

Introduction

Ireland . . . remained a land of no particular interest, until a few years ago, during the time of the American War, the suppressed spirit of the people awoke, felt its power, threw off a part of the English yoke . . . From this time forward, Ireland was remarkable also for us, as contemporaries and spectators.

‘Introduction by the Editor’, in Küttner, *Briefe über Irland*¹

Ireland is still as clay under the potters’ hand: the elements of society in that country are still floating in chaos, and await the hand of power to fix and fashion them . . . Improvement and civilisation must there descend from above; they will not arise spontaneously from the inward workings of the community.

Lewis, *On Local Disturbances in Ireland*²

In the closing decades of the eighteenth century, Ireland became the object of a vigorous debate concerning the promise and perils of commerce in an era of global war and revolution. This debate concerned not just the identity and future of the Irish polity itself, but of the British Empire of which it was a central part and the relationship of that empire to its European allies and rivals. As such, it had many participants: not only Irish and British, but also French, German, Swiss and Italian. Some, like the unidentified editor of the German Celtophile Karl Gottlob Küttner’s Irish travel writings, were concerned with Ireland’s potential for political agency – its ability to achieve a ‘rank among nations’.³ Others employed Ireland as a field of projection in broader disputes over the meaning of ‘improvement’ and ‘civilisation’. For British politicians like the Whig MP

¹ Karl Gottlob Küttner, *Briefe über Irland, an seinen Freund, den Herausgeber* (Leipzig: Johann Phillip Haugs Wittwe, 1785), vii.

² George Cornwall Lewis, *On Local Disturbances in Ireland, and on the Irish Church Question* (London: B. Fellowes, 1836), v–vi.

³ Küttner, *Briefe über Irland*, vi.

George Cornwall Lewis, Ireland was a place where empire was forced to confront the painful history of its own inadequacies.

As Küttner's editor also noticed, this pan-European upsurge of interest in Ireland was new. Since the defeat of the forces of James Stuart in 1692, the Irish Kingdom had been relatively marginal to the politics of both Europe and the British Empire. From the middle of the eighteenth century, however, it became increasingly impossible to ignore. Ireland's uncertain political allegiance and violent religious dissensions troubled and divided British intellectuals and politicians. Its potential for wealth – and poverty – became the object of fevered speculation. Its claims to an ancient Gaelic civilisation and to a long history of English oppression gave it a prominent position in the pantheons of European romanticism and humanitarianism. Its nascent democratic movements – from the 'Volunteer' militia of the 1770s, to the republican United Irishmen and the Catholic Association of Daniel O'Connell – caught the imaginations of radicals and revolutionaries.

Despite the imperial framework for Irish politics in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the ample interest in Ireland exhibited by British and continental European political thinkers, histories of Irish political thought in this period have adopted an overwhelmingly national focus. While they have frequently engaged with the transnational contexts, whether British, Atlantic or European, that have shaped traditions such as unionism, nationalism and republicanism, their ultimate purpose has been to better understand the principal actors in what remains an Irish story.⁴ This focus on Irish national and confessional identities has tended to sideline other questions that we might usefully ask of texts produced in and around Ireland during this turbulent period. Where was Ireland located, by Irish and non-Irish contemporaries alike, within the broader political conjuncture of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries? What can debates concerning Ireland tell us about the evolution of British and European political thinking in the era of the American and French

⁴ Joep Leersen, 'Anglo-Irish Patriotism and Its European Context: Notes towards a Reassessment', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland/Iris an dá chultúr*, 3 (1988), 7–24; Stephen Small, *Political Thought in Ireland, 1776–1798: Republicanism, Patriotism, and Radicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Ultán Gillen, 'Le directoire et le républicanisme Irlandais', in Pierre Serna (ed.), *Républiques soeurs: Le directoire et la révolution atlantique* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009); John Bew, *The Glory of Being Britons: Civic Unionism in Nineteenth-Century Belfast* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009); Kevin B. Nowlan and Maurice R. O'Connell (eds.), *Daniel O'Connell, Portrait of a Radical* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1985); David Dwan, *The Great Community: Culture and Nationalism in Ireland* (Dublin: Field Day, 2008).

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Revolutions, and of Britain's rise to global commercial and colonial hegemony?

