

'The violence of a servile war': three narratives of Irish rural insurgency post-1798

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'Ireland claims attention for the singularity of its past history, and its present situation. There is about Irish affairs the interest of uncertainty; nothing is fixed; we discern the changes that are inevitable, but we cannot ascertain their character.'

John O'Driscoll, *Views of Ireland: Moral, Political and Religious*
(2 vols, London, 1823), I, p. 1.

In the numerous commentaries and publications that have followed the bicentenary of the 1798 rebellion relatively little attention has been paid to the repercussions for early nineteenth-century Irish society.¹ An understandable omission, one might contend, as anniversaries have a frequent habit of monopolising attention on a discrete set of events and their points of resonance with the present. Notwithstanding this, in the aftermath of insurrection and subsequent political amalgamation numerous surveys of Ireland appeared, in a process of mapping Irish realities similar to the treatment of post-'45 Scotland.² Ireland, as demonstrated by recent events, was clearly suffering from serious deficiencies, flaws for which many of these surveys were to recommend a programme of civil and moral improvement.³ A feature of this diagnosis was the identification of Ireland with two, inter-related, characteristics; firstly, an endemic agrarian unrest and, secondly, a historical dynamic of recurring political violence and instability. In this context, the legacy

1 Stephen Howe, 'Speaking of '98: History, Politics and Memory in the Bicentenary of the 1798 United Irish Uprising', *History Workshop Journal*, 47 (1999), pp. 222-39. 2 Among these surveys see Sir Richard Colt Hoare, *Journal of a Tour in Ireland* (London, 1807), Robert Fraser, *General View of the Agriculture and Minerology, Present State and Circumstances of the County Wicklow* (Dublin, 1801), George Barnes, *A Statistical Account of Ireland, founded on Historical Facts* (Dublin, 1811), Donald Dewar, *Observations on the Character, Customs and Superstitions of the Irish, and on Some of the Causes that have Impeded the Moral and Political Improvement of Ireland* (London, 1812), and William Shaw Mason, *A Statistical Account or Parochial Survey of Ireland, drawn up from the Communications of the Clergy, by William Shaw Mason, Esq. M.R.I.A. Remembrancer and Receiver of First Fruits, and Secretary to the Board of Public Records* (3 vols, London, 1814-19). The latter work was directly based on Sir John Sinclair's monumental *Statistical Account of Scotland, drawn up from the Communications of the Different Parishes* (11 vols, Edinburgh, 1791-9). 3 See, for instance, Edward Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political* (2 vols, London, 1812), vol. 2, p. 730.

of the 1790s created an echo-chamber that was to resonate well into the post-Union period, particularly at times of crisis or at moments that directly recalled the rebellion. While repeated outbreaks of Whiteboyism underlined the unstable nature of Irish political realities, we have in the record of the Rockite campaign of rural insurgency (1821-4) an event that demonstrated how vulnerable the current structures of authority actually were. The *jacquerie* that erupted in the south-west during January 1822 launched an unheard of assault on a range of gentry and military targets. Almost entirely absent from published accounts of nineteenth-century unrest, this rural insurrection was the most serious outbreak of violence since the summer of 1798, and was represented in those terms by many contemporary commentators. A brief account of this episode, drawn primarily from the State of the Country Papers in the National Archives of Ireland, forms the first of the narratives mentioned in the title.

It is in this context that a paper war began which took as an organising motif the sobriquet of 'Captain Rock'. The first instalment of this debate, Thomas Moore's anonymous polemic *Memoirs of Captain Rock* (1824), proved to be an influential re-orientation of the 'Rock' signifier away from the *nom-de-guerre* of threatening letters and towards the newly strident voice of Catholic middle-class politics in the mid 1820s.⁴ Moore, the outstanding success of early nineteenth-century Irish letters, has subsequently enjoyed an uneven critical reputation as the author of the maudlin *Irish Melodies*, trite productions that appealed to an anodyne Regency drawing room audience.⁵ However, as Joep Leerssen and others have recently reminded us, the upheaval of the 1790s dominated nineteenth-century Irish historical writing, a cultural context in which Tom Moore played no small part.⁶ For many writing in the aftermath of the rebellion 'it appears as if a paradigm is established; violent episodes are a regular feature of Irish history, [recurring]

4 [Thomas Moore], *Memoirs of Captain Rock, the Celebrated Irish Chieftain, with some Accounts of His Own Ancestors* (London, 1824), henceforth MCR. For treatments of this work see Patrick O'Sullivan, 'A literary difficulty in explaining Ireland: Tom Moore and Captain Rock, 1824', in Sheridan Gilley and Roger Swift (eds), *The Irish in Britain: 1815-1939* (Dublin, 1989), pp. 239-274; Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork, 1996), pp. 82-8; Luke Gibbons, 'Between Captain Rock and a Hard Place: Art and Agrarian Insurgency', in Tadhg Foley and Sean Ryder (eds), *Ideology and Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 23-44. 5 Terence Brown, 'Tom Moore: A Reputation', in *Ireland's Literature: Selected Essays* (Mullingar, 1988), pp. 14-27; Tom Paulin, 'A Professional Irishman', in *Ireland and the English Crisis* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1985), pp. 39-41; Patrick Raffroidi, 'Thomas Moore: Towards a Reassessment?' in M. Kenneally (ed.), *Irish Literature and Culture* (Gerrard's Cross, 1992), pp. 55-62. 6 For recent re-interpretations of Moore see Seamus Deane, 'Thomas Moore', in Deane (ed.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (3 vols, Derry, 1991), vol. 1, pp. 1053-1069; Tom Dunne, 'Representations of 1798 in Literature', in F.B. Smith (ed.), *Ireland, England and Australia: Essays in Honour of Oliver MacDonagh* (Canberra/Cork, 1990), pp. 14-40; Norman Vance, *Ireland's Literature: A Social History: Tradition, Identity and Difference* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 100-117.

because they correspond to an underlying structure'.⁷ This 'underlying structure' was ably (and influentially) articulated in Moore's conception of Irish historical experience in *Memoirs of Captain Rock*, a process that Moore characterised as the repetition of a series of unresolved and recurring traumas. Thus, the true significance of 1798 only became clear in the light of the 1641 rebellion, and vice versa, a reversal of similar manoeuvres in ultra-loyalist texts such as Sir Richard Musgrave's *Memoirs of the Various Rebellions*. By the 1820s the millennial expectations evident in the dissemination of Pastorini's prophecies, which predicted the demise of the Protestant population, had created an atmosphere of sectarian tension and fear, and served to deepen the connection which some commentators made between the mid-seventeenth and late-eighteenth centuries.⁸ Moore's polemic is considered here as a key Catholic reinterpretation of the 1798 rebellion, but crucially one refracted through the framework of agrarian insurgency. As we shall see later, there was a continuing Catholic middle-class ambivalence towards the capacity of their lower-class co-religionists to revert to campaigns of agrarian violence, episodes that remained potentially damaging, both politically and socially.

