League; there was always a British dimension to Davitt’s aspirations toward a global overhaul of the property system. Still, the “transformation” also meant that Ireland had now been “cleared” (although in very different ways) in a fifty-year period of two classes of people—the peasantry by the Famine and the landlords by the Land League. Davitt had wanted to see a socialist ending to the Land League campaign, with its slogan “The Land of Ireland for the People of Ireland.” Instead, the Wyndham Act of 1903, which abolished landlordism as a political force in Ireland, also created a peasant proprietorship, which he felt destroyed the opportunity for a true communal holding of land and the public spirit he thought would be enhanced thereby.

The Naked and the Dead

Liberal and radical writers of the Enlightenment who opposed the penal systems of Europe often argued that the afflicted conscience of a wrongdoer was prison enough. Remorse besieged a mind that could find no relief except in confession and compensation. The list of advocates is long and impressive: it includes Cesare Beccaria, Adam Smith, Julien Offroy de La Mettrie, Claude-Adrien Helvétius, Paul-Henri Dietrich, Baron d’Holbach, William Godwin, Thomas Holcroft, William Hazlitt, Percy Bysshe Shelley.⁹ But it was the modern system of imprisonment, described by Michel Foucault in 1975, in *Discipline and Punish*, that prevailed; Irish political prisoners in British jails played a prominent role in its history.

Wilfred Scawen Blunt, the English diplomat who supported the Irish nationalist cause, was the first political prisoner to refuse to wear prison

9. See Deane 1986.

clothes, in 1887. He was followed in this by other members of the IPP, William O'Brien and Timothy Harrington. For more than a century, the British government wanted to deny that political prisoners existed in Britain, although the Devon Commission of 1870, in "The Treatment of Treason-Felony Convicts in English Prisons," all of whom were Fenians, had section headings stating that its brief was "to inquire into the treatment of political prisoners in English jails." In the same year, Marx published "The British Government and the Fenian Prisoners" in *L'Internationale*, in which he claimed that with the regular suspension of law in Ireland, "thousands of people *suspected of being Fenian supporters* were taken into custody in Ireland . . . and subjected . . . to the most savage tortures" (Marx [1857] 1976a: 256).¹⁰

The appalling treatment of Fenian prisoners in British jails caused a public outcry in Ireland. Amnesty associations were formed, and the public opinion they aroused—particularly in the United States—led to the release of many and to an accommodation for others whereby they were transported to Western Australia instead. The main point was to get them out of English prisons to a place or condition in which they would be less of a political problem. Irish political prisoners were targeted for ill treatment by warders, prison governors, and doctors, in part because they did not at first exist as *political* prisoners and therefore had no legal status or protection.

Celts and Shadow Empires

In nineteenth-century Europe, lots of people, and peoples, were made up or given a makeover, the Celts among them. In Ireland, one of the ancient peoples of Europe, pre-Roman (always a crucial marker in an imperial system), was reborn as one of the newest. The Celts had already had a nineteenth-century revival to their cultural credit; now they had their near extinction as a race as an emblem of an indomitable spirit. As this version of an ancient and a modern Europe split asunder along the major fault lines of the United Kingdom in Ireland, the British government began to be drawn by the Irish Home Rule campaign into the political whirlpool of the island it had enslaved. The old national character had become a modern racial character, a more formidable product of that modernity of which it also declared itself to be the antithesis and the redemption.

10. See also McConville 2003 (201–2). There were twenty-six treason-felony prisoners at the time of the Devon Commission in 1870.

The function of the Celtic variation on racial typology was to explain and to mediate the transition of a traditional to a modern society. Both Irish nationalism and Irish republicanism made the same demand: that they should have the freedom to decide how the terrible transition after the Famine should be managed. The traditional could no longer be identified with the regressive; and the modern would have to surrender its idolatry of the progressive as identical with the economic. These demands index the struggles between nationalism and republicanism in their claims to be truly Irish—which in this context means truly free to determine what being Irish would be.

