

The Irish Act of Union, 1800

Bicentennial Essays

Editors

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Contents

<i>Abbreviations</i>	vii
<i>Introduction</i>	ix
1. The Historiography of the Act of Union <i>James Kelly</i>	5
2. <i>The Injured Lady</i> and Her British Problem <i>Michael Brown</i>	37
3. 'An Union for Empire': The Anglo-Irish Union as an Imperial Project <i>Thomas Bartlett</i>	50
4. Political Anglicanism in Ireland 1691–1801: From the Language of Liberty to the Language of Union <i>Joseph Richardson</i>	58
5. Ulster Presbyterians and the Passing of the Act of Union <i>Ian McBride</i>	68
6. 'Like a Phoenix from its Ashes': United Irish Propaganda and the Act of Union <i>Manuela Ceretta</i>	84
7. Dublin Castle and the Act of Union <i>James Quinn</i>	95
8. The Failure of Opposition <i>James Kelly</i>	108
9. The Irish House of Commons, 1799–1800 <i>Patrick M. Geoghegan</i>	129
10. Dublin after the Union: The Age of the Ultra Protestants, 1801–22 <i>Jacqueline Hill</i>	144
11. Completing the Union? The Irish Novel and the Moment of Union <i>Claire Connolly</i>	157

Appendices

1. Members of the Irish House of Commons, 22 January 1799 177
2. Members of the Irish House of Commons, 1800 184
3. Irish MPs in the House of Commons of the United Kingdom, 1801 192

Notes 195

Notes on Contributors 233

Index 235

'Like a Phoenix from its Ashes' United Irish Propaganda and the Act of Union

MANUELA CERETTA

‘There is already a living argument in the face of every United Irishman in Ireland. The gloom of the past discomfiture has been exchanged for the smile of anticipated success. You know they are ready to run riot with joy.’¹ With these words Thomas Goold, a friend of Edmund Burke and a former Irish MP who wrote against the Union, commented on the United Irishmen’s involvement in the propaganda war that preceded the Act of Union. Goold’s testimony was just one of many indications that United Irish propaganda against the Union gave rise to considerable anxiety in official circles. The Dublin Castle under-secretary, Edward Cooke, felt it necessary to attack the views of the Catholic United Irishman William James MacNeven in his pro-union pamphlet.² Moreover, on 19 December 1798, the MP and leading Orangeman, John Claudius Beresford, wrote to the chief secretary, Lord Castlereagh, that the Union has given to ‘the almost annihilated body of United Irishmen new spirits, and the society is again rising like a phoenix from its ashes’.³ In particular, Beresford considered the anti-union pamphlet written by Denis Taaffe,⁴ a Catholic priest who claimed to have fought in Wexford in 1798 and was clearly sympathetic to the ideals of the United Irishmen, a ‘pretty specimen’ of the troubles the movement was making.⁵

The reaction to the Act of Union was described by James Bentley Gordon, Anglican clergyman and author of the *History of the Rebellion: Ireland in 1798* (1801), in terms similar to those used by Theobald Wolfe Tone to delineate the impact of the French Revolution in Ireland. Just as Tone noted that the ‘French disease’ had divided the nation ‘into two great parties’,⁶ Gordon wrote: ‘the nation became divided anew into two parties: the unionists and the anti-unionists, in each of which were indiscriminately ranged royalists, croppies, Orangemen and Catholics’.⁷ Like the debate on the French Revolution, the question of the legislative Union between Britain and Ireland was both extensively debated and deeply polarising, even at times among those of the same party, sect or movement.

However, the extent of the debate on Union, amounting to about 300 pamphlets, only partially explains why the United Irishmen were so deeply involved in it, despite their recent failed attempt at revolution.⁸ Given that the Union was the most momentous constitutional change in Ireland since the Glorious Revolution, it encompassed questions of fundamental importance for the United Irish movement, such as political independence, Catholic emancipation and the problem of the relationship between the autonomy of the Irish parliament and the liberty of the Irish citizens.

I

Even before the foundation of the Society of the United Irishmen the idea of union had been treated as a matter of considerable importance by persons who later became members of the movement. The radical Presbyterian polemicist William Drennan, in a letter dated 1785, claimed that the only true options Ireland had were, in reality, 'a commercial treaty', 'union' or 'disunion', and added: 'I hope in God that a short time will show the expediency, necessity and sublimity of the last choice, without which Ireland will never become a great or a happy people'.⁹ In November 1790, Wolfe Tone and the small committee of the College Historical Society set up in Trinity proposed to discuss whether 'a union with England would be of advantage to this country'.¹⁰

Aside from these early allusions, there are numerous references to a union in the writings of the United Irishmen, both as individuals and as members of the society, long before the intense debates of 1798–1800. In *Idem sentire, dicere, agere*, the anonymous prospectus containing the first idea of founding the United Irishmen, written by Drennan in June 1791, we see among the issues to be confronted by Drennan's 'brotherhood of affection', the question of whether there is 'any middle state between the extremes of union with Britain and total separation, in which the rights of the people can be fully established and rest in security'.¹¹

In September 1792, Captain Edward Sweetman, who formally became a United Irishman two months later, linked with typical United Irish rhetoric the Catholic question, the liberty of the people of Ireland and the prospect of union. Speaking on behalf of the electors of the Catholic convention, he put the attainment of civil and political rights for the Catholics and the creation of a nation made of citizens as the only alternative to a country inhabited by slaves and at the mercy of England. He warned Protestants:

if you refuse that mercy, and withhold this justice, you should prepare for a union: Things cannot remain in their present situation; you must either give freedom to the Catholic or abdicate it for yourselves . . . A union will

be advantageous to the Catholic . . . The Catholic would not be raised to the Protestant, but the Protestant would be levelled down the Catholic, and sunk into a slavish acquiescence in the will of a country accustomed to despise him.¹²

