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Republicanism and Aristocracy in Modern Ireland

Joe Cleary

I

Alexis de Tocqueville's writings on modern political democracy are widely known and much debated; his writings on the likely eventual cultural consequences of democratic society much less so. Though generally positive in volume one (1835) of *Democracy in America* about the likely progress of nineteenth-century political democracy, in volume two (1840) of that work, Tocqueville shows himself to be more sceptical about the effects of democracy on the development of culture and the arts. For Tocqueville, the essential difference between aristocratic and democratic societies is that democracies are characterized by much greater social and professional mobility and hence by more rapid social change in all spheres than are the more socially segregated and comparatively immobile structures of aristocratic societies. Such fundamental divergences, he argues, inevitably mould national temperaments and philosophical dispositions of a substantively different order. Thus, in aristocratic societies, the intellectual elites

Áras an Uachtaráin, Dublin (1751), formerly the Viceregal Lodge of the Lord Lieutenant. Architect: Nathaniel Clements. Photo: Richie McCann, 2012.

Front view of Leinster House, Kildare Street, Dublin. Samuel Frederick Brocas (*c.* 1792–1847). Ink drawing (*c.* 1812–47). National Library of Ireland.

are naturally disposed to assumptions about the static nature of society and about absolute distinctions between various social classes, an outlook which favours contemplative philosophical systems and impedes the advance of abstractly universal philosophies about humankind. Modern democracies, in contrast, are disposed, he feels, to more generalized philosophies about humanity as a species and also to demand of science and philosophy immediately useful applications to industry and everyday life. American democracy in particular is intellectually an offshoot of English society, but its democratic institutions have, in Tocqueville's view, forged a philosophical mentality neither so determinedly empiricist and resistant to general ideas as the Americans' more aristocratically inclined English philosophical forefathers nor one so disposed to 'as blind a faith in the absolute value of any theory' as the eighteenth-century French, who, unlike their English counterparts, had no practical experience of anything other than the absolutist state and thus had only wholly abstract and highly idealistic conceptions of democracy with which to challenge the *Ancien Régime*.[1]

On the evidence of the low state of development of the American arts, many Europeans, Tocqueville surmised, contended that democracies in general would lead inevitably to an absolute diminution of the arts of the future. However, he contended, there was no basis to assume anything of the kind: firstly, the United States lacked an aristocratic heritage and it therefore suffered very specific deficiencies that need not equally disable European democracies; secondly, the number of people actively interested in the sciences and arts would actually greatly expand in democracies and that wider interest would extend to classes which would have had neither the time nor skills for such pursuits in aristocratic systems. Democracies would not therefore prove indifferent to the higher forms of learning; they would, rather, develop learning in different directions than aristocratic societies had done, and both types of societies would display their

1 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America*, translated by Gerald E. Bevan, with an Introduction and Notes by Isaac Kramnick (London, 2003), 508.

2 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* 528.
3 Tocqueville, 539.
4 Tocqueville, 540.
5 Tocqueville, 546.
6 Tocqueville, 548.

own typical qualities and deficiencies in the modes of learning they cultivated.[2] In the case of the sciences, the fundamental danger that democracies posed was that the stress on social utility and commercial return would mean that an interest in the practical application of scientific learning would eventually so outstrip interest in general theoretical principles as to eventually lead to a stagnation in that area, something that would in time prove detrimental to science as a whole. In the cultural field, Tocqueville argued, the natural aversion to change characteristic of aristocratic regimes and the corporatist or segmented nature of their professional structures were conducive to specialization and refinement since all craftsmen must satisfy groups with a highly developed, often guild-regulated sense of their own particular metier. Moreover, since the creators of art in aristocratic societies cater almost exclusively to upper-class, wealthy, well-educated, tradition-minded connoisseurs, refinement in the fine arts especially might be expected to be of a very high level in such societies. In contrast, in democratic societies the professions are much less hereditary in nature and since class compositions were generally also more fluid it was inevitable that both artists and the audiences to which they catered would become more heterogeneous in educational and other aptitudes. Obliged to be more commercially conscious of these socially and educationally heterogeneous audiences, artists would be compelled to sell their works for lower prices to a greater number of consumers; hence,