Could this be allowed politically? The question of Home Rule, not to say Irish independence, aroused such passions in Britain that the IPP, steered by Parnell through the alliance with William Ewart Gladstone's liberals, scarcely survived them, even before the catastrophe of Parnell's fall in 1890. The British government so often practiced the various forms of legal coercion that the state of exception became the norm. Further, the brutal sentencing and torture of Fenian prisoners led to much condemnation, but the British public generally supported this treatment (Mac Suibhne and Martin 2005). Any violent response to these policies was condemned as barbaric, so the 1916 Rebellion, in the midst of World War I, produced apoplectic fury—in Ireland as in Britain. All resistance to colonial power is treated in this manner, but public fury against it reaches extraordinary dimensions in a carefully managed polity such as Britain's—the later example of France and Algeria provides an interesting comparison.

So we have two dominant themes. One is the claim to independence, which is represented in moral/ethical terms as a right and, in the historical crisis of the Famine, a necessity. Lalor's republicanism lives within a nationalist discourse that solders the material and the spiritual elements of its claims in a characteristic Romantic alloy. The relationship between the republican ethical force and the nationalist racial (not racist) allure remained an area of specialized cognition, known inwardly only by the Celt. Here is a second theme. The ethical and ethnic are, in principle, separable, but it is their conjunction that matters. Can the local ethnic dimension of their claims include the universal-ethical? In an older terminology, can the nation and the city (Rome, Venice, Florence) be reconciled? Mitchel, Lalor, and Davitt were facing a global empire with its giant powers of propaganda and communication. For them, understanding the role of the Famine in world history required that it be seen as a near-terminal crisis from which the Celts (a global not a local people) would emerge as the subject,

not the victim, of the historical process. To become that, they too needed an empire.

And they found one; indeed, they found four, although they founded none. Davitt dedicates his *Fall of Feudalism* to one of them. It is the Celtic world of the diaspora, the twenty million Irish in the United States, Canada, and Australia—“the Famine emigrants, the political exiles” (Davitt 1904: 383–403). Then there was the “convict copy” of empire that John Mitchel detailed in *Jail Journal*, the globalized prison of the British imperial system. A transported prisoner like Mitchel, and most of his Young Ireland friends, spent month after month on board ship, learning the extent and organization of the enemy empire firsthand. “The Carthaginians” (as Mitchel calls the British, because the Romans claimed perfidy to be the dominant trait of their great enemy) “have convict colonies everywhere; at Gibraltar, at Bermuda, in the Atlantic; at Norfolk Island in the Pacific; besides Van Diemen’s Land, and the various settlements in New South Wales; for on British felony, the sun never sets” (Mitchel [1854] 1913: 8). Third, there is the empire of property monopoly, of “landlordism” (capitalism), replicated all over the world—in Britain itself and in its empire. Davitt dedicated himself to the cause of overthrowing this particular order, which is “the very negation of Celtic nationality.” Ireland has a contradictory position in this world-system. “The Irish have a place in the world’s affairs today that is incompatible with the position which Ireland occupies as a kind of vegetable-patch for selfish interests” (Davitt 1904: 724). Fourth, besides these geographic or para-geographic spaces, there was a global condition, which included the British system, even perhaps derived from it—the world empire of modernity, in which Ireland had a tragic exemplary place. The capitalist system was, like the spear of Achilles, wounding and healing at once; a mechanical and quantifying world, damaging to the Celtic spirit, and a countering imaginative world in which it would flourish, the world of what later came to be known as the Fifth Province.

These shadow empires had a powerful presence, projected in a literature of return and resurrection—*Dracula* in low culture, Yeats and Joyce in high culture. Developments in photography in the late nineteenth century also helped to promote the empire of shadows—spiritualism. The dead and the undead walked the earth together, and the First World War won many anguished converts to spiritualist beliefs. But the great political exponent of resurrection was Padraig Pearse.