In order to analyse these broader questions, we certainly have to understand how Irish thinkers and politicians thought about the evolving shape of European and global politics, and the opportunities (and dangers) these afforded to the different confessional and ethnic communities that constituted the Irish polity. But we also have to concern ourselves with British and continental European debates *about* Ireland. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries have long been identified as a turning point in the governing structures and ideologies of the British Empire, ultimately marking the emergence of 'free trade imperialism' abroad and 'liberal government' at home.⁵ Yet the relationship between Britain's Irish policies and the long-run evolution of British governing ideologies remains curiously understudied.⁶ Continental European writing on Ireland, meanwhile, is commonly utilised as a historical source for Irish conditions, with little or no reference to its contemporary meaning or resonance for European readers.⁷

If we link together Irish, British and continental European thinking on Ireland, however, then we can open up an entirely new perspective on the history of Irish political thought, and of Ireland's significance to the history of political thought more broadly. Where historians have traced the evolution of distinctively Irish political ideologies, contemporary thinkers understood the problems of Irish government as part of a broader European debate about the relationship between commerce and empire in an age of war, revolution and rapid social change. Ireland occupied a central position in contemporary European discussions of mercantile empire, agrarian reform, international trade and the balance of power.

⁵ Bernard Semmel, *The Rise of Free Trade Imperialism: Classical Political Economy, the Empire of Free Trade and Imperialism 1750–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Jonathan Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

⁶ One of the few existing works to attempt this is Douglas Kanter, *The Making of British Unionism, 1740–1848: Politics, Government, and the Anglo-Irish Constitutional Relationship* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009).

⁷ For instance, James Kelly, 'Introduction: Interpreting Late Early Modern Ireland', in James Kelly (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Ireland: Volume III, 1730–1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1–20. The work of Manuela Ceretta is a vital exception to this rule: Manuela Ceretta, 'L'Irlande entre histoire et politique française', *The Tocqueville Review/La Revue Tocqueville*, 31 (2010), 139–57; Manuela Ceretta, *Il Momento Irlandese. L'Irlanda nella cultura politica francese tra Restaurazione e Secondo Impero* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2013). See also Seamus Deane, 'A Church Destroyed, the Church Restored: France's Irish Catholicism', *Field Day Review*, 7 (2011), 202–49.

By viewing debates about commerce and empire through an Irish lens, we can discern new connections between these central categories of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political thought. In so doing, we can also think afresh about Ireland's position within the two orders that have shaped so much of its modern history: the British Empire-state and the European states system. Instead of classing Ireland as a 'periphery' – whether of Britain or of Europe – we will consider it as a point of connection between these overlapping circuits of rivalry and exchange.⁸ Successive crises of British authority in Ireland were not viewed as *sui generis*, or of purely local significance. Instead, Ireland's society, economy and history were studied and debated in order to provide insights into Europe's future. As a vulnerable and restive outpost of British power and civilisation, Ireland was a field of conflict between rival conceptions of commerce, empire and international order.

An Age of Crisis

Two sets of events, the United Irish risings of 1796–8 and the British–Irish parliamentary Union of 1801, are usually viewed as natural caesuras in the narration of the Irish past. Conveniently falling at the end of a century, 'the '98' and the Union mark a clear distinction between 'early modern' and 'modern' Irish history: between an eighteenth century dominated by the Anglican settler aristocracy that ruled via the Dublin parliament, and a nineteenth defined by the rise of constitutional and physical force nationalisms, under a more direct form of British rule.⁹ The perspective taken here, by contrast, seeks to incorporate Ireland into a broader narrative framework that is widely prevalent in British, European, international and global history. In these fields, the period from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century has long been treated as an integrated whole – an intensified period of transition and flux, marking new departures in political, economic and intellectual life.¹⁰

⁸ On Ireland as a periphery, see Micheal Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975); Richard Butterwick-Pawlikowski, Simon Davies and Gabriel Sánchez Espinosa (eds.), *Peripheries of the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁹ John Pocock, 'The Union in British History', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, 10 (2000), 181–9.

¹⁰ Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. P. Camiller (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 58–63.

The most prevalent version of this idea remains that of a global ‘Age of Revolutions’, stretching from the British American colonists’ Declaration of Independence in 1776 through the French and Haitian Revolutions, the revolutions in Portuguese and Spanish America and the European risings of 1830 and 1848.¹¹ In a British context, a similar period has been described as an ‘Age of Reform’, facilitating the transition from a ‘fiscal-military’ to a ‘laissez-faire’ state.¹² In the history of European statecraft and diplomacy, the breakdown of the eighteenth-century ‘balance of power’ and its reorganisation by the European ‘Concert’, created by the Vienna Congress of 1814, suggests a similar periodisation.¹³ In the German tradition of conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*), meanwhile, the century from 1750 to 1850 has been described as the *Sattelzeit*: a period of intensified change and production in the intellectual underpinnings of political life, when many central words and concepts took on meanings broadly similar to those that they bear today.¹⁴