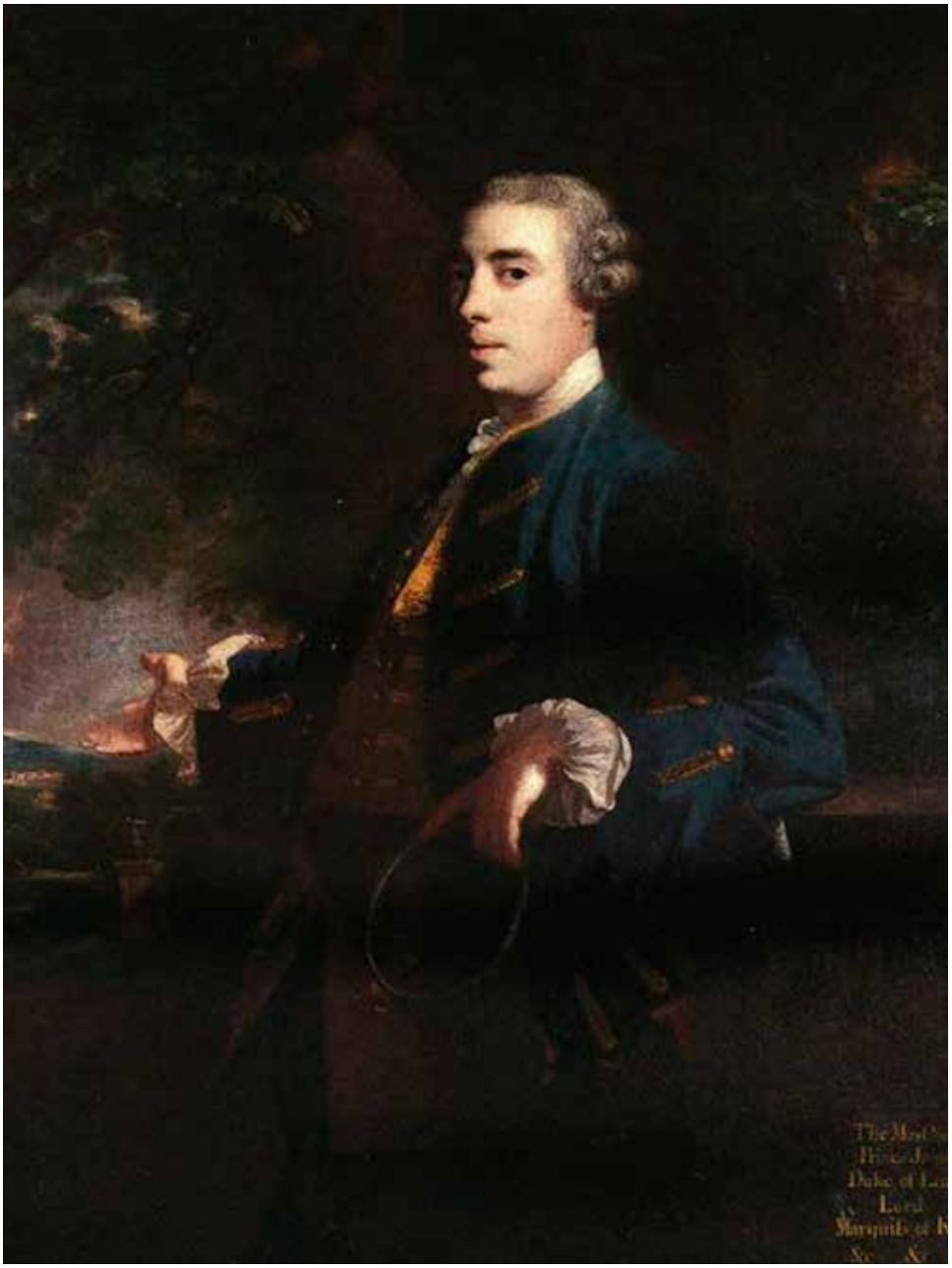
> [w]hen only the rich had watches, they were almost all of excellent quality; now, mostly mediocre specimens are produced but everyone possesses one. Thus, democracy not only directs the human mind to the useful arts but also persuades craftsmen to produce many second-rate goods and consumers to put up with them.[3]

The fine arts follow a similar logic to the useful arts: 'Works multiply while their merit declines.'[4]

In the literary field specifically, Tocqueville asserts that aristocratic social structures encourage a sophistication of expression and a rigorous embellishment of tone since the audience for literature is primarily a restricted and highly educated one with a strong sense of literary heritage. On the positive side, this generates a literary milieu distinguished by its trained sensitivity to matters of style and formal accomplishment; on the negative side, it promoted a fussy academicist obsession with rules for rules' sake and a degree of professional self-enclosure that issues in 'a sort of aristocratic jargon which is scarcely less removed from fine language than popular dialect.'[5] In democracies, even language itself becomes more eclectic and mixed, less strict and stratified than in aristocracies. Thus:

> Considered in its entirety, literature of democratic times could not possibly present, as it does in aristocratic times, a picture of order, regularity, science, and art; its formal qualities will normally be disregarded and sometimes despised. Style will often appear quirky, incorrect, inflated and flabby, and almost always extreme and violent. Authors will aim more at speed of execution than perfection of detail. Writing on a small scale will occur more often than weightier books, wit more often than scholarship, imagination more often than profundity. [...] An untutored and almost barbaric power will govern thought, accompanied by great variety and an unusual richness of writing. Writers will strive to startle rather than to please and to rouse passions rather than to charm the reader's taste.[6]

These distinctions, Tocqueville conceded, were applicable to ideal social types and the actual character of specific societies would naturally prove more variable than this statement allowed. Moreover, even in the more debilitating circumstances of democratic societies, a small number of