Padraig Pearse (1879–1916)

These alternative empires were reminders from the past and the present that could become omens of the future. Yet they had an “actual” population, the Celts. Their home, in time, was premodern; in space, it was contemporary Ireland. Celts were the people who lived in these giant shadow empires. And it is inside this Celtic cage—neither iron nor rubber—that Irish republicanism was sequestered, momentarily quelled after the 1880s, ventriloquizing through Parnell its demand for freedom from tyranny, the fact of despotism, not the despotism of fact.¹¹ Not all Celts were republicans. Sometimes they were Gaels, if they were of Norman extraction or Viking ancestry, but while not all Celts were Gaels, all Gaels were Celts. Gaels burned with a clear and instant intensity; Celts were merely flammable. Pearse was a Gael, possibly because of his sense of the Gaelic language as a mark of identity; like the Gaelic language, the Gael could be resurrected. (It is striking to contrast Davitt’s portrait of Parnell, the non-Celt, with Pearse’s of O’Donovan Rossa, the true Gael.)¹² But, as Pearse warned, the most important point about being resurrected is the most obvious—you first have to be dead. Shadow empires are filled by the innumerable legions of the ancestral dead. The Shadow State was cast by the British Empire but, shadow-like, could never be coincident with the casting body while still yet belonging to it. Yet it could claim to have, or to be about to have, a role on the world stage. An eccentric historian and landlord, like Standish O’Grady (1846–1928), could declare that the Irish landlords had a world-historical role in bringing their Celtic tenantry, full of ancestral loyalty and as feudal as one could wish, to resist modern socialist movements such as the Land League, to resist Karl Marx and his ilk, and thereby save Ireland and the world (O’Grady 1886: 104). O’Grady’s Ireland was not the only land of the Celts; but to survive, it needed the landlords. The Celtic land without landlords was the only one that had a political future (Thom 1995: 118–49).¹³

The most celebrated or derided component of nineteenth-century Ireland was its Catholicism. Yet by the end of the century, it was fully “modernized,” in the sense that its “Devotional Revolution” had almost fully purged it of its “traditional” features and replaced them with the Roman

11. Max Weber’s famous “iron cage of rationality” was mocked in Ernest Gellner’s concept of the “Rubber Cage.” See Anderson 1992 (200).

12. See Davitt 1904 (651–58) and Pearse (1916) 1924 (127–37).

13. See Thom 1995 (118–49).

ritual and liturgy in its newly invented pomp, a transformation comparable to that of the British monarchy in the same period. Cardinal Cullen (1803–78) led the process; by 1900, most Irish Catholics had fully adjusted to the new system. This revival prospered despite or even because of the anti-Catholicism of popular and official sentiment in Britain; it boasted of Ireland's role in a global religion fiercely opposed to the values of a Protestant, or atheistic, or, worst of all, a socialistic modernity. The early articulation of this came from Cardinal Newman during his sojourn in Dublin; he even had a course in literature in which the great achievements of Protestant England in that arena were declared over and a new Irish literature in English predicted.

Pearse would have wanted the new literature to be in Irish. But in general, it was in his writings and speeches that the newly revived Catholicism and Celt fused together to produce the most intense blaze of nationalist discourse. The combination was an assured success. In effect, this meant that Ireland would have a political and cultural revolution without a social revolution, for the Land Reforms did not lead to the social ownership Davitt hoped to see. The church would not permit the last of these and was confident of controlling the first two. Not even Arnold or Ruskin on Englishness could match the ecstatic pitch of Pearse on the Gael and his destiny; nor had either command of the listing of names, as in religious lamentation, of great Irish heroes, legendary, religious, and revolutionary: Cú Chulainn, Colmcille, Tone, Robert Emmet, Lalor, Davis, Mitchel, and Davitt. All these Celts had discovered their inner Gael, so to speak; their names were elements in a ritual chant of glorification. And now the Fenians, always considered to be an organized but mysterious presence, would emerge with an insurrection that, unlike the puny episodes of 1848 and 1867, would be decisive. With Pearse, republican nationalism reached its apotheosis. The Republic was there, the "Ghosts" of his famous essay were about to become incarnate in the state to which the sacred nation would make a transition. The chosen method for the achievement of the Republic was violence, although on nothing like the scale for the achievement (or non-achievement) of Home Rule, an anemic version of which the then leader of the IPP, John Redmond, agreed to suspend, colluding thereby with a chauvinist imperialism that cost thousands of Irish lives. Casualties for the Rising were about 450; over thirty thousand Irish died in the War, a number similar to that of the dead in 1798. This marked the deserved end of the once powerful IPP.