While there is no doubting the significance of a 'traumatic paradigm' in shaping nineteenth-century Irish historical conceptions post-1798, this chapter also underlines the vital importance of the agrarian unrest of pre-Famine Irish society in shaping representations of the Irish peasantry and national character during the 1820s and after.⁹ According to Thomas Crofton Croker in *Researches in the South of Ireland*, one only had to look at the events of 1798 where 'two generations of the peasantry had been trained to become actors in this event' to establish the link between agrarian insurgency and outright rebellion. As Croker continued, 'When turbulent and disaffected men agitate such a body [i.e. the peasantry], it becomes difficult to tranquillize those who have only life to lose, and every thing to gain. Continued and petty insurrections render this sufficiently obvious.'¹⁰ Therefore, we

7 Joep Leerssen, '1798: The Recurrence of Violence and Two Conceptualizations of History', *Irish Review*, 22 (1998), p. 38. 8 The millenarianism of Pastorini's prophecies, testifying to impending Protestant doom around the year 1825, derived from the English Roman Catholic Bishop Charles Walmesley's late eighteenth-century *General History of the Church*. For a treatment of the latter see Geoffrey Scott, "'The Times are Fast Approaching": Bishop Charles Walmesley, OSB (1722-1797) as Prophet', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 36/4, (October 1985), pp. 590-604. For a central account of the influence of millenarianism on the Rockite campaign see James S. Donnelly Jr, 'Pastorini and Captain Rock: Millenarianism and Sectarianism in the Rockite Movement of 1821-4', in Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly, Jr (eds), *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780-1914* (Madison, 1983). 9 For important examinations of national character as a linguistic, literary and historical category see Raymond Corbey and Joep Leerssen (eds), *Alterity, Identity, Image: Selves and Others in Society and Scholarship* (Amsterdam, 1991); Manfred Beller (ed.), *L'Immagine dell'altro e L'Identità Nazionale: Metodi di Ricerca Letteraria* (Fasano, 1997). For discussions which focus on the Irish case, see Seamus Deane, 'Irish National Character, 1790-1900', in Tom Dunne (ed.), *The Writer as Witness: Literature as Historical Evidence* (Cork, 1987). 10 Thomas Crofton Croker, *Researches in the South of Ireland, Illustrative of the Scenery, Architectural Remains, and the*

can extend the metaphor of violence associated with the pathology of Irish historical consciousness, mentioned already in relation to Moore and Musgrave, to include the fear of a peasant rebellion challenging the forces of social and political control. In many ways this fear was reflected in the reaction to *Memoirs of Captain Rock*, a response that was to veer from the adulation of pro-Catholic commentators to the disgust of conservative Protestant critics, horrified at the audacity of Moore in employing the alias of 'Rock' without engaging with the reality of agrarian violence. Nowhere is this anger more visibly displayed than in the Revd Mortimer O'Sullivan's *Captain Rock Detected*, written in direct refutation of Moore's polemic.¹¹ O'Sullivan (1791?-1859), Tipperary born and a convert from Catholicism to Protestantism, is chiefly remembered, along with his brother Samuel, as a founding member and contributor to the *Dublin University Magazine*, in addition to being one of the most insistent voices of Irish conservative Protestantism in the early nineteenth-century. In O'Sullivan's text, the voice of a 'Munster farmer' narrates the real 'State of the South', where a banditti-ridden landscape recalls the 1798 rebellion. What all three of these narratives share is a sense of the disruptive potential of violence, whether it be the turmoil of the 1790s, or its continuing echo in agrarian insurgency.

*'The sword of the mighty General Rock'*¹²

The accepted starting point of the Rockite campaign are the disturbances that broke out on the Courtenay estate in Newcastle, Co. Limerick, during 1821. Alexander Hoskins, an Englishman recently appointed as estate agent, ran what was generally perceived as a harsh regime, forgoing many of the accepted and expected leniencies, leading eventually to his son's assassination.¹³ The unrest that began here proceeded gradually in a southerly direction into the north Cork area, spread by

Manners and Superstitions of the Peasantry. With an Appendix containing a Private Narrative of the Rebellion of 1798 (London, 1824), p. 14. **11** [Mortimer O'Sullivan], *Captain Rock Detected or the Origin and Character of the Recent Disturbances, the Causes, both Moral and Political, of the Present Alarming Condition of the South and West of Ireland, fully and fairly considered by a Munster Farmer* (London, 1824). Shortly after the publication of *Captain Rock Detected* he gave evidence before the select committees on the state of Ireland, excerpted and subsequently published (Dublin, 1825). **12** Threatening notice forwarded by Lord Doneraile to Chief Secretary, 17 March 1824, State of the Country Papers, Series 1-2345/38, National Archives of Ireland (henceforth styled SOCP, NAI). **13** See the evidence of various witnesses to the 1825 Select Committees on the State of Ireland, including the parish priest of Mitchelstown, the Revd John Kiely and his remarks that, 'the disturbances originated in the western part of the county of Limerick, through the conduct of Mr. Hoskins', cited in George Cornewall Lewis, *On Local Disturbances in Ireland and on the Irish Church Question* (London, 1836), pp. 72-3. For a literary-historical take on the significance of the Courtenay estate disturbances, see W.J. McCormack, *Ascendancy and Tradition in Anglo-Irish Literature* (Oxford, 1985), Appendix D, pp. 405-6.

groups systematically raiding houses for arms. By October of that year, reports were arriving at Dublin Castle of regular assemblies, sometimes reaching several hundreds, searching for arms and swearing others to be loyal to the 'Rock' system. This activity continued through November and December, despite a military build-up in the affected areas. In November, George Warburton, chief magistrate in charge of the Peace Preservation Force in Limerick, drew attention to the astounding militancy of the disaffected: 'They offer, through the medium of placards, rewards for the heads of magistrates and policemen, whose names they affix to the placards'.¹⁴ A hint of the events to come was discernible from a threatening notice posted in the Limerick area on 13 December subtitled 'A true and legal authority from Captain Rock'. A general warning went out to cease paying tithe money to named local individuals, closing with the threat that 'I am only at the beginning of my proceedings, and I will put all things to right in the course of a short time'.¹⁵

Communiqués continued to be sent to the Dublin authorities emphasising the necessity for troop reinforcements, even in places that had been recently strengthened. There was a spate of house burnings. First to be attacked were the residences of gentlemen such as Drew and Bevan, both residing in the west Cork area, followed by further attacks by large bodies of men collecting arms.¹⁶ On 11 January 1822 the first major incident of the revolt occurred with the confrontation between gentry and military forces and a party of several hundred Rockites in the glen of Keimaneigh, near Gougane Barra. Lord Bantry, in a letter to Thomas Townsend, a local gentry figure, described the events in the following terms:

I received information about four o'clock yesterday morning that a body of men consisting of from five to seven hundred mostly mounted with about forty stand of arms had attacked the house of Mr. Mellifont Esqr. where they took two blunderbusses, also the houses of Messrs. Doyle, Patterson, &c., where they obtained two double & one single barrellled guns.