A month later, the Dublin Society of the United Irishmen, in a letter addressed *To the Friends of the People, at London*, dated 26 October 1792, made clear that the object of the movement was 'a real representation of the Irish nation' in parliament, but the letter specified that the parliament in question was 'an Irish parliament' and in order to eliminate any doubt the Society wrote: 'As to any union between the islands, believe us when we assert that our union rests upon our mutual independence. We shall love each other, if we be left to ourselves'.¹³

Repeatedly in 1792, in 1793, and even more after Fitzwilliam's dismissal in 1795, the United Irishmen showed clearly their awareness that Pitt and the British government had not abandoned the project of union, heralded by the introduction of the commercial propositions in the mid-1780s.¹⁴ The measure with which the 'country will be lost indeed'¹⁵ was prophesied in March 1793 by Drennan, who in March 1795 let his brother-in-law know that 'the report of this day is that Catholic emancipation is to be the price of an union'.¹⁶ On 4 May 1795, during the discussion of the Catholic bill introduced by Grattan, the future United Irishman Arthur O'Connor addressed the House of Commons with the following words: 'you who shall vote on this night for the rejection of this bill will appear in the eyes of the Irish nation, not only as a man voting in obedience to the British ministers, against the voice of the people, but as a man voting for an UNION WITH ENGLAND.'¹⁷ In 1796, the United Irish propagandist William Sampson asked in his *Advice to the rich*: 'Do you think you are not driving on to a UNION with England, and that upon a footing which will make you poor indeed?'¹⁸

The United Irishmen were not only aware of the prospect of the Union, but were also quite apprehensive about the means which a British government would use to obtain it. Aware that in time of war security considerations could be used to justify almost anything, they suspected that the British government was deliberately attempting to provoke a crisis in Ireland to prepare the way for a union. In fact the possibility of revolution in Ireland seems to have convinced Edmund Burke, formerly an opponent of union, that even this 'bold experimental remedy' might be 'justified, perhaps called for, in some nearly desperate crisis of the whole empire.'¹⁹ Drennan, for example, was adamant that union would sooner or later be presented as a necessary measure to prevent republican revolution. In September 1796, he claimed that the fear of an invasion 'will be an excellent pretext for putting the country into a sort of barracks and garrisoning it with Englishmen,

preparatory, perhaps, to a forced union'.²⁰ Drennan believed that this crisis would be the pretext with which Pitt would attempt to carry the Union, and he evaluated in this light the repressive measures against the United Irishmen begun in 1793. Sampson considered the dismissal of Fitzwilliam and 'the subsequent treatment and provocation' as evidence of the government's intentions and later recalled that with the *Advice to the rich* he 'endeavoured to show, that the government were stimulating the nation to rebellion for that end [Union]'.²¹

In the opinion of the United Irishmen, repression, revolution and union were the steps that the government was trying to make to obtain, in Drennan's words, a 'forced marriage' and would have the effect 'of turning fornication into adultery'.²² His views were echoed by Arthur O'Connor, who described the Union as a measure that would 'everlastingly reduce' the country 'to the state of an abject province'. Sampson summed it up as a 'COLONIAL UNION' useful to cement 'a despotism . . . by means of a strange soldiery and standing army';²³ while MacNeven claimed that under the Union the Irish would have been governed 'as a conquered people, deprived of the power to change the system of legislation according to the times and needs'.²⁴

II

Despite this early awareness of the project of union, it was only in the final years of the century that members of the United Irish movement began systematically to debate the Union, in pamphlets and anonymous handbills that can be attributed to them with a certain degree of confidence. Apart from the exception of Samuel Neilson, who wrote from the prison of Fort George in Scotland in June 1799, that

I see a union is determined on between Great Britain and Ireland. I am glad of it. In a commercial point of view, it cannot be injurious; and I can see no injury the country will sustain from it politically . . . If I had possessed the means, I would have published my sentiments on this subject in a short nervous pamphlet; so deeply I am impressed by its national utility.²⁵

the United Irishmen declared themselves against the Union, sometimes repeating or clarifying ideas already expressed, sometimes expounding new arguments. What stimulated and broadened their reflections, without changing their fundamental features, were the main arguments used in favour of the Union, in particular, the claims made by Pitt, called the 'British Machiavel'²⁶ by Taaffe, and the thesis advanced by Edward Cooke in his pro-union pamphlet, which in MacNeven's opinion showed 'ignorance and insolence at every line'.²⁷

From an examination of the arguments employed in the pro-union pamphlets, it is easy to recognise some very old topics, but there are also new ones that appear to have been written purposely to cope with United Irish propaganda of the 1790s. Among the old arguments used by Pitt, in his speech of 31 January 1799, was that of presenting the Union as an easy task to accomplish: 'England speaks the same language and her laws, customs and tradition are the same as Ireland, but carried to a greater degree of perfection'.²⁸ Not only did Pitt display an air of superiority that the United Irishmen cannot have appreciated, but he used exactly the same words in favour of the Union that almost one century before were adopted by the republican thinker Henry Maxwell. In 1703, in fact, Maxwell declared that the 'happy wedding'²⁹ of the two parliaments would have been easy to create, because the language, the tradition and the laws of the two countries were identical.³⁰ As Maxwell had done at the beginning of the century, Pitt chose to ignore the fact the language and the traditions of the two countries were not identical. He did not take into public consideration the plurality of which the people of Ireland was made, echoing the Orangeman who wrote in 1799 of 'the Protestant as the nation'.³¹