Ernie O'Malley (1898–1957)

Hunger striking reversed the use of famine as a weapon against a community by reenacting it on behalf of the community. The unofficial armies—since the Whiteboys in the eighteenth century—identified themselves by their version of a uniform; so too all the resistance groups either wore their own clothes or had some kind of dress code. The outstanding enactment of the relationship between clothing, camaraderie, nakedness, and isolation is Ernie O'Malley's memoir *On Another Man's Wound* (1936); it "is an attempt to show the background of the struggle from 1916 to 1921 between an Empire and an unarmed people" (O'Malley 1936: 9). Winston Churchill (1874–1965) had a somewhat different view, claiming that the strategy of the anti-Treaty republicans, who refused to accept the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1922, was to provoke a reconquest of Ireland by disturbing the newly patched-up British State and that the infamous Black and Tan "rampage of the Anglo-Irish war is best considered as a *war of British independence from Catholic Ireland*" (Churchill 1929: 85).

O'Malley has the capacity to convey the struggle as a moment in an impersonal historical process while simultaneously giving the subjective experience of it a remarkable intensity; the double optic demands a sure control of structure and tone. The dominant motif of his book is clothing—hats, shirts, trousers, shoes, leggings, the insignia on collars and sleeves. The mixture of these has two combinations—that of the official uniform and that of the informal guerilla outfit. The British Auxiliary Force, for instance, wore a hastily assembled police/army two-toned uniform that gave them their name, "the Black-and-Tans," and also indicated their ambiguous role: official army and terror group. Once, on board a train, O'Malley and some colleagues, traveling in plain sight in their own clothes, but under orders, encountered a group of Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), front-line enemies of the Irish Republican Army (IRA): "They had a black swarthy complexion, the only color there was came from a patch of claret cloth backing their cap badge, the crown above the harp, and the salted-butter yellow on the sergeants' V's. Their uniforms were blue-black with a touch of green. . . . The colour darkened their appearance. They carried batons in heavy leathern cases, carbines and bayonets. They wore padded cupola helmets" (O'Malley 1936: 74).

O'Malley regularly uses the effect of a massed dark background in which dabs of color—yellow, blue-black, claret, green—show here and there; his descriptions of landscape have a similar overall effect in which,

say, the blue strike of a kingfisher above a river, is like a gun flash. Gradually we see in this painterly technique a political analogy for the mobility and color of the guerrilla against the established, massed background. His own family's and class's attitude toward the rather dilapidated uniforms of the Irish Volunteers is governed by the same perceptual approach. They can't march properly, their outfits are mix and match, and even at the scene of Pearse's speech over the grave of O'Donovan Rossa he remains a hostile observer:

Out of curiosity I passed by the glass coffin lid, objecting to the green-uniformed Fianna Boys who guided the long files. . . . I watched the funeral pass to Glasnevin cemetery, company after company of Irish Volunteers . . . some in uniform, some wearing uniform hats and bandoliers, others green ties only. I saw the ungainly side of the parade; irregular marching, faulty execution of the commands, strange slouch hats turned up at one side, uniform caps wobbling, long single-shot Howth Mauser rifles. They provided an amusing topic of conversation at dinner. (27)

Fragmentary groups eventually coalesce into a composite force—a uni-form. In the account of an ambush in 1920, a mix of colors, a chorus of birdsong, fleeting shadows in sunlight transpose into hissing bullets, a flash of blood; or the catalog of the names of different kinds of gun in an arms dump can mutate from miscellany into organization. These sheaves of particulars come to be owned collectively. The perceptual experiences become a conceptual shape, the effect of the book's republican, collective dynamic.