Following a pursuit, Bantry encountered the insurgents in the pass only to be 'seen by the horsemen on the heights above us, giving them an opportunity of perceiving our small party, [whereupon] they made an attempt to surround us, & commenced an attack with fire arms'.¹⁷ After a period of time and several casualties to the Rockite force, Bantry's party made its escape. Having been repulsed here, he launched a counter-attack on 21 January, on a force of approximately 400

¹⁴ Information on the disturbed state of County Limerick and environs, 13 October to 20 December 1821, Public Record Office, Home Office, 100/200, f. 17, cited in Virginia Crossman, *Politics, Law and Order in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, 1997), p. 28. ¹⁵ 21 Dec. 1821, SOCP 1-2299/12, NAI. ¹⁶ For the attacks on Bevan and Drew see Maj. Carter, 5 Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2342/4, for the attacks on John Jonson Rye, 6 Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2342/8; for Sweet and Rye see Revd H.J. Newenham, 11 Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2342/11, and Lt Col H.J. Evelagh to Goulburn, 11 Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2342/20, NAI. ¹⁷ Townsend, 15 Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2342/37, NAI.

Rockites, armed for the most part with pikes and scythes. As Bantry's force approached the pass, 'shouts, horns and bugles were sounded, men in every direction appearing on the road, [and] we were fired upon'.¹⁸ An attempt by the Rockites to dislodge an overhanging boulder named Red Deer's Rock, with the intention of trapping the party in the pass, was apparently frustrated when the military force was prematurely attacked. Eventually, the encounter ended with Bantry's party escaping from Keimaneigh, with the loss of one soldier and numerous Rockite casualties.

The effect of the first ambush was to shatter local gentry confidence about their ability to control the population now at large in the mountainous south-west region, with several accounts of the incident being circulated.¹⁹ A further shock was the audacity of the attack, an unprecedented occurrence in the region, an event that for many underlined the need for re-embodiment of a substantial yeomanry force capable of suppressing 'the spirit of insurrection'. As Samuel Townsend commented in his letter on the first ambush, 'were there any force in the country much of this might have been prevented, & gentlemen instead of converting their houses into garrisons & confining themselves to the defensive might anticipate the movement of more insurgents, prevent their assemblage, [and give] some confidence to their poor neighbours whose state of alarm & terror is most intolerable'.²⁰ Adam Newman, a magistrate in the barony of Duhallow, insisted that given the increase and frequency of Rockite attacks, military assistance had become a necessity to maintain any semblance of the rule of law. 'So completely has the system of terror been established that it is quite impossible for either me or my Brother Magistrates in this vicinity to get even by the offer of pecuniary compensation such information as would enable us to act effectively.'²¹

This breakdown in familiar methods of circumventing peasant outrage was reflected in the growing reliance on the ad hoc patrolling of the countryside organised by local gentry figures. However, the obvious inadequacy of this in the face of the vast area to be covered was not lost on those who felt under threat. One correspondent to Dublin Castle felt the necessity to remark that while 'There is no want of Spirit among the principal gentry of this County . . . the general complaint is that they cannot ask to their assistance an adequate force upon emergent

¹⁸ Lord Bantry to Goulburn, 22 Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2342/60, NAI. ¹⁹ See SOCP 1-2342/24; 2343/5; 2343/31; 2346/17; 2343/18, NAI; Public Record Office, Home Office Papers, 100/203; SOCP 2, Carton 170, NAI, contains unsorted correspondence on the incident. For a detailed account of this episode see Diarmuid Ó Gráda, 'Cath Chéim an Fhia': Its Place in the Rockite Campaign', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 97 (1992), pp. 97-103. For fictional representations of the incident see Caesar Otway *Sketches in Ireland: Description of Interesting and Hitherto Unnoticed Districts, in the North and South* (London, 1827), and a refashioning of this account in Anna Maria Hall's *The Whiteboy: A Story of Ireland in the Year 1822* (2 vols, London, 1845). ²⁰ S. Townsend, 13 Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2342/24, NAI. ²¹ A. Newman to Goulburn, 14 Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2342/27, NAI.

occasions'. This was all in the light of the most 'methodised plan of outrage, & one conducted with more stratagem as well as enterprize than at any other period'.²² Protestant families were soon withdrawing to the larger towns, as many gentry residences began to take on a fortress appearance, being barricaded against the nightly appearance of Rockite bands. As early as 9 January, the Revd H.J. Newenham noted the retreat of Protestants to Bandon, known to many as the 'Derry of the South', while the Revd Orpen of Kanturk reflected an even greater isolation when he wrote to the Chief Secretary on the 25th that 'I have no doubt now that a massacre is immediately intended and situated as I am with a large young family in a solitary spot, it is more than possible that this may be the last communication you receive from me'.²³

Others under more direct attack were beginning to describe the growing Whiteboy 'spirit' in terms of a medicalised discourse of disease, a pattern of infection spread by contaminating agents of the Rockite system. On 6 January, John Johnson Rye described the attack on his house that day as perpetrated by 'a party of those White Boys who begin to infect this neighbourhood'.²⁴ In a similar vein, Lt Col H.J. Evelagh, stationed at Ballincollig, wrote on 11 January that 'Our neighbourhood, hitherto the most peaceful in the country, is now in a disturbed state, the infection has reached us'.²⁵ Looking forward to 23 January, by which time the situation had deteriorated even further, Lord Ennismore, in a letter describing the current state of the Mallow region, was to combine the rhetoric of contamination with that of outright rebellion. He wrote:

It may be observed, that the military here succeeded in preventing the contagion coming into the country where they have been placed, but they have *not* been able to put a stop to it, where it has taken root . . . *short nights & starvation* may do much bye and bye, but they will not put down the mischief and we shall have the uncomfortable prospect of similar work again next winter.²⁶

22 Townsend, 15 Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2342/37, NAI. **23** Orpen, 25 Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2343/6, NAI. Among the many depositions and testimonies forwarded to Dublin Castle were memorials from magistrates, who were coming under considerable pressure to maintain an acceptable level of control. Lord Carberry, enclosing a threatening notice in his communication, also included a memorial from the magistrates of south-west Cork. Their remarks testify to the siege mentality which was developing in the face of a hitherto unseen level of Whiteboy audacity and activity: 'The progress of this diabolical system during the last month has been most rapid and alarming and we regret to say that we have been obliged, from want of adequate assistance, to remain almost passive spectators of its advances, until at length many have been obliged to convert their residences into garrisons, and others have sought security in the Towns.' Carberry to Goulburn, 15 Jan 1822, SOCP 1-2342/33, NAI. **24** Carter to Gergory, 6 Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2342/7, NAI. **25** Sorell to Goulburn, 11 Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2342/20, NAI. **26** Ennismore, 23 Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2342/62, NAI.