James FitzGerald, 1st Duke of Leinster (1722–73), and his landholdings. Portrait, 1753, by Joshua Reynolds (1723–92). Private collection.

writers could always be expected to react against the prevailing commercial literary trends and baser standards of mass taste, and those who reacted thus would find small but appreciative readerships of a select kind. But even then, he surmised, 'those very few people who have escaped common practice in general will always relapse when it comes to details'[7] because even the most sophisticated elite could not be expected entirely to transcend its ambient context. In sum, therefore, the combined effects of a situation in which a modern commercial ethos would eventually reconfigure every aspect of life, in which the producers of art would therefore become more business-minded

7 Tocqueville, 548–49.

8 Tocqueville, 551.
9 Tocqueville, 551.
10 Tocqueville, 551.
11 Tocqueville, 552.
12 Tocqueville, 552.
13 Tocqueville, 549.

and direct their products towards larger, more variegated audiences, and in which the consumers of art would be more numerous but generally less highly educated than the elite audiences of aristocratic societies, the preponderance of art in general, even if not in its entirety, would prove less refined in democratic social formations.

Nevertheless, despite this stress on the deleterious consequences of democratic society for the long-term quality of the higher arts, Tocqueville remained hopeful that some of the inevitable deficiencies might at least be checked. Those who argued that the Greek and Roman republics had produced great art and therefore served as a positive precedent for the artistic potentials of modern democracies forgot that Greece and Rome were actually aristocratic republics, and in each 'nothing indicates that literature was ever treated like an industry.'[8] But since classical literatures possessed precisely those qualities of superior skill and linguistic fastidiousness that democratic literatures would lack, an education in the Greek and Roman literatures would at least help future writers to be more conscious of their habitual defects and thereby encourage their correction. Even so, Tocqueville counselled, here displaying the essentially conservative tenor of his liberalism, it would not do to offer such classical learning to everyone in modern democracies since in societies committed essentially to commerce and material prosperity this would only produce 'very dangerous citizens':[9] by this he apparently means that the masses would acquire from the ancient classics ideas about direct participation in political life of the kind feasible for small, aristocratic republics, but which could never be met in their modern mass counterparts. In other words, an immersion in the classics for everyone would simply induce the masses to 'disrupt the state in the name of the Greeks and Romans, instead of enriching it with their industriousness.'[10] This leads Tocqueville to the further conclusion that the welfare of individuals and the security the modern democratic state 'insists that the education of the masses should be scientific, commercial and industrial rather than literary' and that only 'those destined by natural endowment or wealth to cultivate or appreciate literature should find schools where they can achieve complete proficiency in classical literature and deeply imbibe its spirit.'[11] To that end, modern democracies should remember that: 'A few first-rate universities would be more effective in reaching this goal than numerous poor colleges where badly taught and superfluous studies obstruct the establishment of necessary ones.'[12] In short, Tocqueville recommends a technological and business-directed education for the masses and a few 'first-rate universities' where 'those destined by natural endowment or wealth' for literary or other higher callings might acquire at least the rudiments of classical learning and aristocratic cultural sophistication and thereby offset the natural defects of democratic culture. There have been few lessons from Tocqueville that the United States in particular and modern democracies more generally have so completely taken to heart.

No society, Tocqueville observed, proceeds from aristocratic to democratic extremes in one fell leap; typically, the transitions from one social form to the next can be expected to be gradual and the cultural manifestations of that process subtle and cumulative. But while Tocqueville envisaged that the literatures of democracies could be expected to be markedly more heterogeneous in quality and more robustly vigorous but also unfortunately less intellectually brilliant or stylistically polished on the whole than those of their aristocratic counterparts, he also envisaged one single exception to this rule, a unique moment in which modern literature and art might—for a short time—actually exceed in brilliance anything that the old aristocratic world had achieved. Such an exceptional moment, he speculated, was conceivable when a cultivated society had reached that point in its transition to democracy where its old aristocratic literary temperament and its new democratic counterpart were of broadly equal strengths and came into contention with each other,

Grace Dieu Lodge, Clogheen, Co. Waterford, September 1907. Miss Susan Alice Anderson (L?) (1881–1941) and unknown friend. Poole Photographic Collection. National Library of Ireland.

both vying 'to establish their joint sway over the human mind.'[13] What Tocqueville means by this was that in the process of making the inevitable transition from aristocracy to democracy a tipping point would inevitably occur when the cultural-cum-intellectual strengths of each were roughly equal, and when, therefore, the developed sense of tradition, the formal restraint and linguistic fastidiousness typical of aristocratic regimes and the rude commercial and demotic vigour of modern democracies reciprocally vitalized each other, the general disposition of neither the residual nor emergent culture for the moment ascendant. Eighteenth-century French literature—by which it seems likely that Tocqueville means the Enlightenment more generally—was one example of such 'brief but brilliant periods, when creativity avoids ebullience and liveliness avoids

confusion.'[14] Were one to look to the works of Arno Mayer and Perry Anderson, cultural historians who have argued that the rule of the aristocracy really persisted across most of Europe except in its most advanced industrial enclaves until World War I, one might wonder whether that efflorescence of the arts that we now call 'modernism' did not represent a second great intellectual and cultural tipping point of the kind that Tocqueville ascribed to the French eighteenth century.[15]