O'Malley echoes Lalor and the Famine generation of writers in his recognition that the armed campaign had to face up to the condition of servility, hammered into the people by a long and cruel conquest. Their endurance is founded on their relationship to the land, or, more exactly the soil, since the land has become so denuded. That is the only material bond left of the complex culture that once existed. Out of that now rises the question: Could a new consciousness be born? Lalor had the evidence of the Famine, in which there was no resistance; O'Malley had 1916–21 as his example. The consciousness, the resistance could emerge from this soil-land intimacy:

There was a strange passionate love of the land amongst the people. Material possessions were low or gone, the arts were a broken tradition, the idea of beauty had gone into the soil and the physical body. Their eyes had long dwelt on the form, color and structure of the

landscape. . . . An old soil well loved had given much to them and they had put much into it. They clung to this last treasure and solace with imagination and with physical senses. (182)

Finally, the young man who left home with a stack of pressed shirts and linen comes into his inheritance in clothes that come from every part of the country: "My clothes were now a composite collection from many counties. I had my coat from Donegal, my waistcoat from Dublin . . . my shirts and socks generally belonged to the county I happened to be in at the time" (127).

But when he is wounded, or beaten remorselessly by the British Auxiliaries in prison, when his blood or that of other victims stains the clothes he wears, or when we hear that he was unrecognizable after the beating of the savagery with which his friends were assaulted and killed in Dublin Castle, the subtle interplay between appearance, status, body, and spirit becomes an allegory of the mutual relationship between fleeting perception, glimpsed freedom, and a steely resolve to endure throughout all the threats and changes he undergoes. Bodily integrity and moral confidence are functions of one another. But clothing, the uniform, and, eventually, nakedness become widely acknowledged as the mark of political identity and of the refusal to have it either withdrawn or granted. With that, inescapably, the physical body becomes the site of a brutal contest. The sovereign power and the naked body are embraced in a struggle to the death.

Philip Pettit (1945–)

The republican movement in Ireland between the 1940s and 1960s was fissiparous, increasingly divided between those on the left, who looked to the Soviet Union for such inspiration as it could provide, and those on the right, who remained loyal to a traditional nationalist position. It was the decrepit police state of Northern Ireland, in which the ancient anti-Catholicism of its parent state had never died, that provoked the IRA into life by its violent response to demands for civil rights and by pogrom-like attacks on Catholic areas of Belfast by loyalists. It reappeared, began to arm itself, and split; the left-wing Official IRA migrated into positions of power in the media in the Republic, from which it continued its war on the Provisional IRA. The Provisionals took over in the North, and there began a bloody thirty-year battle between them and the local and notorious police force—the Royal Ulster Constabulary and its supplementary cohorts of the B-Specials and the Ulster Defence Regiment, the British Army (thirty thou-

sand at the height of the Troubles), and a plethora of extreme Protestant paramilitary groupings who often worked in collusion with the police and army. The upshot was three thousand dead and the frail peace process that obtains today, a key element of which is the renunciation by the IRA of violence as a means to achieving the United Irish Republic.

Internationally, in recent decades, almost coincident with these events but having nothing otherwise to do with them, republicanism has achieved great intellectual prestige within the academy. From John Pocock and Quentin Skinner to the leading exponents of “communitarianism” like Alasdair MacIntyre and Michael Sandel, it has been introduced into the wastelands of neoliberalism through “the construction of local forms of community within which the moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us” (MacIntyre 1981: 263). This has renovated a sense of republicanism’s great historical achievements, of its ethical ideals of public service, and of the future political and social possibilities that might emerge from an awakened recognition of how a reconstruction of its past might help in the much-needed reconstruction of the present.