The chilling comments that close the letter underlined the insurrectionary circumstances of the area. Large scale hostilities eventually broke out on 24 January with the attack on the Tralee mail coach and the engagement between a party of dragoons and Rockites at Carrignamana, between Millstreet and Macroom.²⁷ Lt Col Mitchell's account of the encounter provides some indication of the scale and strength of motivation on the part of the insurgents. Having received reports that peasants were assembling in force two or three miles away, Mitchell pursued the local Rockites with two detachments until he came upon 'large Bodies of them, at least 8 or 900' on the hillsides. After attacking and chasing them over mountain terrain, he went on to observe that

The Magistrates of these places will assist [in] watching the Mushra Mountains which I am informed is to be one of their great Scenes of Action tomorrow, if the reception they met with today from us does not cure them of such Amusements – Had I not witnessed their presumption & boldness altho so badly armed I certainly could not have believed it, they frequently made attempts towards a charge on any small parties they suddenly encountered.²⁸

The following day saw a Rockite attempt on Millstreet itself, when some 1,000 people attacked the town, only to be repulsed by the small party of troops stationed there. Having embarked on a tour from Mallow to Millstreet, Brigadier Major Daniel Mahony soon encountered the 'general rising amongst the people in various quarters'. Shortly after this he met a Roman Catholic clergyman, who informed him of the depth of local feeling:

[He] had just returned after expostulating with the people and using all the arguments in his power to dissuade them from their mad projects, to which their reply was 'we know from what has already happened in other places that there will be an attempt to put us down, we may as well die one way as another, we will not therefore defer our attack upon Millstreet, & if the gentlemen have a disposition to serve us we will listen to them tomorrow after we try what we can do'.²⁹

This is one of the few instances when we have a chance to hear the direct voice of the local insurgents, albeit recorded and repeated, and it allows us a glimpse of the underlying economic hardship that must have driven the local populace to attempt so desperate a measure, given their knowledge of the repressive consequences. This strength of motivation is in many ways similar to that observed during 1798. Discussing the spate of recent attacks and the necessity of giving

²⁷ H. Fortesque, 24 Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2343/4, NAI. ²⁸ Sorell to Lord Lieutenant, 24 Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2343/5. ²⁹ Mahony, 25 Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2343/9, NAI.

reductions in rents to certain tenants, the land agent, John Hungerford, observed that

John French Nowry declared yesterday that the night before there were horns sounding about him from hill to hill, & that when the signal was answered a shot was always fired . . . my experience in 98 makes me look on passing events with a watchful eye, & enables me to form a rational opinion on the state of things.³⁰

Others were also to cite the similarity between the scale of the previous rebellion and the threatening nature of present circumstances. R.B. Townsend, writing from Skibbereen and detailing local Whiteboy incidents, was to frame his observations in the light of earlier events: 'I feel it my indispensable duty to give such information as I have rec'd & relate such facts as come [to] my own personal knowledge & observation, as I was here on my post during the troubles of 1798'.³¹ Lt Col Hill reported: 'To those residing in the Country and having intercourse with the lower class of its inhabitants, a very material change is manifest in the manners and disposition of the people, petty quarrels, drinking, and rioting at fairs has totally subsided, as previous to the Rebellion of 1798'. In this analysis a grand sectarian enterprise against 'loyalist houses which have had the spirit to resist those deluded people' lay behind the present attacks.³²

Matters were to get worse. There had been an attempted attack on Newmarket on 25 January that had been dispersed with significant Rockite casualties.³³ A planned attack on nearby Kanturk was called off at the last minute, and the crowds assembled around the town dispersed.³⁴ Tuesday, 29 January saw the last major action of the week, and the only other Rockite victory since the initial incident at the Keimaneigh pass. A force of approximately 100 men attacked the 17 strong Peace Preservation Force barracks at Churchtown, which resulted in 3 policemen killed, 8 badly beaten and all arms taken.³⁵

30 Hungerford, 13 Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2342/23, NAI. **31** Townsend, 13 Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2342/24, NAI. **32** Hill to Goulburn, 26 Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2343/21, NAI. **33** As Captain Thomas Kappock wrote, 'there was an assemblage of some Thousands of Insurgents on the Scarteen Hill - and finding that they were advancing on the Town - We went out to meet them - and after a sharp contest - with a severe loss on their side succeeded in putting them to flight and we took three prisoners'. Enclosed in Allen to Carter, 28 Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2343/25, NAI. **34** Craster to Gough, 25 Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2343/41, NAI. **35** The Churchtown incident gained a certain notoriety as an example of peasant brutality. O'Connell was to defend some of those accused of the attack, and Thomas Crofton Croker even noted the connection between the appearance of a banshee to a family servant and the attack on the barracks: 'The poor girl's cousin was at this time in jail. He was one of the misguided followers of Captain Rock; and two or three days after he was tried for being concerned in the attack on Churchtown barrack, [he was] found guilty, and executed'. Thomas Crofton Croker, *Fairy Tales and Legends of the South of Ireland*, cited in Luke Gibbons,

While the principal targets for the week-long insurrection had been military and police forces, there had also been a spate of gentry house burnings. On 19 January Langford Lodge near Tullesee was burned, the 22nd saw Attamina House belonging to Sir John Purcell near Liscarrol destroyed, Purcell having the misfortune to have used his house as a base for military parties. James Barry, a landlord and tithe collector near Inchigeelagh who brought numerous successful prosecutions against many of the insurgents, had his house destroyed near the end of January for his efforts.³⁶ The most immediate result of the disturbances was to shatter any confidence that establishment forces had in their ability to contain large scale unrest. As S.J. Connolly has noted, in the wake of the January revolt the spectre of 'scattered protest giving place to the mobilisation of peasant armies in a full-scale insurrection' replaced any lingering doubts as to the rebellious potential of agrarian outrage.³⁷

Moore's Irish maladies: memoirs of Captain Rock

Wellesley, not long installed as Lord Lieutenant, characterised the disturbances as the possible beginning of a sustained agrarian war: 'The prevalent distress combined with the character and habits of the people of Ireland furnishes the most apt material for the work of sedition, and it requires no great skill to inflame a nation in such a condition'. Extra forces were quickly drafted into the south-west region, and Castlereagh guided the Insurrection Act through the House of Commons on 7 February 1822. It received royal assent on the 11th, with the suspension of habeas corpus remaining in effect until August 1822.³⁸ The region, which had been the most turbulent during the January revolt, became the most quiescent, the epicentre of unrest shifting to north Cork and Limerick.³⁹ It was some time later, during July and August 1823, that Tom Moore was to make his tour of the south of Ireland, more than a year and a half after the events of January 1822, and towards the end of the Rockite campaign. The journal entries and records made during this visit were to lay the basis for *Memoirs of Captain Rock*, published on 1 April 1824.⁴⁰