In briefly mentioning another old Protestant commonplace – the role of 'divine providence' in saving the country – Pitt turned to something that for centuries had been considered a pro-union argument: the desirability of having a Catholic minority in the realm.³² This was a thesis that he had defended more forcefully some years previously in a letter where he described the Union as a guarantee for the 'Protestant interest' because it would create a Protestant majority in parliament and a Catholic minority in the empire.³³ A similar sectarian arithmetic was also used by Edward Cooke in his famous pamphlet in 1798, when he noted that the proportion of Catholics to Protestants under the Union would change to 3 to 14,³⁴ and by the loyalist propagandist Sir Richard Musgrave, who noted that 'In a menacing tone, the papists have told us for some years "we are 3 to 1". With the Union, we may retort "we are 11 to 3"'.³⁵

In engaging with the United Irishmen, who made their appeal to the nation, Pitt's rhetorical strategy was to appeal to the empire. On behalf of the empire, Pitt wrote that 'a mistaken sense of national pride is so likely to operate in judging the Union.'³⁶ Instead of persisting in seeking an independence that Ireland would be unable to maintain it had to be acknowledged that union 'tends to the general prosperity of the empire', 'will benefit every member of the empire', is 'calculated to produce mutual advantages to the two kingdoms', and will give to Ireland 'its due weight and importance as a great member of the empire'.³⁷

Cooke used the same argument, affirming that in evaluating the measure people should not reason in 'terms of national dignity and national pride'.³⁸

The word 'nation', that in Thomas Goold's opinion had an almost 'magic force' in the hands of the United Irishmen, had become a dynamic political weapon.³⁹ In the past, the word nation had been an instrument for broadening or underlining already existing divisions in Irish society. First, it was used in its political meaning and attributed only to Protestants, and second it was used in its plural form to describe the anomalous situation of Ireland. The United Irishmen gave a new meaning to an old word, convinced as they were that the word nation could be declined only in its singular form. Founding the concept of nation on individual rights and public interest they took possession of it and of other related political ideals such as popular sovereignty, liberty and political participation. From Pitt's point of view, America and France had already proved that the ideal of the nation was a dangerous weapon, and for this reason it had to be destroyed by recourse to the concept of the empire.

However, the logic of the empire brought with it a cultural dimension, as illustrated by Pitt's quotation given above which spoke of England's laws, customs and traditions being 'carried to a greater degree of perfection' in their country of origin.⁴⁰ To be part of the empire meant to be blessed by British civilisation and, through proper conduct, this was a blessing to which the Irish could aspire. Pitt, for example, noted that Irishmen 'deserved' the name of 'Britons' for the part they played in the suppression of the 1798 Rebellion.⁴¹ Edward Cooke went a step further, arguing that the time had come for the Irishmen to acknowledge reality and to proclaim 'our defects in civilisation and policy'.⁴² With an imaginative metaphor, Cooke supported his idea of the Union as a civilising mission saying:

if any person has a son uneducated, unimproved and injured by bad habits and bad company, in order to remedy these imperfections, would it not be his first endeavours to establish him in the best societies and introduce him into the most virtuous, the most polished and the most learned company? . . . What can any sanguine Irish patriot wish for his country, but that its inhabitants should attain the same habits, manners and improvement which made England the envy of Europe?⁴³

Like Pitt, Cooke referred to a key topic of traditional Protestant rhetoric, that the Catholics offered allegiance to a foreign king, but, unlike Pitt, he supported this claim with an appeal to the powerful lesson of history.⁴⁴ The cultural and political inferiority of Ireland was, he claimed, the product of its 'disgraced' history, made of conflicts, massacres and divisions within Irish society that nobody, not even those bathed in Enlightenment optimism such as the United Irishmen, could deny. To these arguments, dominated by the logic of the empire, by the necessity of a Catholic minority, by the exigency

of protecting the Protestant interest and the need to preserve 'the Protestant religion and establishment as a fundamental article', the United Irishmen responded vigorously, claiming to uncover a false or perverse thesis advocated by the supporters of union.⁴⁵

III

First, the United Irishmen argued that the empire was simply a mask under which England concealed her interests and claimed that union with Britain would have 'annihilated Ireland for the good of the empire'.⁴⁶ Several years previously, in *Idem sentire, dicere, agere*, Drennan had excluded from the right of membership of the brotherhood of affection 'those that are bound down by obedience to that wizard word *empire*, to the sovereignty of two sounding syllables'.⁴⁷ At the beginning of the 1790s, Tone wrote: '*the good of the empire!* Let us substitute "England" for "the empire" and see if it be not nearer the fact and truth'.⁴⁸ In MacNeven's opinion, 'the disastrous but instructive consequences of the subjection to a foreign power' should clarify to the Irishmen 'the measure of their duties toward Great Britain'.⁴⁹

In the place of empire the United Irishmen looked to a world composed of nations. For the United Irishmen, a nation had a political dimension; it was the product of a shared civil and political condition and was capable therefore of encompassing all Irishmen whatever their religion, culture and language. Applying the categories of political contractualism not only inside political society but also outside, they claimed that the so-called empire was just an 'English necessity' that should be replaced by sovereign nations and by a 'law of the nations'⁵⁰ to protect the weakest ones. Such contractualist theories served to deny any claims against Irish independence grounded on precedent. Dispensing with this precedent, the United Irishmen argued that 'every connection between free and independent nations should be of its own nature a voluntary act; and . . . connections that are not voluntary, are chains';⁵¹ they added that 'the connection between nation and nation is cemented and strengthened by its being placed on the basis of justice and reciprocal benefit. It is a bond founded on interest; and when that is violated, all bond of connection is broken.'⁵²