The Irish political philosopher Philip Pettit, a graduate of Queen’s University Belfast, who first taught at University College Dublin and thereafter at the National University of Australia and at Princeton University, has been of one of the leading exponents of this resurgent republicanism; he had ready knowledge, in Ireland, of how a society that called itself democratic—like Northern Ireland—could in fact be a glaring example of sectarian discrimination, of single-party rule, and of the maltreatment of a minority. The further complication was that it was a subaltern system, a part of the Westminster Parliament that had a policy of silence on the matter of Northern Ireland and did not intervene to correct its well-publicized injustice until violence broke out and began to bring unwelcome attention to this area and to the general and local problems of the UK federation and the recurrent issues of injustice and violence in Ireland. Two kinds of solution or improvement have been offered since 1968–69. The most obvious has been to offer internal changes that would minimize the more scandalous policies of the local Belfast administration (Stormont); the other has been to address the constitutional arrangement between Stormont and Westminster, even to the point of Westminster taking over completely—Direct Rule. Yet even though there have been remarkable distortions in what would be taken for law in any democratic society, no one has really begun to address the issue of the relation of law to violence, the relationship most bitterly questioned by the Hunger Strikes and the whole apparatus of Special Powers and sus-

pensions of the law that have been characteristic of Northern Ireland since its creation in 1922.

No one has given a better account than Pettit of the need for human beings to be free of domination and dependency in order to become peaceable citizens of a polity in which the common good is the responsibility of all.¹⁴ Pettit is aware of the need for a neorepublicanism that neoliberalism seems no longer to remember as part of its own history. Neoliberalism is by now an abiding condition that flourishes in the absence of fundamental political questions—all of which it believes to have been answered. It is full to the brim of its own emptiness. Yet shopping and political apathy seem to make such emptiness irresistible.¹⁵ Pettit, while displaying great powers of distinguishing between the varieties of dependence that “neo-Romanism” can trace within a polity which silently breeds them, confines the bulk of his attention to analyzing the defects of a mass democracy. This in general consists of removing the blemishes of democratic rule by pointing up its many inadequacies and suggesting constitutional or structural changes that will give citizens in a democracy full access and equality in the processes of decision making. This has been, over many years, an admirable and remarkable exercise of analytic reasoning. He brilliantly illuminates some of the differences between liberalism, communitarianism, and republicanism. He wants to find a common domain of choice in which the citizen is free, free from the will of the collective and from the interference of the state. Freedom is the condition for his scrupulous evaluative judgments.

The political problem is that such freedom is rarely realized as a precondition but posited as the basis for his exposition. He is asking us to take for granted the very condition that many political systems strive to create (or to extinguish) as a goal. For there are few societies in which antagonism between communities is not a critical issue and the absence of freedom an abiding reality. Ireland and, even more emphatically, Northern Ireland display the durability of the effects of violent domination; the anti-Catholicism that was foundational for the British state in the seventeenth century has remained surprisingly virulent into the twenty-first century; the very boundary of the region was determined, at least in part, by counting the numbers of each confessional group, Protestant or Catholic, in various strategic areas. The political agreement that underpins the present state of

14. See Pettit 1997, particularly the chapter “Republicanism: A Propositional Survey” (271–81). See also, for the general discussion, Smith 1998.

15. See Thom 1995 (110–18).

affairs institutionalizes the relationship between party power and confessional allegiance.

Neorepublicanism tends to assume the existence of a social whole that needs to be educated into a consciousness of the ethical principles that must be upheld for it to survive as a community. For example, is there not a debt owed to the oppressed by the oppressing community—as in the case of black communities and their white counterparts in the United States? But the moral horizon of a community may not include the idea of recompense or justice for another that it has damaged by oppression, even though the coexistence of both communities is necessary for their social world to be a nonviolent reality. In other words, some societies are, by historical circumstance, doomed to rest on antagonism. What can be done about this? Pettit surprisingly does not ask the question. The common good is an admirable goal, but where is it to be found, articulated, preserved? If the state is conceived to be neutral in relation to what constitutes the common good, it cannot operate effectively when the main components of that state have been polarized by their historical enmities, most especially when these are taken to concern the survival or the cultural identity of one or both. No liberal, communitarian, or republican commentary or analysis has been able to deal with this problem; the first gives priority to individual rights, the second and third to an idea of communal rights that serves as a standard for the evaluation of an action or policy. But precisely there lies the problem. In an antagonistic society there is no standard of communal rights; if there were, the antagonism would be by definition resolved. Further, equality is not a given basis for evaluation. It obviously does not exist in the economic arena. Therefore, its political existence may be no more than an attractive hypothesis or a disingenuous claim even though it is taken to be an essential component of democratic liberalism.