'Topographies of Terror: Killarney and the Politics of the Sublime', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 95/1 (Winter 1996), p. 35. **36** Stewart to Sorell, 30. Jan. 1822, SOCP 1-2344/4, NAI. **37** William E. Vaughan (ed.), *A New History of Ireland. Volume V: Ireland under the Union, 1801-1870* (Oxford, 1989), p. 71. Wellesley to Peel, 15 Feb. 1822, PRO, HO, 100/203, cited Ó Gráda, 'Cath Chéim an Fhia', p. 97. **38** Galen Broeker, *Rural Disorder and Police Reform in Ireland, 1812-1836* (London, 1970) pp. 133-4. **39** The starting point for any student of the Rockite campaign has to be Finbarr Whooley's remarkable thesis, 'The Rockite Movement in North Cork, 1820-1825', unpublished MA thesis, University College Cork, 1986. Particular attention should be given to his reconstruction of the Rockite committee structure in the Mallow and Doneraile areas. **40** For the entries charting the success of MCR see Wilfred S. Dowden (ed.), *The Journal of Thomas Moore* (6 vols, Delaware, 1983-91), vol. 2. Discussions of these can be found in O'Sullivan, 'A Literary Difficulty' and Gibbons, 'Between Captain Rock and a Hard Place'.

In some respects Moore's text repeats the more formulaic conventions of early nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish fiction; the text opens with a frame narrative of a young English missionary figure travelling through the alien and threatening countryside, a familiar novelistic device of the time.⁴¹ On this journey, he encounters 'a most extraordinary personage' bedecked with green spectacles and flaxen wig who begins musing on the troubled and linked nature of Irish past and present. At Naas, the ruin of Lord Strafford's house becomes the subject of a short speech by the missionary's strange companion:

It is melancholy to think, that while in almost all other countries, we find historical names of heroes and benefactors, familiarly on the lips of the common people, and handed down with blessings from generation to generation, in Ireland the only remarkable names of the country, are become words of ill-omen, and are remembered only to be cursed. Among these favourites of hate, the haughty nobleman who built that mansion, is to this date recorded; and, under the name of Black Tom, still haunts the imagination of the peasant, as one of the dark and evil beings who tormented the land in former days, and with whom, in the bitterness of his heart, he compares its more modern tormentors. The Babylonians, we are told by Herodotus, buried their dead in honey – but it is at the very gall of the heart that the memory of Ireland's rulers is embalmed.⁴²

This declaration underlies the premise of Moore's remarkable prose satire; that there exists a trans-generational principle of misrule and consequent reactive violence at the heart of Irish history, a by-product of which is a traumatic tradition of peasant remembrance. In this scenario, it is the 'Rock' family who endure the process whereby 'in the History of the English government in Ireland – every succeeding century [is] but a renewed revolution of the same follies, the same crimes, and the same turbulence that disgraced the former'.⁴³ *Memoirs* details this principle of violence by emphasising the essential repetition central to the Irish past; thus in the chapter dealing with 1641, with its familiar position within the canon of anti-Catholic rhetoric, Moore reverses the parallels drawn between that event and the violence of the recent uprising. The narrative voice of our contemporary Rock narrator is suspended, replaced by the journal entries of an elderly bed-ridden ancestor, unable to 'partake in the pastime that was going on'.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, the

⁴¹ Katie Trumpener, 'National Character, Nationalist Plots: National Tale and Historical Novels in the Age of *Waverley*, 1806–1830', *English Literary History*, 60 (1993), pp. 697–8.

⁴² *MCR*, pp. vii–viii. ⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 23. ⁴⁴ For recent scholarly treatments of the arguments around the commemoration and memorialisation of 1641 see Thomas Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation: The Catholic Question, 1690–1830* (Dublin, 1992); Brian MacCuarta (ed.), *Ulster 1641: Aspects of the Rebellion* (Belfast, 1994); Toby C. Barnard, 'The Uses of 1641 and Irish Protestant Celebrations', in *English Historical Review*, 106 (1991), pp. 889–920 and James Kelly, "'The Glorious and Immortal Memory": Commemoration and Protestant Identity in Ireland, 1660–1800', in *R.I.A. Proceedings*, 164 (1994), pp. 25–52.

parallels between the account of the Ulster rebellion and the 1790s are made explicit by the footnoting of incidents from the late insurrection to its precursor, the violence of the distant past becoming a drama only waiting to be 'acted over again'. As one particular footnote testifies, 'The skill with which the county of Wexford was roused from its tranquillity in 1798, by the seasonable application of burnings, half-hangings, &c. was a palpable but improved copy of the expedition of the Lord Munster [during the rising of 1641]'.⁴⁵

The origin for such a comparative framework for discussing both rebellions is Musgrave's ultra-loyalist and anti-Catholic *Memoirs of the Various Rebellions in Ireland* (1801). As Kevin Whelan has recently remarked, Musgrave's text succeeded in influentially aligning the events of Scullabogue and the Wexford rising with the ghostly accusers of Temple's *History of the Irish Rebellion*, striving to represent Irish Catholics as 'barbarians frozen in the formaldehyde of seventeenth-century antagonisms'.⁴⁶ Moore's strategy, in turn, was to reverse the comparison, reminding the reader in one footnote that 'Sir John Temple . . . was about as trustworthy a narrator of 1641 as Sir Richard Musgrave has been of 1798'.⁴⁷ At moments of crisis, such as the height of the sectarian Rockite campaign, the connection was to seem all too real. *Memoirs* was therefore located in a highly contentious historiographic arena, where the violence of the past merged in urgent fashion with the similar disorder of the present.

'Book The First' closes and 'Book The Second' opens with the transition from the 'historical' narrative of the progress of the Rock family to the beginning of the personal history of the narrator himself. The entry of the Captain into the world is framed by two events – the backdrop of the Rock clan's silence during the Scottish Jacobite rebellion in 1745, and the execution of Fr Nicholas Sheehy in 1766, the latter event being 'one of those *coup d'état* of the Irish authorities, which they used to perform at stated intervals, and which saved them the trouble of further atrocities for some time to come'.⁴⁸ Moore firmly writes the contemporary Captain Rock into this notoriously disputed episode, placing his birth at the inception of the Munster tradition of Whiteboyism, along with the continually resonant martyrdom of Sheehy.

