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A “Democrat” from the Start: Theobald Wolfe Tone, Emblematic Founder of Irish Republicanism, Anti-Monarchism, and the “Baneful Influence of England”

Un « démocrate » dès le début : Théobald Wolfe Tone, père fondateur du républicanisme irlandais, l’anti-monarchisme et le « fléau de l’influence anglaise »

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A "Democrat" from the Start: Theobald Wolfe Tone, Emblematic Founder of Irish Republicanism, Anti-Monarchism, and the "Baneful Influence of England"

Sylvie Kleinman♦

In May, 1916, fifteen men who had led a failed revolution in Dublin, the Easter Rising, were court-martialled and executed. Seven of them, forming an interim government until the election of a national one "representative of the whole people of Ireland," had been signatories to a "Proclamation of the Irish Republic," publically read out by Patrick Pearse: it validated the Rising and declared Ireland a "Sovereign Independent State" (CAIN Archive—Conflict and Politics in Northern Ireland: https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/pir24416.htm). Under war-time measures to defend the realm, the men were charged with fomenting an armed rebellion, and indicted for waging "war against His Majesty the King," with the "intention of assisting the enemy," i.e. Germany (UK National Archives, War Office: 71 354/8). But to what extent was this juridical personalisation of a conflict both armed and ideological, between Irish republicanism and English royalism, echoed in the political language of these Irish revolutionaries? Long the object of insular hagiography, the Rising has more recently been located within a transnational context of "challenges to monarchies" (Jones, 2016: 264). Yet the Proclamation merely points to the "usurpation" of the right of the Irish people to their nationhood, and the "control" of their own destiny, by a "foreign people and government" (CAIN Archive, ibid). Its noble rhetoric is not grounded in condemning monarchism, deemed an outdated institution by the revolutionaries. It exalts past attempts to uphold nationhood,

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namely the first and only significant attempt at a republican revolution of the modern age, the failed 1798 rebellion (Kleinman, 2017: 79). International war had then also given separatists an opportunity to strike, but Irish radical ideology had been transformed by the American and French Revolutions well before 1793. Irish nationalists, and increasingly militant separatists after 1898, drew inspiration from the most pantheonised of 1798's fallen heroes and martyrs for freedom, the radical agitator and separatist Theobald Wolfe Tone (Elliott, 2012: 1 & 397). After the failure of the campaign for comprehensive political reform he helped shape, he turned to revolutionary conspiracy, and negotiated a clandestine strategic alliance with France in 1796. There, his pen was free to assert what time would prove to be the first clear vision of a sovereign Irish republic (Tone in Moody *et al*., 2001: *inter alia*, 207, 301; Kleinman, 2016). Tone died a prisoner in a French uniform in his native Dublin in 1798, but unlike his associates among the United Irishmen, the principal ideologues behind the rebellion, he left behind a voluminous written legacy (Moody *et al.,* 1998-2007). It was avidly read and became a virtual site of memory for nationalists, especially from the late 19th century onwards. Rightly or wrongly, Tone is still considered today as the so-called founder of Irish republican nationalism, due to his heroic actions, but mostly to the potency and appeal of his published pamphlets, vivacious diary, and especially his compelling autobiography, which was written in France (Elliott, ibid) and historicised his actions and his journal writing (Kleinman, 2024: 46 & 48). Tone repeatedly asserted himself as "an irreconcilable enemy of England," a potent framework exploited by Irish separatists in the late 19th century but more aggressively throughout the 20th century (Tone, Moody *et al*., 2001: 179). Yet paradoxically, his republican rhetoric is not infused with anti-monarchism, a theme also noticeably absent in the secondary literature on the 1790s. This discussion will outline influential events during Tone's formative years, then overview how scholars have viewed Tone's Irish nationalist language, though often from a perspective burdened by 20th century militant republicanism. Small's scrutiny of his political language provides an especially incisive framework, yet overlooks his private writings, in the public domain after 1826 (Small, 2002). Tone's disloyal rhetoric and his separatist republican writings in France will be considered, and some general conclusions will be attempted after a brief look at broader Irish radical culture ca. 1798.

