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0521813867 - Irish Opinion and the American Revolution, 1760-1783

Vincent Morley

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## Irish Opinion and the American Revolution, 1760–1783

This ground-breaking study traces the impact of the American revolution and of the international war it precipitated on the political outlook of each section of Irish society. Morley uses a dazzling array of sources – newspapers, pamphlets, sermons and political songs, including Irish-language documents unknown to other scholars and previously unpublished – to trace the evolving attitudes of the Anglican, Catholic and Presbyterian communities from the beginning of colonial unrest in the early 1760s until the end of hostilities in 1783. He also reassesses the influence of the American revolutionary war on such developments as Catholic relief, the removal of restrictions on Irish trade, and Britain's recognition of Irish legislative independence. Morley sheds new light on the nature of Anglo-Irish patriotism and Catholic political consciousness, and reveals the extent to which the polarities of the 1790s had already emerged by the end of the American war.

VINCENT MORLEY has worked as a researcher with the Royal Irish Academy's *Dictionary of Irish Biography* and lectured in eighteenth-century Irish history at the National University of Ireland, Galway. He is the author of *An Crann os Coill*, a study of the Jacobite poet Aodh Bui Mac Cruitin (1995).

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## Preface

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In a still useful article about the impact of the American revolution on Ireland which was written two generations ago, Michael Kraus (1971) observed that the revolution and its effects ‘so faded into the more momentous French revolution that the general student often overlooked the particular influence of America’. If the American bicentennial prompted some further investigation of the subject in Ireland, the bicentenaries of the French revolution and the 1798 rising have more than restored the original imbalance and Kraus’s observation is at least as true today as it was when first made in 1939. This study is an attempt to isolate the ‘particular influence’ of the American revolution. Its aim is to trace the influence of the revolution and the international war that it precipitated on the political consciousness of the various sections of Irish society during the period from the beginning of colonial unrest in the early 1760s until the end of hostilities in 1783.

I have not attempted to present a detailed narrative of events – a task performed in considerable detail for the latter part of the period in question by Maurice O’Connell (1965), and for the entire period in a less detailed manner by R.B. McDowell (1979). Instead, my concern has been to chart the evolution of attitudes in Ireland at each stage of the revolution and to identify changes that can reasonably be considered to have resulted from the revolutionary process – whether produced directly through the operation of American example on Irish opinion or indirectly as a result of altered circumstances arising from the war. This aim has obliged me to adopt a chronological structure as a thematic approach would have obscured both transient changes in opinion and the relationship between such fluctuations and contemporary events.

As this study is concerned with the political outlook of sections of Irish society rather than with the stances adopted by individual actors on the political stage, priority has been given to sources that were in the public domain and which may have either reflected or influenced the views of the populace. Newspapers, pamphlets, vernacular song and published sermons have been used extensively while less attention has been paid

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to confidential sources such as state papers and private correspondence. I have also been conscious of the adage that ‘actions speak louder than words’ – that is, of the principle that the behaviour of a social group is likely to be a more accurate indicator of its political sympathies than the declarations of those who pretended to speak on its behalf. I have therefore looked for evidence of popular activity that might shed light on the views of those who were excluded from the political nation. Conversely, I have noted the rhetoric of parliamentary orators only when it appears to reflect the attitudes of a constituency ‘out of doors’.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the courtesy and assistance I received from the staffs of the following libraries and archives: National Library of Ireland; Royal Irish Academy; Public Record Office, Kew; British Library; University of Liverpool; University College Dublin; Russell Library, St Patrick’s College, Maynooth; Trinity College Dublin; National Archives, Dublin.

I am grateful to Frank Keoghan, Ian McBride, James McGuire, Breandán Ó Buachalla, Éamonn Ó Ciardha and Pádraig Ó Snodaigh, who read and commented on drafts of this book or of the thesis on which it is based. It need hardly be said that they do not necessarily agree with the views expressed below and that the responsibility for all errors of fact or interpretation is mine alone. I also wish to acknowledge the generosity of the University of Liverpool in awarding me a studentship, as well as an additional grant for research visits to the British Library and the Public Record Office, without which the doctoral thesis on which this book is based would not have been written.

My greatest debt is to Marianne Elliott, the supervisor of my thesis, who was always available as a ready source of advice, encouragement and constructive criticism despite her heavy administrative workload and the demands of her own work in progress.

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## Textual note

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The spelling and capitalisation of all quotations, whether from primary or secondary sources, have been normalised in the interests of readability and consistency. I have also silently corrected obvious spelling errors, expanded abbreviations, and ignored the use of italics except when used for emphasis. Words in square brackets have been interpolated by me; words in parentheses occur in the original.

In the case of Irish-language verse, deviations from the standard spelling have been accepted when necessary to preserve the metre; punctuation and line breaks have been adjusted as I considered appropriate. All quotations in Irish have been translated except for the initial lines given in footnotes for the purpose of facilitating reference to the manuscripts. Where I am aware that a poem or song has been published I have provided the relevant details, but such editions may differ from the version quoted.

Unqualified references to organs or officers of state ('the Privy Council', 'the speaker', etc.) refer to bodies or persons in Ireland; whenever the British equivalents are referred to, this is stated.

In the interests of clarity, references to the Williamite Revolution of 1688–91 are distinguished by use of a capital 'R'; a lower-case 'r' is used when referring to other revolutions.

Newspapers are cited by their date of publication: a reference to the issue of *Finn's Leinster Journal* dated 3–6 February 1779 will thus appear as *Finn's Leinster Journal*, 6 February 1779.

# Abbreviations

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<i>Anal. Hib.</i>	<i>Analecta Hibernica</i>
<i>Archiv. Hib.</i>	<i>Archivium Hibernicum</i>
BL	British Library
BNL	<i>Belfast News-Letter</i>
DEP	<i>Dublin Evening Post</i>
FDJ	<i>Faulkner's Dublin Journal</i>
FJ	<i>Freeman's Journal</i>
FLJ	<i>Finn's Leinster Journal</i>
<i>Hist. Jn.</i>	<i>The Historical Journal</i>
HJ	<i>Hibernian Journal</i>
HM	<i>Hibernian Magazine</i>
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission
IHS	<i>Irish Historical Studies</i>
LJ	<i>Londonderry Journal</i>
NLI	National Library of Ireland
PRO	Public Record Office, Kew
<i>Proc. RIA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy</i>
QUB	Queen's University of Belfast
RIA	Royal Irish Academy
SNL	<i>Saunders' News-Letter</i>
<i>Studia Hib.</i>	<i>Studia Hibernica</i>
TCD	Trinity College, Dublin
UCD	University College, Dublin