Be that as it may, if these tipping points when aristocratic and democratic cultures reached some transient equilibrium represented for Tocqueville a kind of best-case scenario for the future, there was also a worst-case scenario. Though the modern world was progressing generally in the direction of democracy, it was always possible, Tocqueville asserted, that the increasing division and specialization of labour that defined modern capitalism might lead to the emergence of a new kind of aristocracy. As capitalism extended its sway over more and more activities, the dictates of efficiency would lead to an ever greater specialization of labour, a process that would lead in turn to a corresponding narrowness in the mental development of workers individually and collectively as a class. 'As the principle of the division of labour is applied more completely, the worker becomes weaker, more limited and more dependent. The craft makes progress, the worker slips backwards.'[16] At the same time, as industrial enterprises inevitably expanded in size and reach of operation, they could no longer be managed by 'ignorant or restless craftsmen' of the older kind, but would rather attract men of great managerial and entrepreneurial ambition 'attracted by the scale of efforts required and the huge results to be obtained.'[17] Thus, while democracy as a mode of governance might lead to a kind of political levelling, capitalism would simultaneously create deepening inequalities not only of wealth but also of intellectual capacity:

> While the worker, more and more, restricts his intelligence to the study of one single detail, the boss daily surveys an increasing field of operation and his mind expands as the former's narrows. Soon the one will need only physical strength without intelligence; the other needs knowledge and almost genius for success. The one increasingly looks like the administrator of a vast empire, the other, a brute.[18]

Such disparities of capacity and power, Tocqueville pondered, would inevitably deepen the dependency of the workers on these managerial titans of industry and lead inevitably to a situation where 'the one is born to obey as the other is to give orders.' 'What is this,' he asked, 'if not aristocracy?'[19]

Even so, Tocqueville stipulated, if capitalism threatened to summon a new aristocracy from the bowels of democracy that new aristocracy would be a class of an unprecedented kind and not a resurrection of the *Ancien Régime*. The new aristocracy would be more individualist and entrepreneurial-minded than the old and possibly less cohesive; the incessant rise and fall of capitalist fortunes would ensure that a new financially or industrially created elite could never be as stable in class terms as the old land-based aristocracy, and hence the newer kind would never possess anything of the sense of settled continuity or inherited tradition of the older kind either. And whereas the old landed aristocracy normally lived among its tenants and was bound by law or custom to some sense of obligation to them, the new industrial aristocracy would neither dwell among its workers nor be bound by any such moral economy—rather, Tocqueveille predicted, at the close of Part II of Volume Two of *Democracy in America*, this new aristocracy 'having impoverished and brutalized the men it exploits leaves public charity to feed them in times of crisis', and, he remarked darkly, 'this is the direction in which the friends of democracy should constantly fix their anxious gaze; for if ever aristocracy and the permanent inequality of social conditions were to infiltrate the world again, it is predictable that this is the door by which it would enter.'[20]

14 Tocqueville, 549.
15 See Arno Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime* (New York, 1981), chapters 1 and 4, and Perry Anderson, 'Modernity and Revolution', *New Left Review* 1/144 (March-April 1984), 96–113.
16 Tocqueville, 646.
17 Tocqueville, 646.
18 Tocqueville, 646.
19 Tocqueville, 647.
20 Tocquville, 648. Tocqueville's concerns about the possibility of a new aristocracy emerging from the ranks of capitalist industrialists were shared by Max Weber. See Regina F. Titunik, 'The Continuation of History: Max Weber on the Advent of a New Aristocracy', *The Journal of Politics*, 59, 3 (August 1977), 680–700.

II

Like much of Europe but unlike the United States from which Tocqueville developed his conceptions of democracy, Ireland has been governed for most of its recorded history by various forms of aristocracy. The origins of the old Gaelic aristocracy are lost in the mists of time; an invading Anglo-Norman aristocracy imposed a top-down colonial feudalism on much of Ireland from the twelfth century onwards; a New English planter aristocracy gradually displaced both the old Gaelic and by then Hiberno-Norman aristocracies from the period of the Tudor, Stuart and Cromwellian colonizations onwards. The political, economic and cultural power of this last aristocracy, which would come to be designated the 'Protestant Ascendancy', was really only broken with the passage of a series of Irish land acts from the 1870s to the early twentieth century. If these land acts marked a late chapter in the economic power of an Irish aristocracy, the establishment of the state of Northern Ireland in 1921 and of the Irish Free State in 1922 represented the beginning of the end of that class's political power also as the importance of Westminster and the House of Lords in Irish affairs began thereafter to recede. Nevertheless, the capacity of that aristocratic class even after these watersheds to offer leadership to Irish unionism was particularly tenacious in Northern Ireland where three of that state's six prime ministers before the abolition of Stormont in 1972 were directly of aristocratic background—Sir Basil Brooke (1943–63), Terence O'Neill (1963–68) and James Chichester-Clark (1969–71)—and where of the three remaining prime ministers, two were elevated to peerages—James Craig (1921–40) and Brian Faulkner (1971–72)—while the mother of the other holder of that office, John Miller Andrews (1940–43), was a sister of Lord Pirrie, chairman of Harland and Wolff.[21]