Tone's defining footprint is lexically present in the validation of the Rising by the insurgent commandant James Connolly to his court martial: "We went out to *break the connection* between this country and the British Empire and to establish an Irish Republic" (UK NA WO 71 354/8; Tone, in Moody *et al*., 2001: 301, our emphasis). Such words to describe the first, necessary step of separation may seem banal, but the choice was hardly random. One may have expected key phrases from the forcefully-worded and eloquent Proclamation. Connolly had in fact reprised pivotal words from "the most quoted passage of Irish history"

(Elliott, 2021: 395) in Tone's autobiography, though the link has never been made. Exiled in France, where he no longer feared prosecution for treason, Tone had reconstructed the progressive development of his political "theory" and summarised it eloquently as follows:

> To subvert the tyranny of our execrable government, *to break the connexion* with England, the never failing source of all our political evils, and to assert the independence of my country—these were my objects. (Tone in Moody *et al*., 2001: 301, our emphasis)

He then addressed the religious divisions imposed by the English crown and the Irish colonial elite since the 1690s, which had more broadly kept Ireland in submission and had thwarted her prosperity:

> To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissensions, and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter—these were my means.

In popular Irish consciousness, these iconic lines of Tone's "spoke out so categorically" for generations that they were never deconstructed (Bartlett, 1993: 1). Absent from these iconic lines is any promulgation of republicanism, or a concomitant condemnation of monarchism. Neither in fact had been the initial focus of his nationalism. Discussion of his legacy was grounded in romantic exaltation until the early 1920s, then hampered by Ireland's ongoing violent history (Taylor, 1999: 14). The domineering misappropriation of Tone's vision by republican paramilitary "men of violence" (Elliott, 1989: 1), then the ongoing conflict in Northern Ireland, formed a "burden of the present," which inhibited scholarly debate until the 1980s (Bartlett, ibid: 1-2). Tone's name was tainted, and his republicanism mostly severed from its historical context of the 1790s. Tone had written his autobiography in a precise context in the autumn of 1796: now a commissioned officer in the French army, he would soon join a military expedition to Ireland, which was intended to trigger a popular revolution. Behind the eloquence of the passage above, subverting the corrupt and unrepresentative colonial government in Dublin meant overthrowing it, to establish Ireland's sovereignty. The second part of the passage foregrounds the mission of the United Irishmen—to end religious distinctions and create a common civic identity. Tone recalled convincing associates that only "the united powers of the whole people" would lead to a republic, and even admitted that this form of government was not the "immediate object" of his speculations; uniting Irishmen was the necessary gateway to independence (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 2001: 304). More recently an emphasis has been placed on the political dimension of Tone's genuinely

revolutionary actions, namely his impact on the true "origins" of both "political thought and practice in Ireland" (Gillen, 2020: 1 & 9).

In a seminal propagandist speech delivered at Tone's grave in 1913, Pearse had proclaimed him "the first to formulate in worthy terms (…) the gospel of Irish Nationalism," and hand down "a precise and worthy concept of Irish 'nationality'" (Pearse, 1915: 3-4; Kleinman, 2016: 6). Elliott's authoritative biography states that it was through this "enunciation" by Pearse of Tone's "republican faith" that his 19th century romantic nationalist status was "transmitted to militant republicanism" in the next century (Elliott, 2012: 400). But Pearse's exalting oration makes no reference to republicanism. In a probing essay, Bartlett charted the evolution of Tone's political thought, which was anything but theoretical or systematic. It had echoes of earlier 18th-century classical republicanism, which was not incompatible with monarchism, quite vague as to its form of government, but imbued with the spirit that it should pursue the common good. With time, Tone's early "commonwealthman" rhetoric of resisting tyranny and ending corruption would, in the wake of the American and French revolutions, condemn hereditary monarchy and government in which the people did not have an essential share (Bartlett, 1993: 4-6). Historians of the 1790s now partially locate Tone's eventual separatist republicanism within the enthusiastic reception in Ireland of Thomas Paine's popularising thought, and had little choice but to demonstrate that Irish separatism and republicanism were not as inextricable as 20th-century militants had proclaimed. A more methodological approach was adopted by Small, who removes Tone from the weight of an exalting cult of great men to contextualise his range of arguments within the conceptual framework of political language. Pertinent to this discussion is Small's analysis of the progression of Irish reforming patriotism to radicalism and eventually the revolutionary republicanism of the mid 1790s, in which fleeting glimpses of Tone's anti-monarchism are discussed, when they emerge (Small, 2002: 178-84, 196-7 & 250-8).