To the extent that Moore's polemic engages with negative stereotyping of the Irish peasantry we have to look to 'Book the Second'. It is here that we encounter the text's fullest elaboration of the 'Rock' persona via the characterisation of the

⁴⁵ MCR, pp. 88–9. ⁴⁶ Kevin Whelan, '98 after '98: The Politics of Memory', in *The Tree of Liberty: Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of Irish Identity, 1760–1830* (Cork, 1996), particularly the section 'The Matrix of Memory: Musgrave's *Memoirs of the Various Rebellions*', pp. 135–8. Whelan also draws our attention to Musgrave's depiction of the rural poor in remote areas of Co. Cork as being "but one step above animal instinct" (p. 138). ⁴⁷ MCR, p. 92. ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 155. For a recent account of the Fr Sheehy incident see L.M. Cullen, 'The Blackwater Catholics and County Cork: Society and Politics in the Eighteenth Century', in P. O'Flanagan, C.G. Buttimer (eds), *Cork: History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County* (Dublin, 1993), pp. 535–84.

narrator's father, initially a dispossessed member of the Catholic gentry, latterly an exemplary representative of the Irish peasantry. One of the first traits attributable to such a generalised peasant figure is his penchant for historical remembrance, cultivated 'amidst the smoke of his wretched cabin' with the aid of a hedge school master. In a moment which links us back to the haunted imagination of the peasant, these fireside recollections become for the young Captain Rock his 'first glimmering knowledge of the history and antiquities of Ireland . . . frightful stories of the massacres committed by Black Tom and Old Oliver'.⁴⁹

Away from the topic of peasant historical remembrance, the hospitality of the elder 'Rock' is followed closely by 'my father's happy talent for wit and humour', the latter becoming a mode for explaining the apparently blundering nature of Irish speech. The 'vernacular relish' of peasant speech is described as essentially unrepresentable, defying the transition from an oral to a print medium. As our narrator writes, 'Half the effect would be lost, unless I could "print his face with the joke;" – besides the charm of that Irish tone would be wanting, which gives the rich effect to the enunciation of Irish humour'. Even the frequent appearance in his father's speech of what is known 'in common parlance [as] a *bull*' cannot be construed as an indication of a deficit in Irish national character.⁵⁰ However, 'in the rapidity of his transitions from melancholy to mirth, my father resembled the rest of his countrymen', this emotional volatility being linked to a belief in miracles, 'a natural consequence of his political position'.⁵¹ In this manoeuvre, political oppression is depicted as the cause of Irish religious irrationalism, particularly evident in Catholic belief in Prince Hohenlohe's miracles and Pastorini's prophecies.⁵²

The closing sections of *Memoirs* depict the corruption of the Protestant Ascendancy as a characteristic feature of the administration of Ireland in the second half of the eighteenth-century. Eventually the tensions of the 1790s lead Rock to appear as a 'a sort of political Mephistopheles' who advises Pitt on the best fashion to 'deliver up Ireland, bound hand and foot, into the fangs of Captain Rock and the Ascendancy, to be their joint prey through all succeeding times'.⁵³ Moore's true relationship to the violence is realised here. Far from the 'Rock' family being a celebration of Irish resistance, it appears as part of a cyclical process of Protestant repression and inevitable Irish response, the reactive nature of peasant violence absolving it from any accusation of shaping Irish national character. Yet we must

49 *MCR*, pp. 242–4. 50 On the importance of the representation of speech in early nineteenth-century literary texts such as Moore's *MCR*, see Tom Dunne, 'Murder as Metaphor: Griffin's Portrayal of Ireland in the Year of Catholic Emancipation', in O. MacDonagh and W.F. Mandle (eds), *Ireland and Irish Australia* (London, 1986), p. 77, id., "'A Gentleman's Estate should be a Moral School': Edgeworthstown in Fact and Fiction, 1760–1840' in Raymond Gillespie and Gerard Moran (eds), *Longford: Essays in County History* (Dublin, 1991), p. 103. 51 *MCR*, pp. 245–7. 52 *Ibid.*, pp. 187–8, p. 248. See Larry Geary, 'Prince Hohenlohe, Signor Pastorini and Miraculous Healing in Early Nineteenth-Century Ireland', in Elizabeth Malcolm and Greta Jones (eds), *Medicine, Disease and the State in Ireland, 1650–1940* (Cork, 1998). 53 *MCR*, pp. 353–6.

also draw attention to the text's very ambiguous relationship to the events of 1798; in a remarkable autobiographical parallel, the bed-ridden ancestor who sits out the course of the 1641 rebellion mentioned in *Memoirs* had a counterpart in Moore himself. As the biographical fragment preserved in an edition of his work reminds us, he too was confined to bed through illness during the course of the rising, presided over by his watchful and nervous mother.⁵⁴ Towards the end of the text as the chronological narrative draws close to the rebellion itself, the reader is warned that those despairing of events such as Scullabogue 'have yet to learn that simple theory of the connexion of events with their causes'. The reader is again referred back to 1641 as the key event in the cycle of Irish – and in this case Catholic-inspired – atrocity.⁵⁵

'The angry sword of the night': reaction to Memoirs of Captain Rock

While most of the reviews of *Memoirs of Captain Rock* were either laudatory or ambiguous, the most severe criticism was to appear in the conservative *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*.⁵⁶ Significantly, *Memoirs* was critiqued alongside Croker's *Researches in the South of Ireland*. According to the reviewer, the former text repeated 'the least interesting portions of Irish history', but it is a sin of omission which damns the Rock narrator's manuscript: 'There is no attempt whatever to give an apparent reality and distinctiveness to the conception of the lawless fanatic [and] there is not a single effective incident or description of any one scene connected with the disturbances'. Furthermore, Moore's attack on the ultra-Protestant obsession with the memory of 1641, despite 'the evidence of the most shocking cruelties recorded in the history of mankind', is condemned out of hand, the reviewer going so far as to cite from Temple's preface to the *History of the Irish Rebellion*.⁵⁷

The *Blackwood's* review goes on to contrast the literary opportunism of publishing what would 'in the mouth of a real Captain Rock be treason', with Croker's *Researches*, a work which has 'entirely escaped the yellow fever of Irish politics'. The discussion of the text focuses on Croker's treatment of a barbarous Catholic rural population, and his 'salvaging' of the fast disappearing remains of a non-literate, anachronistic peasantry. Compiled before the current phase of agrarian insurgency had begun, Croker had recorded 'many of the national customs, which were fast dying away, and which, interrupted by the violence of a servile war, are likely to be soon forgotten'.⁵⁸ Prominence was also given in the review to segments of the text which associated the carnivalesque popular culture of the Catholic peasantry,

⁵⁴ See Mary Helen Thuente, 'Thomas Moore's Songs and Satires', *The Harp Re-Strung: The United Irishmen and Rise of Irish Literary Nationalism* (Syracuse, 1994), p. 184. ⁵⁵ MCR, p. 358. ⁵⁶ For the reaction to MCR see H.H. Jordan, *Bolt Upright: A Life of Thomas Moore* (2 vols, Salzburg, 1975), vol. 2, pp. 375–80. ⁵⁷ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, xv (May 1824), pp. 551–5. The *Wellesley Index* identifies John Anster as the author of the review. ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 547–8.