Synthesising all of these approaches and more, the historian Christopher Bayly has described a ‘world crisis’ stretching from the mid-eighteenth to the early nineteenth century. The Seven Years’ War (1757–63), the War of American Independence (1776–83), and the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792–1815) entangled the political orders of West and South Asia with those of Europe and the Americas. They formed a cycle of fiscal and military escalation, driven by the global rivalry between Britain and France, which fundamentally altered the structure, capacities and governing ideologies of states and empires across all of these regions. The advantages of power and wealth shifted decisively to Western Europe as a whole, and to the British Empire in particular. In Europe and the new United States, commercial and demographic expansion, alongside the first stirrings of ‘Industrial Revolution’, expanded the demand for labour and goods, while deepening the integration of regional economies into global markets.¹⁵

¹¹ David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds.), *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹² Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes, ‘Introduction’, in *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1–17; Philip Harling and Peter Mandler, ‘From “Fiscal-Military” State to *laissez-faire* State, 1760–1850’, *Journal of British Studies*, 32 (2014), 44–70.

¹³ Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

¹⁴ Reinhart Koselleck and Michaela Richter, ‘Introduction and Prefaces to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*’, *Contributions to the History of Concepts*, 6 (2011), 1–37.

¹⁵ Christopher A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 86–121.

The growing scale of military conflict and the gathering pace of economic transformation inspired a ferment of new ideas about the relationship between commerce, empire and war. The importance of trade and colonisation to European politics had been recognised since the rise of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century, and had long been the object of a practically oriented literature focused on the utility of commerce as a means to power.¹⁶ Power-political analyses of mercantile empire were never neatly separable, however, from a broader set of cultural and ethical ideas about what it meant to live in societies defined by luxury consumption and market exchange. The moral legitimisation of what Adam Smith termed ‘commercial society’ was always unstable and incomplete.¹⁷ Yet by the end of the eighteenth century, many Europeans nonetheless believed that it represented a superior, and distinctively ‘modern’, mode of life.¹⁸ The identification of commerce with peace and ‘civilisation’ – often hard to sustain in an eighteenth century defined by wars for control of colonies and trade routes – was encouraged after 1815 by the failure of French attempts to enforce an anti-British commercial blockade, the Continental System, in Europe.¹⁹ Later in the nineteenth century, it would justify the forcible ‘opening’ and reorganisation of East and South Asian societies that did not conform to European ideals of ‘free’ trade and private property.²⁰

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland experienced a series of radical economic, social and political changes that would place it at the heart of European debates over the political economy of Britain and its empire in this global age of crisis. The rise of the linen weaving industry after 1750 and the expansion of tillage agriculture after 1780 were both encouraged by rapidly growing demand for Irish goods in British, imperial and global markets.²¹ The second half of the eighteenth century witnessed a significant expansion and improvement of Ireland’s road network and the construction of the modern-day centres of major cities including Cork,

¹⁶ Julian Hoppit, ‘The Contexts and Contours of British Economic Literature, 1660–1760’, *The Historical Journal*, 49 (2006), 79–110.

¹⁷ István Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

¹⁸ Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 14–19.

¹⁹ Anna Plassart, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 187–220.

²⁰ David Todd, ‘John Bowring and the Global Dissemination of Free Trade’, *The Historical Journal*, 51 (2008), 373–97.

²¹ Louis Cullen, ‘Economic Development, 1750–1800’, in T. W. Moody and W. E. Vaughan (eds.), *A New History of Ireland, Volume IV: Eighteenth-Century Ireland, 1691–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 159–95.

Dublin and Belfast.²² This period also witnessed a transformation in the Irish landscape, which increased the quantity of land dedicated to grain production and filled upland and marginal acres with small potato farms.²³ Encouraged by wartime demand and the interruption of British trade with Europe in the Napoleonic era, the turn to potato tillage and grain exports enabled explosive population growth, particularly in the west of the country. It also increased Ireland's vulnerability to economic and environmental shocks, laying the foundations for the catastrophic famines of the 1840s.²⁴

Economic volatility and demographic transformation were, meanwhile, paralleled by an upsurge in popular politics. Political movements with parliamentary and elite connections, like the Irish Volunteers of the 1780s, the republican United Irishmen and Daniel O'Connell's Catholic Association, increasingly turned to 'the people' – even, in the case of the United Irish revolutionary Wolfe Tone, the 'men of no property' – for support and legitimisation.²⁵ The expansion of popular politics further complicated Ireland's complex confessional settlement, making possible cross-confessional alliances between the Presbyterians who shaped the politics in the north-eastern region of Ulster and the Anglicans and Catholics who predominated in the rest of the island. They simultaneously, however, reawakened deep memories of the bloody violence of religious warfare in the seventeenth century.²⁶ Political radicalisation, alongside the social dislocation produced by rapid economic change, encouraged the growth of oath-based secret societies among peasants and artisans, in town and country alike.²⁷ Here, too, the famines of the 1840s imposed a sharp caesura. While the first appearance of the potato blight

²² David Dickson, 'Town and City', in Eugenio F. Biagini and Mary Daly (eds.), *The Cambridge Social History of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 112–28.