Only recently have ground-breaking studies properly contextualised the dynamic transformative forces at play during Tone's adolescence (Higgins, 2010; Murtagh, 2022). His teen years began on 20 June, 1776, i.e. weeks before the American Declaration of Independence, and pre-existing calls for electoral reform had intensified as never before. Many demands echoed American-style advances in terms of, e.g., broadening electoral representation and democratising the franchise, as Ireland's commercial and political grievances were rooted in its own colonial status. If anti-Englishness remained a muted, minority view during these heady years, it seems to have shaped Tone's early political "apprenticeship to revolution," to borrow a metaphor from a seminal study of radicalised labourers (Murtagh, ibid). The war with America led to the raising of citizen militias or Volunteers to defend Ireland, but their meetings and parades spilled over into political extra-parliamentary agitation, achieving so-called legislative

independence in 1782, which Tone later decried as no independence at all. Yet many Volunteers corps had displayed Irish, and not English regal insignia. As Ireland became gripped with intense patriotic fervour, new ideologies and practices transformed Ireland into a "nation of politicians," which extended socially downwards (Higgins, 2010: 5; Murtagh 2022: 189). Tone, a native of Dublin, then the second city of the British Isles, would have been immersed in its density of increasingly popular politicisation, now extending to the labouring classes (Murtagh, 2016: 5). Public discourse led to the unprecedented transcending of rigid class boundaries between gentry and tenant. More scandalously to the conservative elites, whose power rested on their Protestant superiority, a sense of common purpose grew between liberal Anglicans and Presbyterian Dissenters, and their traditionally spiritual and civic inferiors, Catholics. Many Volunteer corps openly recruited Catholics, who were nominally forbidden to carry arms, and made up an estimated eighty percent of the Irish population. From Volunteer propaganda, a modern rhetoric of power "residing in the many" foregrounded natural rights and carried campaigns for free trade, recalibration of the Anglo-Irish connection, and "a more equal representation of the people" in parliament (Higgins, 2010: 5 & 212). More audaciously, it was envisaged that the latter might include Catholics. Tone's youth was marked by this new "articulation of national identity," which also frequently defined itself "in opposition to Britishness" (ibid: 152). While there is even evidence of a "desire to overthrow the Hanoverian regime" in popular Irish-language verse, it is infused with Jacobite sentiment inherited from earlier generations, a positioning which was outdated by the late 1770s (ibid: 7). The war led to boycotts of English products, and merchants, including Tone's father, were evidently involved. Showcasing exclusive consumption of Irish textiles or ale facilitated new forms of patriotic display, namely of Irish symbols and signifiers such as the traditional harp, shamrock, and the colour green. For this period, Tone frustratingly only alludes to his adolescent conviction that he would dazzle females by parading in a Volunteer uniform. But Higgins' compelling and richly-detailed discussion of the gender dynamics of this "*rage militaire*" (ibid: 128-177) leads us straight into the recalibration of Irish self-identification, and allows us to better understand how this defined Tone's early manhood. While effigies burned in Dublin were limited to contested public figures and not kings, prints and satirical cartoons were spreading. In these, possibly cautiously, representations of British power were limited to a crowned lion or the Romanised female personification of Britain, *Britannia*, often opposed to her symbolic sister *Hibernia,* both precursors to the *Marianne*. *Hibernia* is always depicted with a harp, a traditional symbol of Ireland, and appears on Volunteer flags, patriotic material and visual culture in which there are often no English visual signifiers. A jug and tray show Volunteers guarding a regal looking *Hibernia*, and even kneeling before her (ibid: 101-2; www.amrevmuseum.org, view 3). The exclusive object of the citizen soldier's

loyalty was now Ireland, and the absence of British symbols in this elegant image is defining. In exile in France, Tone would increasingly avow his prime allegiance to "the liberty and independence of my country, first," and even promote Irish symbolism (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 2001: 207).