such as the Saint John's pattern observed by Croker in 1813, with sedition and superstition:

All became actors, – none spectators, – rebellious songs, in the Irish language, are loudly vociferated, and are received with yells of applause. Towards evening the tumult increases, and intoxication becomes almost universal. Cudgels are brandished, the shrieks of women and the piercing cry of children thrill painfully on the ear in the riot and uproar of the scene; indeed the distraction and tumult of a patron cannot be described.⁵⁹

A similar antagonism to the disaffected condition of the Catholic peasantry and its popular culture can be found in a full length response to *Memoirs*, the Revd Mortimer O'Sullivan's *Captain Rock Detected*, which was published anonymously in July 1824. In many ways O'Sullivan continued the attack on Moore initiated by conservative reviewers, primarily by focusing on the incongruity of the author of the *Irish Melodies* deploying all his powers of literary allusion, erudition and reputation to the creation of a 'Rock' persona to narrate the iniquities of Irish history and their present-day parallels. The strategy for repudiating *Memoirs* is to reinscribe the agrarian violence of the Irish countryside deemed absent from the learned manuscript of Moore's 'Captain Rock'. The narrative sections that occupy the first 120 pages of the text offer a sustained depiction of the threat of Whiteboyism as it appeared to a confirmed Protestant conservative situated in Tipperary during the early 1820s.

An overview of the 'State of the South' discounts the relative waning of rural violence, citing the calm that often precedes outright rebellion. Indeed our narrator soon recalls a quiet evening in the winter of 1822 (a direct recollection of the *jacquerie* of 1822), when 'I heard the sound of a party marching in regular time . . . We soon saw it emerge from the trees, and march on quietly before the house. [300 persons] passed on in the same regular array'.⁶⁰ In a manner that peculiarly echoes Moore's evocation of peasant memory at the site of Strafford's ruined castle, an old tenant informs O'Sullivan's 'Munster farmer' of the dangerous nature of recalling the recent past:

'I tell you,' said a poor old man, 'there's something not right among them boys; they are grown so dark, and getting together in holes and corners; and when I speak to them about the ould times, and the bloody year ninety-eight, and the hard summer that came after, to frighten 'em, 'tis that that only sets 'em wild entirely.' The poor old man did not know that, in memory, hatred and revenge are only one remove from horror.⁶¹

The destabilising memory of the rebellion is kept alive by a disaffected ballad

⁵⁹ *Researches*, p. 281. For more on Croker see Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, pp. 159–60, and Cornelius G. Buttimer, 'Remembering 1798', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 103 (1998). ⁶⁰ *Captain Rock Detected*, pp. 11–12. ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

culture. As the text continues, 'the disturbers find their best solace in the songs and acts of heroes'.⁶² It is the Spenserian figures emerging from the 'woodes and the glens' of the winter's night in 1822 that a young English missionary, Edward Ormsby, encounters on his rambles through an Irish landscape dotted with 'trees, and waters, and green hills, and ruins, and dark mountains'. Falling asleep in a ruined abbey, he awakens to hear 'a snatch of a wild impassioned air, of which he had sometimes before heard from the labourers as they returned at evening from the field'. The narrative proceeds to recount the text of the seditious ballad that Ormsby overhears:

Is your hand on your blade cries the angry Star of the night
Is your heart in the cause where the hearts of the brave unite,
But the slave said no! for my masters hands are strong
And the pride of my heart is low, and my strength is gone.⁶³

Such an example of a seditious peasant orality is a direct response to the occasional snatches of ballads and prophecies scattered throughout *Memoirs*, such as the frequently cited couplet, 'Through Leinster, Ulster, Connaught, Ulster | Rock's the boy to make the fun stir!' O'Sullivan's parody of a seditious popular culture diagnosed by Croker and others rewrites the ballad tradition as a slave revolt, sweeping forth with an insatiable bloodlust. This pseudo-ballad goes on to paint a lurid landscape of impending rebellion, 'when the shrieks of my perishing victims rise | And my banners of flames stream forth on the midnight sky'.⁶⁴ In many ways this links back into a discourse of conservative hostility to popular culture, as typified by Croker's suspicions of the carnivalesque pattern scene quoted earlier, and highlights the fear of the lower class oral tradition as cultivating a violent and divisive pattern of memorialisation, particularly in relation to 1798.

In a passage that recalls the strictures of the opening narrative on vulnerable rural military outposts, O'Sullivan argues that the forcefulness and purpose of the original colonising impulse has been gradually diluted by 'the blandishments of Irish sociability'. He continues: 'they adapted the freedom of Irish habits; they [became] Irish in their garb and in their manners – they knew the power of song, and all the romantic seductions by which the bards could entice them'. Thus the enervating force of native culture, particularly in its oral form, stunts the focus of the colonisers. In an important following remark, the violence of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is described in terms very redolent of recent conflict: 'The war . . . maintained against the natives, was perhaps such a one as England in these latter times, felt compelled to enter into against Republican France – a war of opinions as much as against enemies.'⁶⁵ It is the very *ideological* nature of Anglo-Irish discord which, in O'Sullivan's formulation, has produced such a legacy of hatred and mistrust, a situation exacerbated by the seductions of native culture as well as

the failure of the original colonial impulse. Ultimately, the intention is to replace the literary and satirical success of *Memoirs of Captain Rock* with a clear delineation of the threat posed to Irish Protestantism. Such a menace can, broadly speaking, be attributed to three (interrelated) causes; firstly, to a degraded and quasi-subversive Roman Catholic clergy as led by James Warren Doyle; secondly to the machinations and compromised leadership of the Catholic Association, and thirdly to the violence and character of the Irish peasantry.

This final point is treated at greatest length in Chapter II, 'Amusements of the Irish Peasants. Conduct of the Landlords'. The task of the chapter, as with *Captain Rock Detected* as a whole, is to re-inscribe the violence fundamentally absent at the heart of Moore's text, while also providing a justification for strong military and judicial control. Familiar topics such as the judicial murder of Fr Sheehy are revisited, providing us with an alternative interpretation of events to those offered by Moore and other Catholic advocates.⁶⁶ Elsewhere on the subject of violence, a detailed description is given of a recent murder which occurred in the vicinity of the narrator's residence. An offender of Captain Rock's code is callously slaughtered for his transgressions, and

before life was quite extinct, [the Rockites] lifted the body from the earth and carried it to a little distance and placed the uncovered head carefully on a stone, that it might be the more convenient mark for their blows – 'Rock is the boy to make the fun stir' – I pass by, however, such trifling amusements such as these – 'miraculously tossing children on the point of a pike'.⁶⁷

What is to be done with such a people? The answer comes in the form of the threat of providentialist retribution. As our 'Munster farmer' writes, 'there are times when I could think, even with some complacency, of some sore judgement sent down upon the land for the wickedness of its inhabitants'.⁶⁸ A telling anecdote proves the necessity for a firm hand in Irish matters. Reverence for the fairies forbade the peasantry from tilling a certain field, until one evening a certain enterprising figure turned a sod to prove that the 'consent of the good people' had been granted. In a similar fashion, the relationship of the British constitution to Ireland is 'a mere fairy fiction', with the firm implementation of all repressive parliamentary legislation promising the turning of the sod.⁶⁹ The alternative is raging anarchy and a Malthusian peasant over-population that promises to reduce Ireland to ashes. After all, as O'Sullivan asserts, 'The Irish poor will never bear famine with the patience of the Chinese'.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 344–5. ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 347–8. ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 342. ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 363–4. ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 376. For comments on Malthus see pp. 324–5.