Second, there were also those who dispensed both with the logic of empire and of nation and treated the Union in terms of sectional interest. As the Catholic archbishop of Dublin, John Troy, reported after a meeting of influential Catholics on 24 December 1798, 'the general opinion . . . was that the Catholics as such ought not to deliberate on the Union as a question of empire but only as it might affect their peculiar interest as a body'.⁵³ The dangers of such a sectional approach were highlighted by William James MacNeven who

warned Catholics 'not to exchange the liberty of Ireland for the Catholic liberty'.⁵⁴

As the United Irishmen did not consider Catholic emancipation as a 'Catholic grievance but the grievance of the nation',⁵⁵ so they regarded liberty not as a Protestant, Catholic or Presbyterian concern but as a national concern. The problem for them was to create, obtain and maintain a 'national freedom'⁵⁶ in debates with those who defended the idea that liberty had religious distinctions. This commonly-held view was made clear by the earl of Clare, the lord chancellor, who in a speech on the Union to the House of Commons claimed that every attempt to weaken the connection between the two countries was a threat to 'Protestant liberty'. Clare warned Protestant MPs that:

the only security for your liberty is your connection with Great Britain, and gentlemen who risk breaking the connection must make up their minds to a union. God forbid I should ever see that day; but if ever the day on which separation shall be attempted may come, I shall not hesitate to embrace a union rather than a separation.⁵⁷

Third, the United Irishmen, in attacking the very idea of British civilisation, broadened the range of their propaganda to encompass cultural factors. In the pamphlets written in response to Cooke and the Union there are some of the few charges levelled by the movement against the destruction of the Irish language, the abuse of the cultural differences and Anglocentrism. Commenting on the effects of colonisation on Irish culture, Denis Taaffe had the Anglo-Irish John Paddy ask England:

Have we not faithfully and assiduously co-operated with you in devising such laws as might reduce them to a state of poverty, barbarity and ignorance . . . ? Could you contrive more effectually to accomplish this, than by the suppression of printing and instruction in the national language? Well knowing that before a whole people can master a strange idiom, and renounce their vernacular tongue, many generations must pass away.⁵⁸

This manoeuvre was again presented as operating under the guise of a civilising mission. Taaffe accused England and her ally, the Protestant ascendancy, of undermining the cultural identity of Ireland, but he also reflected on their abuse of religious and cultural differences. He made clear that the supposed superiority of the Protestant religion and of the English language was a matter of convenience: 'black men, and white men, and red men will answer the purposes of the old tyrannical policy, *divide et impera*, as well as religion'.⁵⁹ For the same reason Taaffe, ignoring or pretending to ignore the part played by Protestantism in forging British identity, asked: 'what then has entitled Protestants to the disgraced partiality of British policy, and qualified them to be the undoers of the land of their birth?'. His

answer was: 'the single circumstance of being the minority'.⁶⁰ Equally, Drennan, in his *Letter on the Union* addressed to Pitt, criticised the Anglo-centrism of Irish society, though without proposing to substitute it with a Hiberno-centrism. He invited his country men 'instead of looking at the world through Britain, to look at Britain through the world'.⁶¹

In arguing against the shrewd appeal to the past made by Cooke and against the politics of fear that had served governments so well throughout the eighteenth century, the United Irishmen drew attention to the *divide et impera* strategy. They noted that – not surprisingly – this strategy was at work in the propaganda in favour of the Union, where it was inconsistently presented as a benefit for every sect of the society and as a benefit incompatible with the well-being of the other sects.⁶² But apart from that, they made clear that the massacres evoked by Cooke were not the product of an 'unnatural union' among incompatible persons but were the fruit of the *divide et impera* strategy. Carrying on a theme previously addressed in the early 1790s, they did not try to forget the past but attempted to interpret it differently, putting forward new explanations to those facts that they could not deny. They asserted that 'nations as persons are the product of education'.⁶³ This enlightened opinion could have paved the way to a different future but it also could have formed a solid barrier to make it different from the past. The United Irishmen were convinced that even if hate was a 'stranger to the country it had infected', as MacNeven wrote, it could be instilled.⁶⁴

If in the past, religion was called down 'from heaven to sow discord on earth',⁶⁵ in the present, it was the alliance between the ascendancy and Orangemen that continued to have the same perverse effect. Convinced of the existence of collusion between government and Orangemen, the United Irishmen were acutely aware of the disastrous consequences it could have on Irish society;⁶⁶ but they were not prepared to accept union as a remedy for neutralizing both the ascendancy and Orangeism, notwithstanding the authoritative opinion of an impartial observer of the Irish situation, William Ogilvie. The Scottish thinker was in fact convinced that the very existence of the Orangeism was a reason in favour of the Union. To counter the claims of Orangemen (whom he termed 'state criminals') who opposed the Union because they were convinced they had 'an *exclusive right* to public professions and salaries', Ogilvie maintained that a fusion of the British and Irish parliaments was the best way to destroy the privileges claimed by the Orangemen, arguing that only under a legislative union would it be possible to concede emancipation to Catholics without putting the ascendancy in danger.⁶⁷