Given the comparative novelty of democratic government viewed against this much greater antiquity of aristocratic rule, it seems unlikely that modern Irish culture would not continue in some ways at least to bear the impress of so long an aristocratic past. In Ireland, like other places after all, the aristocracy was always more than simply a class; it had also come to be associated with certain ideas about rule and authority, about nobility and breeding, about *esprit* and fine living, about glamour and distinction and aesthetic taste; it was associated as well, of course, with negative attributes such as snobbery and cruelty, sexual license and extravagance, and (in the Irish case at least) with a history of absenteeism and peasant eviction. Whatever about its diminishing force as a social class, therefore, the aristocracy did not simply disappear after World War I or the formation of the new Irish states; to the contrary, even as the actuality receded socially, the idea of an aristocracy might have be said to have become more complex and free-floating.

Architecture, as one of the most highly visible and public forms of symbolic capital, has a particular role to play here. Despite the fact that the span of its rule was by far the lengthiest of the three aristocracies mentioned above, the old Gaelic aristocracies have bequeathed the least to modern Ireland by way of architectural remains. Apart from ecclesiastical centres established under its patronage such as Clonmacnoise, Armagh or Glendalough, the Gaelic lordships left behind comparatively little by way of grand castles or other religious or secular monuments and for the most part the surviving cultural deposits of that era are primarily literary and religious manuscripts compiled by either bardic or monastic schools, these now of interest mainly to academics and the more specialist cultural tourist. The hegemony of the Anglo- or later Hiberno-Norman aristocracy was much shorter lived than that of its Gaelic predecessor, but its architectural remains are nonetheless much more visible on the contemporary Irish landscape. As befits a military-colonial elite, many of these are defensive structures—walled cities, fortified castles, keeps—though the Normans also left behind most of the major monastic centres and cathedrals still in active use in modern Ireland. The

21 See Neil C. Fleming, 'Aristocratic Rule?: Unionism and Northern Ireland', *History Ireland*, 15, 6 (November-December 2007), 26–31.

Protestant Ascendancy that displaced these earlier elites was the first aristocracy to be distanced from the mass of the Irish people by religion, and it was dismissed not only by the aggrieved remnants of the old Gaelic order but also by as distinguished a commentator as Edmund Burke as a 'plebeian oligarchy' or as an essentially usurping and rapacious mercantile formation—a new plutocracy in Tocqueville's sense perhaps rather than a legitimate ancestral nobility of the European kind. Nevertheless, despite its always contested legitimacy, or perhaps precisely because of the precariousness of its legitimacy, the Ascendancy went to great effort to parade its aristocratic credentials and today the great houses, villas and demesnes of Ascendancy Ireland (Ashford Castle, Avondale House, Bessborough House, Birr Castle, Castletown House, Carton House, Florence Court, Powerscourt House, Russborough House, Strokestown Park) are probably more resonant to a broad Irish public than any other remnant of the aristocratic era. Moreover, many of the more notable administrative headquarters of the modern Irish Republic are located in Georgian-era Ascendancy buildings such as Leinster House, the Viceregal Lodge (Áras an Uachtaráin), the Custom House or the Four Courts, and many government departments are located near Merrion Square, once the fashionable heart of Ascendancy Dublin. Looking beyond architecture, the Ascendancy era also gave to modern Ireland its oldest university, Trinity College Dublin, and several of the leading administrative cultural institutions of the Irish Republic—most notably the Royal Irish Academy (1785), the Royal Irish Academy of Music (1848), the National Library and National Museum (founded or promoted by the Royal Dublin Society in 1877), and the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), housed in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham—also have strong Ascendancy associations. Given the rapid decline of the Irish language from the eighteenth century onwards, modern Irish literature also has its origins effectively in Ascendancy Ireland as the names of many of its most notable luminaries from Swift and Berkeley to Maturin and Stoker or Gregory and Bowen readily attest. The architectural, literary and intellectual cultures of the Irish Republic all have knotty affiliations, then, with the Irish Ascendancy and with an aristocratic past; that aristocratic past, it would appear, retains the capacity both to legitimize the Republic (by testifying to the fact that democracy has apparently displaced aristocracy and has now appropriated its sacred spaces) and to aggrandize it (by suggesting that the modern Republic has a grand pedigree).