The Volunteers were self-embodied and did not hold military commissions from the Crown, whereas all men recruited into royal regiments swore an oath of allegiance, defining their duty to defend its institutions, embodied by the monarch. Most Volunteer uniforms were in the official scarlet of the king's men, but a radical newspaper, *The Volunteer's Journal*, boldly stated the colour had been polluted in the "massacre" by redcoats of "our friends and brethren in America" (*Volunteer's Journal*, 21 July 1784, cited in Higgins, 2010: 44 & 169). Surely Volunteers should wear "the same colour as the *national* flag" of Ireland, of blue-green, but increasingly a purer green. On breastplates, buttons, drums or flags, the paper dictated that "no Volunteer ought to have a British crown over an Irish harp."[1] That paper's masthead displayed two Volunteers flanking a harp surmounted with a simple, pointed crown (i.e. of Ireland's ancient kings), as distinct from the elaborate British arched coronet (Higgins, 2010: 45). These reconfigurations are more than symbolic. Tavern songs, for example, probably included mock loyalism when chanting "God Save the King" while lifting a tankard of Irish ale. In the early summer of 1784, as a fleeting reference shows Tone was engaged in student agitation around reform, the *Journal* added a slogan to their masthead. Only when the "men of Ireland" rejected religious prejudices and joined forces would they "eradicate the baneful English influence, and destroy the aristocratic tyrants of the land." This vision may predate its use in the 1790s rhetoric of Tone and the United Irishmen (Murtagh, 2022: 49), but in it we can also relocate the union between Irishmen as the means to attain liberty in that most quoted phrase from his memoir. The Volunteers foregrounded Ireland's violated rights but never openly vocalised separation from Britain, though their language was confrontational. Their subtle subversion of royal military insignia would resurface during Tone's mission to France.

Reluctantly pursuing a legal career, during the early months of the French Revolution, Tone was drawn to Dublin's political scene, and recognised his writing skill as a valuable asset. His first pamphlet was triggered by heady, Whig-leaning agitation in Dublin during the Regency crisis, prompted by George III's temporary insanity. In a strange twist to the dual monarchy arrangement, the Prince of Wales could have become regent in Ireland only (Elliott, 2012: 76-7), and appointed a Whig colonial administration there. Patriot energies were revived, as reform and full Catholic emancipation seemed achievable. Though Tone quickly moved beyond the limited boundaries of this only mildly progressive and place-

1 After Ireland became a kingdom under English rule in 1542, the harp was officially surmounted by an English crown; this 1784 call for its native purity will resurface in Irish revolutionary history, and in Tone's, as is shown later in the paper.

seeking opposition, his *Review of the conduct of administration* (1790), which critiqued the establishment, was well received by its opponents, and opened a door to political writing (Tone in Moody *et al.*, 2001: 282-3). It reprises consistent Irish patriot or Whig themes from the Volunteer age, i.e. condemning corruption, and features "some anti-English rhetoric" (Small, 2002: 178). Examples of what Small considers as Tone's "fairly violent, but hardly novel" language (ibid) could be the "rapacious prodigality of an English Viceroy," the "insidious seduction of an English Secretary," and a "prostituted Irish peerage" (Tone, in Moody *et al.*, 1998: 48). Only indirect, pertinent and neutrally respectful references are made to the "King," the "first magistrate of the kingdom" who in England could "do no wrong," in contrast to the "maladministration" his ministers were capable of in Ireland (ibid, 39). Irish radicals may have secretly pondered their sovereign's tolerance of this maladministration, and questioned their allegiance. Tone's biographer Marianne Elliott stresses that while not questioning the role of the monarch, the *Review* did not gloss over the "confusion between crown as person and the crown as government influence" as easily as it usually is in conventional Whig rhetoric"; yet, she deems that he "never entirely lost a sneaking respect for royalty"—an assertion revisited below (2012: 81). By now, in France, Louis XVI had been depicted in a vicious cartoon as an elegantly-drawn pig with an instantly recognisable human head, complete with the cuckold's horns. Yet no biting satire of George III, not to mention one reaching this extreme, would ever emerge in Ireland even in 1798. The themes in Tone's pamphlet "lay at the heart of all his subsequent political thought," namely in its "insistence on the sovereignty of the Irish people" (Gillen, 2020: 6), if somewhat vaguely. This principle of sovereignty lying in the popular will of the nation would come to inexorably direct Tone's thinking. Far from incompatible in the type of constitutional monarchies that later emerged, it would prove to be unachievable in Ireland during his lifetime.