For their part, instead of the Union of the Irish and British parliaments, the United Irishmen put forward the concept of union among Irishmen and exhorted their countrymen: 'hope not from any union but *your own*' and

'embrace as a friend, and a brother, every man of any sect or party (whatever his past errors) who shall take arms in his country's cause, and make *her* [Ireland's] *interest his religion*'.⁶⁸

In United Irish opinion, hate could be injected through historiography and social practice. Historiography never let Irishmen forget the memories of the past and it never seriously tried, in the opinion of the United Irishmen, to establish the true motivations of the conflicts that had 'disgraced' Irish history.⁶⁹ Social practice also played its part in broadening the divisions of Irish society. Drennan wrote in 1795:

our eyes and ears by custom grow callous to what our heads and hearts condemn. The remembrance of civil war is still perpetuated from year to year, by the puerility of a flower or a ribbon; and we see hatred, and unforgiveness, commemorated and sanctioned, with the parade of a procession, or what in this case, may be called the savage sociality of a public dinner.⁷⁰

In a similar vein, the United Irishman Thomas Russell observed that 'there was no national spirit in Ireland – on the contrary the anniversary of those events which led to degradation of were celebrated, strange as it may appear, by Irishmen with martial pomp and festivity'.⁷¹

Despite the evidence that the people were not inclined to forget or reassess the past – as shown by the Armagh outrages and the growing number of increasingly triumphalist Orange parades from 1796 onwards – the United Irishmen were not prepared to accept union even as a remedy for the divisions of the society. Such an opinion had been put forward in 1776 by the impartial voice of Adam Smith who wrote in the *Wealth of Nations*, that 'without a union with Great Britain, the inhabitants of Ireland are not likely for many ages to consider themselves as one people'.⁷² In contrast, the United Irishmen argued that the only way to destroy those 'brazen walls of separation' that prevented the 'separate nations' of Ireland from 'mingling' and kept them 'convened' as an 'incoherent mass of dissimilar materials, uncemented, unconsolidated like the image of Nebuchadnezar'⁷³ was the union of the people of Ireland under the common name of Irishmen, as the words written by an anonymous United Irish propagandist show:

Now my countrymen, let me exhort you to persevere in forwarding that UNION on which depends your eternal welfare, and which all the powers of hell with which your enemies are invested, shall never be able to dissolve. On your UNION depends your victory over tyranny and oppression; – In your UNION lies all strength, importance and foundation of your future happiness. Then let the UNION be always uppermost in your thought; let all animosity between parties or individual cease; forgive trifling injuries, and heart and hand become ONE PEOPLE.⁷⁴

IV

The content and the exhorting tone of the writings of the United Irishmen are quite indicative: *a* people had still to become a reality and they still needed to be convinced to make the effort to constitute themselves as a nation. The events of the second half of the 1790s did not cause the United Irishmen to change their mind, but they did dampen their optimism and deeply damaged their faith in their countrymen. Despite the 'loaves and fishes'⁷⁵ distribution and the political manoeuvres employed by the government to secure support, the movement was convinced that the Irish people must accept a large part of the responsibility for the passage of the Act of Union. As Drennan wrote, in his last public letter on the Union, a letter that he considered his 'political will and testament',⁷⁶ it was not the 'British Machiavel', nor the perverse principles of the ascendancy nor the Orangemen who were solely responsible for the Union. The Irish people themselves with their old prejudices and fears were to blame for it, because they were 'not yet been able to become members of the same body, having the same friends and the same foes.'⁷⁷

These words reflected the disillusionment of the leadership of the United Irishmen who looked on in despair as the Union was opposed only by small, self-interested groups, and the majority of Irish people meekly acquiesced in its passing. Such an outcome underlined the failure of United Irish propaganda against the Union and, more generally, the failure of the United Irish nation-building project as a whole.⁷⁸