The Ascendancy was not only the first aristocracy to be distanced from the majority of the Irish people by religion (its membership being mainly Anglican; the lower orders mostly Catholic and Presbyterian), but it was also the first such class to rule over an Ireland whose economic order was, like that of most of the rest of the world, becoming increasingly capitalist and expansionist. As in the rest of the United Kingdom, this meant that the Irish nobility was increasingly integrated into a wider global imperial system, and that the linkages between aristocratic landed wealth and commercial, industrial and financial wealth would become increasingly internecine and complex. By the same token, this was the first aristocratic formation in Ireland to witness the emergence of extensive artisanal and professional middle-classes in any modern sense, and it was from these classes that the first competitor-ideologies to contest the whole idea of aristocracy were to emerge: namely, Irish republicanism and liberalism. Of these, republicanism was the elder ideology; it was intellectually formulated and developed in the works of John Toland, William Molyneux, Francis Hutcheson, William Drennan and others mainly, though not all, of Ulster Dissenter origin, even though republicanism only became a vehicle of mass opposition to the established political order after the American and French revolutions, first in the form of the Irish Volunteers who argued that any English domination of an Irish parliament

represented a debasing form of tyrannical subjection, and later and much more radically through the agency of the United Irishmen, who contended that a genuinely free Ireland could only be attained through a republican model of government that was not only free from British domination but that also extended full franchise to adult Catholic males. As it mutated intellectually and in class terms from its Protestant Dissenter and freethinking origins through the more patrician versions of the Irish Patriots to the Jacobin version of Tone and the United Irishmen, Irish republicanism would eventually find its strongest social anchor in the last two centuries among the working or lower-middle classes of the Catholic population, the very classes which republicanism in its earliest articulations would have excluded on the grounds of their despotic religion and lack of property.[22]

It is commonly held by historians, and especially by revisionist historians, that after the 1798 catastrophe, political republicanism was overtaken by a various kinds of reforming liberalism—an O'Connellite Catholic version or unionist or Home Rule Whig versions—and that republicanism in cultural or intellectual terms was also superseded by an emerging romantic cultural nationalism, which offered racially conceived national differences rather than a commitment to contrasting models of government as the real basis for Irish separation from the United Kingdom.[23] At most, this is a partial truth; it seems more accurate to say that while Whig reformism, Catholic liberalism and cultural nationalism all entered the Irish cultural mainstream with the development of modern mass politics in the nineteenth century, republicanism was forced underground politically and became dispositionally ever more fiercely critical of the existing ruling order in Ireland and Britain. In the hands of its most articulate nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century ideologues—James Fintan Lalor, John Mitchel, Michael Davitt and James Connolly—republicanism came increasingly to identify the enemies of liberty not just as a tyrannical monarchy, an illegitimate foreign parliament, or an Ascendancy oligarchy that allied itself to a foreign power, but also with the corruptions of modern capitalism and economic imperialism per se. After the Great Famine, moreover, when both reforming English governments and Irish republicans alike came increasingly to identify Irish backwardness and turbulence with the Ascendancy's monopoly of land and political power in Ireland, republicanism appears to have suffered a kind of internal intellectual schism. Historically, it had always been an article of faith among classical republicans that the true liberty and civic virtue of citizens could only be guaranteed under a mixed constitution that upheld the rights and obligations of private property. For some republicans, this meant that an Ireland of smallholding landed proprietors would furnish the proper basis for an Irish republic and a politically responsible and virtuous citizenry; for others, most notably Lalor and Connolly, to transfer land from landlord to tenant would serve only to deepen the grip of a capitalism inimical to republican virtue and liberty, and thus only a communal nationalization of land and other property would provide the basis for genuine republican liberty, equality and fraternity. It might be argued that one of these versions of republicanism would find its logical fulfilment in democratic liberalism, the other in socialism, republicanism as such in either case doomed to become redundant in a modern industrial capitalist order. This is a popular view, and one that has rationalized several political splits in republican movements over the last century, but it is as valid to argue that modern Irish liberalism and socialism alike have inherited republican genes that both successor-ideologies are opportunistically quick to claim when seeking to identify themselves with the long history of the Irish national struggle, but no less opportunistically quick to disown whenever they feel obliged to assert their political respectability or ideological purity. However, the main point to be underscored here is that unlike its French or American counterparts, Irish republicanism

22 On Irish republicanism, see Iseult Honohan, ed., *Republicanism in Ireland: Confronting Theories and Traditions* (Manchester, 2008); Fearghal McGarry, ed., *Republicanism in Modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2003); and Richard Bourke, *Peace in Ireland: The War of Ideas* (London, 2003). See also Ian McBride, 'The Harp Without the Crown: Nationalism and Republicanism in the 1790s' in S. J. Connolly, ed., *Political Ideas in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), 159–84, and 'The School of Virtue: Francis Hutcheson, Irish Presbyterians and the Scottish Enlightenment' in D. George Boyce, Robert Eccleshall and Vincent Geoghegan, eds., *Political Thought in Ireland Since the Seventeenth Century* (London and New York, 1993), 73–99. More generally, see also Thomas Duddy, *A History of Irish Thought* (London and New York, 2002).