One of the hazards of neorepublicanism is the priority it assigns to the idea of a stable discourse and even of a stable identity that gives the discourse a discoverable intentionality. This, so to say, neutralizes language in respect to evaluations, decisions. But since language is itself a site of power and of power relations—as Pettit has himself demonstrated in his work on Hobbes and language—the proposed neutrality of language is on a par with the proposed neutrality of the commentator (Pettit 2008). That is, he has a view from outside, not contaminated by all the pollutions of partisanship that we find most obviously in the realm of party politics. Such a language can become the object of its own idolatry.

Further, dependence on systems is actually what includes us within

a state (Joyce 2013: 1–27). Are such forms of dependency then so great that any investigation that has independence as its ideal is skewed from the outset—that is to say, that dependency is so systemic that it is silently and deeply absorbed to such a degree that even an examination of its saturation cannot in any meaningful sense reduce it? Where is the power-free zone from which we can view the power-saturated zone? Most banal of all, but still needing exploration, is the simple fact that if we did live in a condition totally saturated by power, we would not be able to say so.

Pettit has no hesitation in placing Tone not so much in the Irish republican tradition but as its epitome. In his 2004 account of the European and American republican traditions and their bearing upon Ireland's 1798 rebellion, he specifies what was at the heart of Tone's republicanism: "he continually held out the prospect of a society in which religious toleration would prevail while the linkage between confessional allegiance and political power would be broken" (Pettit 2005: 41).

Every item in that prospect was absent in Northern Ireland in the late twentieth century. Unionism enforced the fatal linkage. Yet it could be argued that in the new techno-state that began to emerge in Britain in the nineteenth century, an almost unconscious dependency upon the state as a material system (not an electoral travesty of democracy) had been so naturalized that no conceptual revision of the republican ideal could practically compete with it. Where there was resistance against repression, it was itself giving way to that depoliticized apathy that was to become the dominant of neoliberal society. The structured and structuring structures, which Pierre Bourdieu describes as being the property of "habitus," "can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor" (Bourdieu 1977: 72). Citizenship in the republican sense is strenuous, watchful, conscious of the demands of duty, and willing to sacrifice selfish interests to community needs. Pettit recognizes this in particular when he describes how utilitarian thinkers, like Jeremy Bentham and William Paley, regard republicanism as "too demanding" (Pettit 2005: 32). In Ireland, as elsewhere, over the last two hundred years when revolution has been thwarted or even when it has been successful, a "happy" apathy has succeeded. The republican ideal could seriously challenge both absolutist rule and colonial rule. But can the rule of the market be effectively countered? Or is "doxic submission" the only possible fate in relation to "statist capital" (Joyce 2013: 35–36)? Is the choice of republican virtue (or virtues) no more than a faint hope for a genuine democracy when the present pseudodemocratic version is so much more popular?

Finally, to understand republicanism in its Irish context is also to understand its troubling relationship to British law and by extension to the idea of law itself. The most recurrent reaction to violence not exercised by the state has been to suspend the law. This creates that state of exemption in which violence and law intersect and reveals an indeterminacy that no form of special legislation can cancel. It serves only to undermine what it attempts to confirm. In Ireland, that is still the tremulous ground on which we stand.