CHAPTER SIX

- 1 Thomas Goold, *An address to the people of Ireland on the subject of the projected Union* (Dublin, 1799), p. 74.
- 2 [Edward Cooke], *Arguments for and against an union between Great Britain and Ireland, considered* (Dublin, 1798), p. 57. For the attribution to Cooke see DNB, iv, pp. 1004–5; W.J. McCormack, *The pamphlet debate on the Union between Great Britain and Ireland, 1797–1800* (Dublin, 1996), p. 9.
- 3 J.C. Beresford to Lord Castlereagh, 19 December 1798, in *Castlereagh corr.*, ii, p. 51.
- 4 Denis Taaffe, *The probability, causes, and consequences of an union between Great Britain and Ireland, discussed: with strictures on an anonymous pamphlet, in favour of the measure, supposed to be written by a gentleman high in office* (Dublin, 1798). On Taaffe's involvement in the United Irish movement, see DNB, xix, p. 284.
- 5 J.C. Beresford to Lord Castlereagh, 19 December 1798, in *Castlereagh corr.*, ii, p. 51.
- 6 Tom Bartlett (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone by his son* (Dublin, 1998), p. 39.
- 7 Quoted in *Castlereagh corr.*, i, p. 155.
- 8 See W.J. McCormack, *The pamphlet debate on the Union between Great Britain and Ireland, 1797–1800* (Dublin, 1996); see also R.B. McDowell, *Irish public opinion, 1750–1800* (London, 1944), pp. 243–60.
- 9 William Drennan to William Bruce, ? August 1785 (PRONI, D/553/45).
- 10 Marianne Elliott, *Wolfe Tone: prophet of Irish independence* (London, 1989), p. 64. See also the well known letter on separation of Tone to Thomas Russell of 9 July 1791 in T.W. Moody, R.B. McDowell, and C.J. Woods (eds), *The writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone, 1763–98* (Oxford, 1998), i, pp. 104–6.
- 11 *Idem sentire, dicere, agere*, NAI, Rebellion Papers, 620/19/24, folio 3. For the attribution to Drennan see William Drennan to Samuel McTier, November 1791 in D.A. Chart (ed.), *The Drennan letters* (Belfast, 1931), pp. 64–5; Alexander Knox, *Essays on the political circumstances of Ireland, written during the administration of Earl Camden with an appendix containing thoughts on the will of the people* (Dublin, 1799), p. 138; A.T.Q. Stewart, '“A stable unseen power”: Dr William Drennan and the origins of the United Irishmen' in John Bossy and P.J. Jupp (eds), *Essays presented to Michael Roberts* (Belfast, 1976), pp. 80–92.
- 12 *The speech of Edward Sweetman captain of a late independent company, at a meeting of the freeholders of the country of Wexford convened by the sheriff on September 22* (Dublin, 1792), p. 8. For the affiliation of Sweetman see R.B. McDowell, 'The personnel of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen', *Irish Historical Studies*, 2 (1940) p. 49. The argument used by Sweetman had been advanced already in Edmund Burke's 'Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe' published in February 1792 see R.B. McDowell (ed.), *The writings and speeches of Edmund Burke* (Oxford, 1991), ix, pp. 631–2.
- 13 *United Irishmen of Dublin to the friends of the people, at London, 26 October 1792*, in Society of United Irishmen of Dublin, 'Let the nation stand' (Dublin, 1794), p. 29. The text was written by Drennan, see William Drennan to Samuel McTier, 30 October 1792, in *The Drennan letters*, p. 93.
- 14 See James Kelly, 'The origins of the Act of Union: an examination of unionist opinion, 1650–1800', *Irish Historical Studies*, 25 (1987) pp. 236–3.

- 15 William Drennan to Samuel McTier, 26 March 1793, in *The Drennan letters*, p. 145.
- 16 William Drennan to Samuel McTier, 16 March 1795, in *The Drennan letters*, p. 226.
- 17 *Speech of Arthur O'Connor, Esq in the House of Commons of Ireland, Monday, May 4, 1795, on the Catholic bill* (Dublin, 1795), p. 31.
- 18 [William Sampson], *An advice to the rich by an independent country gentleman, pointing out the road to security and peace* (Dublin, 1796), p. 15. Sampson himself claimed to be the author of this work in his *Memoirs of William Sampson* (New York, 1807), p. 344.
- 19 Edmund Burke to S. Span, 23 April 1778, in T.W. Copeland (ed.), *The correspondence of Edmund Burke* (10 vols., Cambridge, 1958–1978), iii, p. 432; Edmund Burke to Lord Edward Fitzwilliam, ca. 26 September 1794, in *The correspondence of Edmund Burke*, viii, p. 20; see also J. Conniff, 'Edmund Burke's reflections on the coming revolution in Ireland', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 47 (1986), pp. 37–59.
- 20 William Drennan to Mrs McTier, 9 September 1796, in *The Drennan letters*, p. 239.
- 21 *An advice to the rich*, p. 15; *Memoirs of William Sampson*, p. 344.
- 22 William Drennan to Martha McTier, 15 October 1798, in *The Drennan letters*, p. 279.
- 23 *An advice to the rich*, p. 20.
- 24 [W.J. MacNeven], *An argument for independence, in opposition to an union addressed to all his countrymen by an Irish Catholic* (Dublin, 1799), p. 14.
- 25 Samuel Neilson to Miss Bryson, 21 July 1799, Fort George, Scotland, quoted in R.R. Madden, *The United Irishmen*, 4th series, 2nd edition (London, 1860), pp. 105–6.
- 26 *The second part of Taaffe's reflections on the Union* (Dublin, 1799), p. 15.
- 27 *Pitt's union* (Dublin, 1799), p. 10. For the attribution to MacNeven, see W.J. McCormack, *The pamphlet debate*, p. 68.
- 28 *Speech of the Rt Hon William Pitt, in the House of Commons, Thursday 31 January 1799* (London, 1799), pp. 64–6.
- 29 Henry Maxwell, *Essay towards an union of Ireland with England* (London, 1703), pp. 17–18.
- 30 As has been shown by Jim Smyth, Thomas Bartlett and David Hayton among others, the pro-union option was part of the difficult process of adopting an Irish identity by those Anglo-Irish that 'like amphibious animals' were considered English in Ireland and Irish in England: Jim Smyth, "'Like amphibious animals': Irish Protestants, ancient Britons, 1691–1707", *Historical Journal*, 36 (1994) pp. 785–97; idem, 'Anglo-Irish unionist discourse, c. 1656-1707: from Harrington to Fletcher', *Bullán*, 2 (1995), pp. 17–34; David Hayton, 'Anglo-Irish attitudes: changing perceptions of national identity among the Protestant ascendancy in Ireland, c.1690–1750', *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, 15 (1988), pp. 5–31; Thomas Bartlett, "'A People made rather for copies than originals": the Anglo-Irish, 1760–1800', *The International History Review*, 12 (1990), pp. 11–25.
- 31 *Union or not? By an Orangeman in Tracts on the subject of an union between Great Britain and Ireland* (11 vols., Dublin, 1799), ii, p. 29.
- 32 *Speech of the Rt Hon William Pitt, in the House of Commons, Thursday 31 January*, p. 12. On the link of providence and deliverance in Irish Protestant mentality, see Ian McBride, *The siege of Derry in Ulster Protestant mythology* (Dublin, 1997), pp. 12–13, 32.