23 See, for example, James Livesey, 'From the Ancient Constitution to Democracy: Transformations in Republicanism in the Eighteenth Century' in Thomas Bartlett, David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan, eds., *1798: A Bicentenary Perspective* (Dublin, 2003), 14–27, and Tom Garvin, 'An Irish Republican Tradition?' in Iseult Honohan, ed., *Republicanism in Ireland*, 23–30.

never attained control of the political state during the nineteenth century, and was thus never able to find open institutional expression in the course of its modern intellectual or political evolution. From its Dissenting origins in the works of Toland or Hutcheson through to the revolutionary Tone or the exiled Mitchel, from the proscribed United Irishmen to the underground Irish Republican Brotherhood, Irish republicanism as it emerged over the centuries lacked the support of a public sphere and was compelled to develop largely outside the social institutions of the establishment such as the universities or cultural and fine arts academies, all of which were unionist or later liberal or conservative Catholic dominated. To put this another way, Irish republicanism developed over the centuries in a wholly adversarial climate: the Anglican Ascendancy was equally opposed to both Protestant and Catholic versions of republicanism, so too was the British imperial establishment, and after the French Revolution and 1798, all of the major Irish churches, Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland and Presbyterian, had their own reasons to anathematize the ideology as alien to throne or altar, or both. Whether this adversarial climate politically and intellectually disfigured the development of Irish republicanism or rather conferred on it a radical anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist edge that its more successful English, French and American counterparts would largely surrender as these states expanded into empires is a matter of perspective; both propositions may be true.

If, as argued earlier, Ireland's long aristocratic heritage had served in certain ways to mould its modern social imaginary (to shape certain ideas about the nature of authority, what constitutes the aesthetic or the beautiful, what defines fine living), what about Irish republicanism: what cultural and intellectual legacies has it bequeathed to modern Ireland? These matters are harder to assess for subaltern than for establishment cultures, but some rough estimates might be hazarded. The republican heritage found its most widespread popular expression in oral form, mainly through the media of political ballads that commemorated and celebrated republican insurrections, political heroes, and steadfastness to a cause whether in exile or imprisonment. Absorbed into a much more mixed repertoire that included religious and cultural nationalist songs and songs of everyday life, at least some of these republican ballads were incorporated into the school curricula of the post-independence Free State and Republic. Outside of the school system, they also survived as part of a common treasury of popular culture and even enjoyed something of a late autumn during the international folk music revival of the 1960s, and were then emotionally and politically re-charged from the 1970s onwards in the heated context of the Northern Troubles.[24] In Northern Ireland, this republican song heritage continued throughout the twentieth century to be regarded as entirely subversive to the state and excluded from the official airwaves, and after the election of the Fine Gael-Labour coalition government of 1973–77, Conor Cruise O'Brien's Ministry of Post and Telegraphs would also lead a campaign to have republican-type songs banned from the southern airwaves even as republican-leaning versions of Irish history were also removed from the school system. Whether such censorship discredited the republican song repertoire or merely lent it a temporary radical chic is debatable, but, in the long run, the expansion of mass culture and the concomitant decline of popular culture together with a more general southern alienation from the Troubles may have done more to make that repertoire seem dated and unfashionable.

Since republicanism had always been an outlaw ideology in Ascendancy Ireland, there had never been much by way of a republican architecture in the country before the formation of the post-partition state order. The establishment of the Free State did remarkably little to change this and, as noted earlier, the post-revolutionary establishment happily embedded itself in the old aristocratic infrastructure of Ascendancy Dublin and thereafter neither the Cumann na nGaedheal/

24 This heritage is still largely under-studied, but see Georges-Denis Zimmerman, *Songs of Irish Rebellion: Irish Political Street Ballads and Rebel Songs, 1780–1900* (Dublin, 2002) and Terry Moylan, ed., *The Age of Revolution in the Irish Song Tradition: 1776–1815* (Dublin, 2000).

The execution yard at Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin. Photo: Courtesy of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Fine Gael nor Fianna Fáil governments that ruled the twenty-six counties from 1921 onwards ever sponsored a new republican architecture, as the seamless passage from the Victorian and Gothic styles in public building that dominated the nineteenth century to the new internationalist modernist architecture that replaced it attests. In Northern Ireland, the imposing parliament buildings built for the new state on the grounds of Stormont Estate and designed by Sir Arthur Thornley in a classical Greek style pointed to a new establishment that might be democratic in form, but which asserted also that it would keep austerely aloof from the city of Belfast. Stormont, in short, was the seat of a democratic parliament that looked very much like an old Ascendancy manor.