²³ Kevin Whelan, 'The Modern Landscape', in F. H. A. Aalen, Matthew Stout and Kevin Whelan (eds.), *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape*, 2nd ed. (Cork: Cork University Press, 2011), 73–115, at 80–5.

²⁴ Cormac Ó'Gráda, 'Poverty, Population and Agriculture, 1801–45', in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A New History of Ireland, Volume V: Ireland under the Union 1801–1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 108–13.

²⁵ Pádraig Higgins, *A Nation of Politicians: Gender, Patriotism, and Political Culture in Late Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010); Jim Smyth, *The Men of No Property: Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992); K. Theodor Hoppen, 'Riding a Tiger: Daniel O'Connell, Reform, and Popular Politics in Ireland, 1800–1847', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 100 (1999), 121–43.

²⁶ Jim Smyth, 'Anti-Catholicism, Conservatism, and Conspiracy: Sir Richard Musgrave's Memoirs of the Different Rebellions in Ireland', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 22 (1998); Irene Whelan, *The Bible War in Ireland: The 'Second Reformation' and the Polarization of Protestant-Catholic Relations, 1800–1840* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2005).

²⁷ Tom Garvin, 'Defenders, Ribbonmen and Others: Underground Political Networks in Prefamine Ireland', in Charles H. E. Philpin (ed.), *Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland*

was attended by widespread popular protest, the scale of death and emigration deeply traumatised Irish society, altering landholding and religious practices in ways that – for a time – would militate against insurgent mass politics in the mould of the Volunteers, the United Irishmen, or O’Connell’s Repeal Association.²⁸

The British Empire in Europe

This long arc of economic transformation and political mobilisation provides a strong justification for locating Irish history in this period within the broader ‘world crisis’ described above. It also enables us, however, to identify a distinct phase in the long history of Britain’s government of Ireland. Here, the most enduring and significant change was the Union of 1801, which replaced a formally autonomous parliament at Dublin with minority Irish representation at Westminster.²⁹ Following O’Connell’s successful agitation, representation at Westminster was broadened to include MPs from the island’s Catholic majority in 1829.³⁰ Over a period of decades before and after the Union, a carefully regulated commercial system based on tariffs and prohibitions, and complemented by a separate Irish currency Exchequer and national debt, was meanwhile dismantled and replaced by an integrated market with common fiscal and monetary institutions.³¹ The offices of the Lord Lieutenant and the Irish Chief Secretary, government officials responsible for an extensive administrative apparatus centred on Dublin Castle, became increasingly important in the British cabinet. After the Union, innovations such as parliamentary inquiries, the Irish Constabulary, the census and the Irish Poor Law increased the capacity of both the Westminster parliament and the

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 219–44; James S. Donnelly, *Captain Rock: The Irish Agrarian Rebellion of 1821–1824* (Cork: Collins Press, 2009).

²⁸ John Cunningham, ‘“Tis Hard to Argue Starvation into Quiet”: Protest and Resistance, 1846–7’, in Enda Delaney and Breandán Mac Suibhne (eds.), *Ireland’s Great Famine and Popular Politics* (London: Routledge, 2016), 10–34; Emmet Larkin, ‘The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850–75’, *The American Historical Review*, 77 (1972), 625–52; K. Theodore Hoppen, ‘Landlords, Society and Electoral Politics in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Ireland’, *Past & Present*, 75 (1977), 62–93.

²⁹ Joanna Innes, ‘Legislating for Three Kingdoms: How the Westminster Parliament Legislated for England, Scotland and Ireland, 1707–1830’, in Julian Hoppit (ed.), *Parliaments, Nations and Identities in Britain and Ireland, 1660–1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 15–48.

³⁰ Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783–1846* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 384–91.

³¹ Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History, 1780–1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 43–6; Kanter, *Making of British Unionism*, 111–29.