- 33 *Speech of the Rt Hon William Pitt, in the House of Commons, Thursday 31 January*, pp. 33–64; William Pitt to Lord Westmorland, 18 November 1792, quoted in Gerard O'Brien, *Anglo-Irish politics in the age of Grattan and Pitt* (Dublin, 1987), p. 163.
- 34 *Arguments for and against an union between Great Britain and Ireland, considered*, pp. 27, 30.
- 35 Richard Musgrave to T. Percy, 15 January 1799 (NLI, Ms 4157). On this point see also William Petty, 'Of reconciling the English and Irish and reforming both nations' (1686); E. Fitzmaurice, *The life of William Petty* (London, 1895), p. 144.
- 36 *Speech of the Rt Hon William Pitt, in the House of Commons, Thursday 31 January*, p. 6.
- 37 *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 4, 11.
- 38 *Arguments for and against an union between Great Britain and Ireland, considered*, p. 7.
- 39 Thomas Goold, *Vindication of the Rt Hon Edmund Burke's Reflections on the coming revolution in France. In answer to all his opponents* (Dublin, 1791), p. 37.
- 40 *Speech of the Rt Hon William Pitt, in the House of Commons, Thursday 31 January 1799*, pp. 64–6.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- 42 *Arguments for and against an union between Great Britain and Ireland, considered*, p. 11.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 59.
- 46 William Drennan, *A letter to the Rt Hon William Pitt* (Dublin, 1799), p. 34. See also William Drennan to Mrs McTier, 10 October 1796, in *The Drennan letters*, p. 243.
- 47 *Idem sentire, dicere, agere*, NAI, Rebellion Papers, 620/19/24, folio 3.
- 48 Theobald Wolfe Tone, *Spanish war! An enquiry how far Ireland is bound, of right, to embark in the impending contest on the side of Great Britain. Addressed to the members of both houses of parliament* (Dublin, 1790).
- 49 W.J. MacNeven (ed.), 'Introduction' in *Pieces of Irish history, illustrative of the conditions of the Catholics of Ireland: of the origins and progress of the political system of the United Irishmen; and their transaction with the Anglo-Irish government* (New York, 1807), p. xix.
- 50 William Drennan, *A letter to the Rt Hon William Pitt*, p. 46. Another United Irishmen, Thomas Ledlie Birch wrote wishing the institution of 'a congress, consisting of delegates from the different states of Europe, to act as arbitrators in settling the disputes between the several nations, and so put an end to the havok and desolation of war', see the letter from Saintfield, in *Northern Star*, 25 June 1795.
- 51 Arthur O'Connor, *Defence of the united people of Ireland*, London (Dublin, 1799), p. 12. The book contains the conclusions of Arthur O'Connor's *The state of Ireland, to which are added his addresses to the electors of County Antrim* (London, 1798).
- 52 Arthur O'Connor, *Defence of the united people of Ireland*, pp. 11–12.
- 53 Rev Dr Troy to Lord Castlereagh, 24 December 1798, in *Castlereagh corr.*, ii, p. 61. Further examples of this approach are in Catholic writings and in Orange propaganda: see Theobald M'Kenna, *A memoire on some questions respecting the projected Union of Great Britain and Ireland* (Dublin, 1799); *Union or not? By an Orangeman in Tracts on the subject of an union between Great Britain and Ireland*, ii, pp. 20–1; *A letter to Theobald M'Kenna, esq the Catholic advocate in reply to the calumnies against the Orange institution, by an Orangeman*, (Dublin, 1799).

- 54 [W.J. MacNeven], *An argument for independence, in opposition to an union addressed to all his countrymen by an Irish Catholic*, p. 32.
- 55 'The Society of the United Irishmen of Dublin to the Irish nation', 25 January 1793, in *Let the nation stand*, p. 59.
- 56 *United Irishmen of Dublin to the Friends of the People, at London, 26 October 1792*, p. 28.
- 57 Quoted in J.C. Beckett, *The making of modern Ireland* (London, 1966), p. 236.
- 58 Denis Taaffe, *The probability, causes, and consequences of an union*, pp. 20–1.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 38.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- 61 William Drennan, *A letter to the Rt Hon William Pitt*, p. 40.
- 62 See for instance: *The second part of Taaffe's reflections on the Union*, pp. 24–5.
- 63 [William Sampson], *An advice to the rich*, p. 37.
- 64 [W.J. MacNeven], *An argument for independence, in opposition to an union addressed to all his countrymen by an Irish Catholic*, p. 47.
- 65 'Address from the Society of United Irishmen in Dublin, to the delegates for promoting a reform in Scotland', 23 November 1792, in *Let the nation stand*, p. 38.
- 66 On United Irishmen on Orangeism see the *Northern Star*, 15 July 1796; B. Clifford (ed.), *The causes of the Rebellion in Ireland and other writings by Rev Thomas Ledlie United Irishmen* (Belfast, 1991), p. 99; Tone, *Life*, pp. 596–7; [William Sampson], *A view of the present state of Ireland with an account of the origin and progress of the disturbances in that country; and a narrative of facts addressed to the people of England, by an observer* (London, 1797), p. 6; O'Connor, *The state of Ireland*, p. 29; O'Connor, *Address to the electors of County Antrim*, 22 October 1796, in *The state of Ireland*, page not numbered corresponding to p. 111; Denis Taaffe, *Observations, occasioned by the alarm of an invasion, propagated by authority. Addressed to the people of Ireland by an Irish Volunteer* (Dublin, 1796), p. 14; Denis Taaffe, *The probability, causes, and consequences of an union between Great Britain and Ireland, discussed*, pp. 26–7 and p. 29; Thomas Russell, *A letter to the people of Ireland on the present situation of the country* (Belfast, 1796), p. 9. See also the following handbills: VINCENT, TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND, Dublin, 7 April 1798 (NAI, Rebellion Papers, 620/36/145); *Orangemen triumphant!!!* (*Ibid.*, 620/54/60); *Invocation to discord*, 26 April 1797 (*Ibid.*, 620/29/320); *The Orangeman's conversion, founded on a true story* (*Ibid.*, 620/54/69); *Countrymen, Orange and Green awake-arouse-unite* (NAI, Rebellion Papers, 620/51/3).
- 67 [William Ogilvie], *Protestant ascendancy and Catholic emancipation reconciled* (Dublin, 1800) in *Tracts on the subject of an union between Great Britain and Ireland*, ix, pp. 75–85.
- 68 TO THE PEOPLE (NAI, Rebellion Papers, 620/7/74/12).
- 69 W. Todd Jones, *A letter to the societies of the United Irishmen of the town of Belfast upon the subject of certain apprehensions which have arisen from proposed restoration of the Catholic rights* (Dublin, 1792), p. 37.
- 70 William Drennan, *A letter to his excellency Earl Fitzwilliam, lord lieutenant, &c of Ireland* (Dublin, 1795), pp. 11–12.
- 71 Thomas Russell, *A letter to the people of Ireland on the present situation of the country*, pp. 2–3.