Conclusion

Many representations of 1798 bear testament to the power of violence in shaping social and cultural frontiers. The three narratives discussed here underline how, approximately 25 years after the rebellion, Irish rural insurgency and the traumatic legacy of the 1790s could be read in one and the same light. A crucial indication of the effect of both the Whiteboy tradition of unrest and the United Irish rising is the readiness with which the pathology of Irish violence was articulated within two interrelated frameworks. Thus, violence is simultaneously historical and given to strange patterns of recurrence (as displayed by both Moore and Musgrave writing on 1798), and innate, a feature of an enduring and essentially unchanging national character, a position derived mainly from the disaffection of a brutalised Catholic peasantry. In the atmosphere of sectarian tension generated at the height of the agrarian protest of the 1820s and the religious fervour of the 'Second Reformation', it proved impossible to disentangle the two.

The opening sections of this chapter chart the perspectives of the Protestant population who faced such a sustained challenge during the events of January 1822. Responses to the unprecedented ferocity of the unrest ranged from a panicky Revd Newenham describing the withdrawal of local Protestants into Bandon, to the chilling comments of Lord Ennismore hoping for 'short nights & starvation' as a cure for a resurgent Whiteboyism. It is also illuminating to read that in this record of alarm, reaction and repression, the spectre of '98 was so vivid to many commentators, a reminder that the rebellion set a precedent that was never far from the minds of loyalists living in remote borderland regions. Whatever the limited and reactive aims of agrarian violence, it retained the capacity to deliver body blows to the confidence of those exerting social and political control. The determination and aggressiveness displayed by large numbers of poorly-armed protagonists in attacking well defended establishment targets during January 1822 was resistance on a scale rarely seen in the annals of Irish agrarian unrest, and reminds us of a latent antagonism to the forces of authority, an issue that remains vital to the study of 1798.⁷¹

Fear of a sectarian *jacquerie* reminiscent of the rebellion was not the exclusive preserve of local élites under siege. The second narrative dealt with here, Moore's *Memoirs of Captain Rock*, displays the uneasiness that constitutional figures such as Daniel O'Connell suffered when dealing with the repercussions of Irish violence. O'Connellite attempts to manoeuvre Catholic middle-class interests away from any association with insurrection, are similar in many ways to Moore's strategy to disavow active Catholic participation in any rebellious activity, be it 1641, 1798 or the continuing campaign of agrarian insurgency.⁷² Supposedly a celebration of

⁷¹ Tom Dunne, '1798 and the United Irishmen', *Irish Review*, 22, 1998, pp. 54-66. ⁷² For O'Connellite reticence on 1798 and the 1822 *jacquerie* see *Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Select Committee of the House of Lords Appointed to Inquire into the State of Ireland, More*

Irish dissent, the polemic is more accurately a bravura performance aimed at distancing any Catholic responsibility for fomenting Ireland's notorious violence. Conservative Protestant critics were not the only commentators to notice this. As the Wexford veteran Myles Byrne was to write in his *Memoirs* many years later, 'What a pity and misfortune, that the author of "Captain Rock" did not possess a thousand a year, or at least an independence which might have enabled him to live out of England! He [might have had] an opportunity of doing justice to . . . all those brave patriots of 1798 who sacrificed every thing dear to them.'⁷³ Byrne's comments belong to a more militant tradition than that of Moore, but they do serve to remind us how susceptible the latter was to accusations of complicity with an English, albeit Whig, establishment.

In contrast to the scathing remarks of Myles Byrne, James Edward Devereux, one of five delegates to present a Catholic petition to George III in 1793 and the author of the pamphlet *Observations on the Factions which have Ruled Ireland* (1801), described Moore's text in very different terms. In a letter to James Hardiman, he commented that in many ways he considered his own polemic as 'the Father and Mother of [Thomas] Moore's Captain Rock'.⁷⁴ That a figure with as lengthy a pedigree in pro-Catholic agitation as Devereux would choose to view his own efforts in terms of the later satire, demonstrates the acclaim that *Memoirs of Captain Rock* had won. Such an anachronistic alignment also draws our attention to Moore's relationship to the eighteenth-century Catholic tradition 'in which the case for reform and emancipation had been articulated through formulaic expressions of loyalty and deference', as Tom Dunne has put it.⁷⁵ Moore's few detailed comments on his involvement with the circles of United Irishmen active in Dublin during the course of the rebellion remind us that for a young Catholic student at Trinity College, association with revolutionary violence would bear no dividends. However, it was Moore's particular success that, when he came to represent the dynamic of Irish history, he brilliantly captured its propensity to be repeatedly marked by episodes of violence.

Conservative and loyalist reaction to *Memoirs of Captain Rock* is essentially correct; while ostensibly charting centuries of Irish disaffection, there is a complete absence of any direct representation of the reality of agrarian insurgency. In response, Mortimer O'Sullivan's *Captain Rock Detected* attempted to re-inscribe this violence deemed absent from Moore's text. It is here that ethnic and religious stereotyping is most evident, particularly in relation to a popular culture that is seen as carrying on the memory of 1798. Identifications of national character, such as those of O'Sullivan and Thomas Crofton Croker, are invariably cast in terms of

Particularly with Reference to the Circumstances which may have Led to Disturbances in that Part of the United Kingdom, 18 February-21 March 1825, H.C. 1825, ix, 1, pp. 141-2. ⁷³ Cited in Deane (ed.), *Field Day Anthology*, 1, p. 1097. ⁷⁴ MS letter from Devereux to James Hardiman preserved in a copy of the *Observations* in the Royal Irish Academy. Cited in McCormack, *From Burke to Beckett*, p. 114, n. 43. ⁷⁵ Dunne, 'Representations of Rebellion', p. 25.

the dangers of a peasantry who harbour the expectation of historical redress and an atavistic Catholic triumphalism. Ultimately, a common feature of all shades of political reaction to the Rockite campaign of the 1820s is a recognition of the capacity of Irish society's religious and ethnic tensions to be reflected in an endemic violence, derived, as so often before, from the tradition of agrarian insurgency.