However, even if it lacked a civic architecture or anything on a scale that would match the aristocratic architectural legacy, republicanism was never without its sacred public sites or *lieux de mémoire*. For the most part, these have a strongly carceral or mortuarial character; republican historical memory in Ireland generally is cathected to such peculiarly interstitial spaces as the prison (Kilmainham figures

Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin. Republican plot. Members of the Four Courts Garrison, 1953.

largely in the south in this respect; Long Kesh in the north) and the cemetery (Glasnevin, Bodenstown, Milltown) though it also has its more martial institutions and iconography, most obviously in the statues to fallen rebel leaders that appear in many villages, towns and cities across the island or in the Easter 1916 wing of the National Museum in Dublin or the Irish Republican History Museum in Belfast. What such sites memorialize is the republican capacity to struggle, suffer and sacrifice—there is in this something of the martial asceticism of republicanism dating back to its Roman and French Revolutionary antecedents. An ethos of military discipline, service and suffering associated mainly with the cause of Empire or the two World Wars is also fundamental to the Irish Ascendancy aristocratic heritage, but there that martial stress is modified by a more epicurean ethos that weds it to other things such as fine living, aesthetic refinement and leisured ease. It would be easy to deduce from the lack of any comparable element in republicanism that the latter has sponsored a wholly masochistic imaginary that can conceive of positive citizenship only in terms of the mortifications of war, incarceration or self-sacrifice.[25]

That martyrology should feature strongly in the Irish republican social imaginary is hardly surprising given its prominence in the Protestant and Catholic persecution histories that shaped republicanism's early modern articulations, and given that the modern history of Irish republicanism more particularly is essentially one of military defeats—1798, 1803, 1848, 1916—leavened by rather fewer 'victories' such as the formation of the Free State or the Peace Process that are never quite 'victories' in any unambiguous sense, haunted as they have been by a sense of shortfall or fatal compromise. Nevertheless, given the thinness of any civic republican architectural heritage and the stress in republican iconology on the military or political spheres of activity at the expense of all other aspects of social life, the aristocratic heritage undoubtedly conveys a much wider compass of reference than the republican.

The Garden of Remembrance, in Dublin's Parnell Square, is the most elaborate republican memorial on the island and the only major one, with the exception of the General Post Office (the most potent site of republican memory, but an appropriated one since it was never designed with republicanism in mind), that serves as an everyday civic space as well as its official commemorative function. Commissioned by the Lemass government, and designed by Daithí Hanly to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising in 1966, this memorial is organized around a sunken cruciform water feature, at the head of which is Oisín Kelly's statue of the Children of Lir, which depicts four figures torqued in a daze of suffering and ecstasy as they are metamorphosed from swan to human form, or vice versa. This image of bewildered transfiguration is complemented to its side by Liam Mac Uistin's aisling-style poem, 'We Saw a Vision', inscribed on plaques in Irish, English and French versions. The mosaics that decorate the cruciform water-feature at the foot of the transfiguration-scene depict Celtic-style weaponry broken and submerged in water to signify the end of battle. Gathering into its protean symbology references to Celtic, Christian, Jacobite and Jacobin-republican traditions, and accommodating these to the ordinariness of the park benches and trees that line its perimeter, the memorial is a rare example of a republican shrine that manages to combine both stately and quotidian functions and to wed a memory of the political struggles necessary to win liberty with reminders of the small everyday freedoms that are the end of such struggle. In one sense, the Garden of Remembrance can clearly be ascribed to a southern republicanism that felt itself in the 1960s to have attained its ends and to be undergoing its own transformation or normalization as it passed from revolutionary to post-revolutionary phase. However, the extraordinarily discombobulated features of the monument's four figures (symbolic of the four provinces) as they undergo their metamorphosis are surely telling in their own right. What is the direction and nature of the transfiguration scene depicted here? Is it that of terrified children as they are swept into the shape of heroic skybound swans? Or is the trajectory rather one of majestic swans in the process of becoming feebly aged humans on the threshold of death and descent into the earth? And which of these mutations—the upsurge from terrified child to swan, or descent from majestic swan to decrepit elderly human—constitutes the sorrier fate? Are there unavoidable suggestions here too of W. B. Yeats's apocalyptic 'Leda and the Swan'? If its tumult and irresolution are what lend Kelly's monument its visual power, they serve also to intimate how difficult it would be for republicanism to make the historical transition from its revolutionary history to a mundane peace. President Éamon de Valera opened the Garden of Remembrance park in time for the 1966 Easter commemorations, but by the time the Children of Lir piece had been added in 1971 to complete the memorial, history, in the form of the Troubles, had stepped in to show that in Ulster at least the weapons had neither been broken nor drowned.[26]

25 Accounts which stress the masochistic and martyrological nature of Irish republicanism include Richard Kearney, 'Myth and Terror', *The Crane Bag* 2, 1–2 (Dublin, 1977), 125–39, and Padraig O'Malley, *Biting at the Grave: The Irish Hunger Strikes and the Politics of Despair* (Boston, 1990). On republicanism and the prison system, see Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago, 1991) and David Lloyd, *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity 1800–2000* (Cambridge, 2011), chapters 4 and 5.

26 For more on the Garden of Remembrance, see Judith Hill, *Irish Public Sculpture: A History* (Dublin, 1998), 157–60.