Castle administration to monitor and discipline the lives of their Irish subjects.³²

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries have long been recognised as an era of reform and transition across the British Empire. Where once, however, historians spoke of the ‘turn to the East’ and the ‘rise of free trade’ as defining features of this period, they now emphasise a complex renegotiation of authority between the different layers of the imperial polity.³³ In the later eighteenth century, the imperative to control Britain’s escalating national debt by extracting additional troops and revenues from its dependencies was a common theme across imperial policy: from Ireland to the American colonies and the East India Company.³⁴ Concern with debt and revenue, however, was only one part of the story. Particularly following the loss of the American colonies, there was a growing aspiration among parts of the British political nation to employ central and executive authority to defend lesser imperial subjects against the depredations of self-governing colonial elites – from East India Company directors to West India slave planters.³⁵

Ireland was widely believed to be ruled by one such extractive elite: the ‘Anglo-Irish’ colonists who had expropriated and replaced an older, Catholic landowning class, of mixed Gaelic and Anglo-Norman descent, in the course of the seventeenth century.³⁶ For much of the eighteenth century, British ministers had been largely content to allow this Anglican aristocracy to rule Ireland on its own terms.³⁷ In the period considered by this book, however, they began to intervene more directly, responding to Irish political mobilisation with an ecumenical vision of British rule that sought actively to win the allegiance of the Catholic majority, and to

³² Peter Jupp, ‘Government, Parliament and Politics in Ireland, 1801–41’, in Hoppit (ed.), *Parliaments, Nations and Identities*, 146–64.

³³ Christopher A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780–1830* (London: Longman, 1989).

³⁴ Robert Donovan, ‘The Military Origins of the Roman Catholic Relief Programme of 1778’, *The Historical Journal*, 28 (1985), 79–102; John H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492–1830* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 294–307; Huw V. Bowen, *The Business of Empire: The East India Company and Imperial Britain, 1756–1833* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 37–42.

³⁵ Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 5–21; Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford, *Rage for Order: The British Empire and the Origins of International Law, 1800–1850* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 28–56.

³⁶ Jane Ohlmeyer, ‘Conquest, Civilisation, Colonisation: Ireland, 1540–1660’, in Ian McBride and Richard Bourke (eds.), *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 21–47.

³⁷ David Hayton, ‘The Beginnings of the “Undertaker System”’, in *Penal Era and Golden Age: Essays in Irish History, 1690–1800* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1979), 32–55.

guarantee Ireland's prosperity as an integral part of the United Kingdom. This was the vision of empire that stood behind the Union of 1801.

The vicissitudes of British government in Ireland, however, were frequently viewed by contemporaries in a context that was as much European as it was imperial. One of the first histories of English attempts to govern both Scotland and Ireland, the Genevan exile Jean-Louis de Lolme's *History of the British Empire in Europe* (1787), defined its subject in terms that were at once geographical and geopolitical. De Lolme's title was both a casual collective description for the two Kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland, and a statement of intent concerning the decisive role played by European warfare in his narrative. The threat of Spain, de Lolme claimed, had made the Elizabethan and Jacobean plantations of Ireland an unavoidable necessity for English reason of state. The English general the Duke of Marlborough's victories against the armies of Louis XIV had, meanwhile, rendered the Anglo-Scottish Union of 1707 irresistible to a Scottish nobility that could no longer hope for French assistance against England. The willingness of the Volunteer movement to challenge the restrictive commercial regulations imposed on Ireland by the Westminster parliament was, by contrast, bolstered by the knowledge that France, a 'great European power', had supported the cause of Britain's North American colonists against the British Empire.³⁸

The effects of the American and French Revolutions on Irish politics, and the complex diplomatic relationship between the United Irish revolutionaries and the French Republic, are among the most storied aspects of Irish history in this period.³⁹ Yet the role played by France in the crises and transformations of 'the British Empire in Europe' endured beyond these moments of direct military crisis and threat. Throughout the eighteenth century, commercial and military rivalry between Britain and the French monarchy spurred British and Irish interest in the reform of Irish government. In the era of the French Revolution, this older form of power-political competition was overlaid with a new set of ideological fault lines. Britain assumed the leading role in organising coalitions of counter-revolutionary European states, and became engaged in a profound

³⁸ Jean-Louis de Lolme, *The British Empire in Europe, Part the First* (Dublin: P. Byrne, 1787), 24–5, 125–6.

³⁹ Marianne Elliott, *Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France* (New Haven, CA: Yale University Press, 1982); Martyn Powell, *Britain and Ireland in the Eighteenth-Century Crisis of Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Ultán Gillen, 'Monarchy, Republic and Empire: Irish Public Opinion and France, c.1787–1804', DPhil Thesis, Faculty of History, Oxford University, Oxford (2005).