- 72 Adam Smith, *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations* (3 vols., Oxford, 1993), iii, p. 461. This opinion was also restated in the twentieth century by a rather less impartial observer, William Monypenny, who claimed during the Home Rule debate that 'the only hope for unity for the Irish was the Union with Great Britain': W.F. Monypenny, *The two Irish nations: an essay on home rule* (London, 1913), pp. 67–8.
- 73 *Idem sentire, dicere, agere*, NAI, Rebellion Papers, 620/19/24, folio 1.
- 74 VINCENT, *TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND*, Dublin 7 April 1798, NAI, Rebellion Papers, 620/36/145.
- 75 See for the expression: Henry Dundas to Adam Smith, 30 October 1779, in Ernest Campbell Mossner and Ian Simpson Ross (eds), *The correspondence of Adam Smith* (Oxford, 1987), p. 240.
- 76 William Drennan to Mrs McTier, 11 January 1800, in *The Drennan letters*, p. 295.
- 77 William Drennan, *A protest from one of the people of Ireland against an union with Great Britain* (Dublin, 1800), p. 7. For similar arguments see [William Sampson], *A view of the present state of Ireland* (Dublin, 1797), p. 6; O'Connor, *The state of Ireland* (Dublin, 1798), p. 29; T.L. Birch, *The causes of the Rebellion in Ireland and other writings* (London, 1812), p. 29.
- 78 I would like to thank Dr James Quinn for his steady support and helpful criticism.

CHAPTER SEVEN

- 1 Cornwallis to Portland, 25 January 1799, *Cornwallis corr.*, iii, p. 51.
- 2 Beresford to Auckland, 6 February 1799, *Beresford corr.*, ii, p. 209.
- 3 Cornwallis to Portland, 28 June, 8, 24 July 1798, *Cornwallis corr.*, ii, pp. 357, 359–60, 372–4; *Cornwallis corr.*, iii, p. 62.
- 4 Earl of Carysfort to Grenville, 15 August 1798, Buckingham to Grenville, 15 September 1798, *HMC Dropmore Mss*, iv, pp. 280, 315.
- 5 Cornwallis to Portland, 28 June, 8 July 1798, *Cornwallis corr.*, ii, pp. 357, 360.
- 6 Cornwallis to Pitt, 20 July 1798, *Cornwallis corr.*, ii, p. 367.
- 7 Cornwallis to Portland, 16 September 1798, *Cornwallis corr.*, ii, pp. 406–7.
- 8 Cornwallis to Pitt, 25 September 1798, *Cornwallis corr.*, ii, p. 416; Cornwallis to Ross, 8 November 1798 *Cornwallis corr.*, ii, p. 431.
- 9 Bolton, *Union*, p. 71.
- 10 Cornwallis to Ross, 26 December 1798, *Cornwallis corr.*, iii, p. 24; Castlereagh to Portland, 5 January 1799, *Cornwallis corr.*, iii, pp. 30–3.
- 11 Cooke to Auckland, 26 January 1799, BL, Auckland Papers, Add Ms 34455.
- 12 Duigenan to Castlereagh, 20 December 1798, *Castlereagh corr.*, ii, p. 53; *Auckland papers*, iv, pp. 67, 70, 71, 80, 82–5 and Auckland to John Beresford, Beresford to Auckland, 31 January, 6 February 1799, *Beresford corr.*, ii, pp. 206, 208–11; for further criticisms of Cornwallis by Cooke see Cooke to Auckland, 30 October 1798, PRONI Sneyd Papers, T3229/2/40, and 2 November 1798, BL Add Ms 34455, ff 26–8.
- 13 Despite the success of the government's campaign of pacification there were still those who thought that union was being brought forward too quickly. See, for example, Lord de Clifford to Townshend, 23 July 1799, *Castlereagh corr.*, ii, pp. 356–8.