Special legislation, as its name implies, claims to have the purpose of reinforcing law against serious threat, usually that of violence or of disaffection against the state. Precisely at that point—violence by the state to stop violence against it—the concealed relationship between law and violence is exposed. In Northern Ireland, before the “Troubles” began, the Special Powers Act in itself compromised any claim to legitimacy the Stormont administration might claim. It was an act that claimed the government could suspend or cancel the rule of law for its own preservation. But can the law be suspended by an act of law? Certainly the experience of the minority in Northern Ireland is that law can disappear. To be suspected of being a suspect was often the “reason” for arrest; in 1953, people were interned without trial, for example, for speaking Irish and therefore of being “subversive” or suspected of being so; and being friendly with such a person made you a suspect in that endless regression that would ultimately allow the police to intern the whole population. In such a place you could not *not* break the law. Yet, in this intersection, neither is there a law to break. Special legislation is a form of terror that is necessary, certainly not a form of law but a condition for the idea and existence of law.

It was during Margaret Thatcher’s premiership that the issue of the political prisoner was resurrected with electrifying force; the hunger strikes of 1980–81 brought this legal issue (if it could be so described) to an unexpected political dénouement. At the height of the Troubles (in the years 1972–82), republican prisoners, in demanding special category status as political prisoners, refused to wear the prison uniform and to “slop out” their cells; they were refused the right to wear their own clothes. In response, they went “on the blanket,” that is, they went naked and used the blanket from their beds as cover. Further, before the hunger strikes began as such, they went on the “dirty protest,” smearing their cell walls with their own shit; their warders, wearing bulky fumigating outfits, steam-cleaned the cells so that the antagonists visually performed “primitives” versus “spacemen” roles. In what became a truly horrifying theater, played out between the

naked and the dying against the “scientifically” suited warders, it became obvious that the only way the imprisoned republicans could become political prisoners was by having their representatives, the hunger strikers, dying for the principle involved. Thus the Maze Prison became a society in which, by failing to die—by coming off the strike—a person consented to become “a common criminal” (in Fenian language) or an “ordinary decent criminal” in the Newspeak of government and the media.

However, the 1980–81 hunger strikes brought to a culmination much that preceded them: the reenactment of the Famine, to show what a political event it had been, now inverting it by making a weapon out of starvation; the stripping of clothes to highlight the importance and significance of uniforms for political status; nudity as emblem of lack of legal status; shit as rage at that exclusion; the decision to force their own bodies to eat themselves rather than be consumed into the criminal system of government. The hunger strike is a terrible instrument; it had been used by republicans in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, in the Irish Free State, and in Northern Ireland. It was a proven lever for moving public opinion but not so for altering the policy of the respective governments. The investment of symbolic capital on both sides was, in this instance, greater than it had been before, largely because of the endless news coverage.

Thatcher held out, won the battle, and lost the war. After those ten deaths, Sinn Féin, as a political party, was assured a future and the Provisional IRA became “too big to fail.” Later agreements that allowed for the release of republican prisoners ceded in retrospect that they had been political prisoners all along. It marked the moment when republicanism felt it could afford to end such symbolic gestures on behalf of the minority and enter instead into a “war of position” in which it now had gained an initial strategic success. It finished the long Fenian/Celtic/Gael shadowboxing between them and the empire, it concluded the clothes/nudity, political prisoner/criminal debates, and death by hunger. Atrocities by republicans, security forces, and protestant loyalists (the latter two often in collusion) did not end in the early eighties, but it was negotiation, sometimes covert, that now provided the dynamic that produced the peace process, war by other means, at last a procedure that might keep going as long as a war that had then another sixteen years to run.

Toland has on his gravestone the following declaration: *Ipso vero aeternum est resurrecturus / At Idem futurus TOLANDUS nunquam* (He himself will undoubtedly arise to Eternal Life, but will never be the same Toland). We may say the same of republicanism in his native land. Yet, like

the Romans “before the ruin of the Commonwealth,” the republican form of government “was that they call’d their Country. . . . For wherever they enjoy’d liberty, there they thought themselves at home; and indeed a fondness for any spot of earth from the mere consideration of having been born there, is not only a false notion of our Country, but [a] childish . . . prejudice” (Toland 1747b: 7).

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