Tone was emboldened, and within weeks, another imperial crisis triggered his second pamphlet, which made a form of quantum leap, making it the only pamphlet noticed by the revolutionaries planning the Rising. An Anglo-Spanish dispute over territorial claims in the North Pacific nearly resulted in war between the two nations in 1790. Ireland's anticipated and statutory involvement as a so-called sister kingdom of Britain (i.e. sending supplies and men) was the topic of intense parliamentary, extra-parliamentary, press and tavern debate, and Tone even attended the Irish House of Commons. Ireland still experienced disadvantageous trade arrangements, and this crisis sanctioned challenges to the connection with Britain, though mostly in commercial nationalism. Writing as "Hibernicus" in *Spanish War!*, Tone deconstructed the boundaries of Ireland's obligations, assertively addressing the Irish Parliament. This work is deemed mature and "cogently and lucidly argued," but too "outspoken and radical" for current Whig policy, and incautious for someone courting a political career (Elliott, 2012: 87). It does indeed include some striking and catchy statements

lamenting Ireland's muted nationhood. Tone boldly opened the preface by stating that many of the ideas in the pamphlet may seem extraordinary, and some, "to cautious men, too hardy" (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 1998: 52). After legalities and detailed discussion of Irish trade with Spain, he targeted the arguments that Ireland would be expected to sacrifice "blood, treasure and trade," for the "good of the empire, the honour of the British flag," and English protection of Ireland (ibid: 56). The royal prerogative to declare war is never questioned, and "His Majesty" is referred to pragmatically. But that the king would declare war "on motives and interests purely British" prompted the question "whether the Parliament and people of Ireland be, of right, bound to support" this war which did not concern them (ibid: 52). Impassioned statements about Ireland later captured the imagination of early 20th-century militant separatists, who unsurprisingly recycled them for their pre-Rising propaganda. This was the only polemical work ever republished by later generations, a fact not commented on in Tone's historiography (*Spanish War!*, 1915). Most of it was not "quite appropriate to the present time," despite what an enthusiastic female nationalist and close reader of Tone's writings thought (Jacob, *Diary*, 20 May 1915), save for some stark words which inspired separatists. Writing retrospectively in France, Tone claimed that in the pamphlet he had "advanced the question of separation" with neither reserve nor disguise, but that the "public mind was not as advanced as I was" (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 2001: 285). Separatism is however only obliquely hinted at. Tone lashed out about the muting of the ultimate signifier of nationhood, relaying the patriotic discourse of his youth and Volunteer symbols. The grand argument about the honour of the British flag was "degrading to our country, and dishonourable to our spirit," making every Irishman hang his head "in sorrow and abasement" (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 1998: 58). To the delight of later nationalists, he cried out on paper "WHERE IS THE FLAG OF IRELAND?"; where were "the docks, the arsenals of Ireland?"; Ireland owed her rights and liberties "to the spirit of Ireland, not the generosity of England," and "First of all, we should take care of ourselves," and not cry out "for protection from any *foreign* state" (our emphasis). By enforcing "our rank among the primary nations of the earth," Ireland would see "A NATIONAL FLAG and spirit to maintain it." Then, if Irishmen fought and bled, at least they would turn their "eyes to the Harp waving proudly over the Ocean" (ibid: 58-61).[2] But in 1790, while enthusiastically promoting an Irish flag, the allusion to nationhood—or, shall we suggest, the elimination of a British symbol—was arguably also an indirect statement of resistance to subjecthood as well. Marianne Elliott rightly discerns no genuine "republican undertones," but asserts that he "was not a separatist" then, and had been "pulled into republicanism by the implications" of his written, incautious words (2012: 87 & 218). Writing in the 1980s, i.e. weighed down by the ongoing

2 A plain green flag with only a gold harp at its centre was to become the jack of the Irish Naval Service in the 1940s, when Tone's autobiography was still read in Irish schoolrooms.

Troubles in Northern Ireland which had become "the burden of the present" for historians, as Bartlett aptly put it, this view is seen as subjective and outdated today (Bartlett, 1993: 1). Elsewhere, *Spanish War!* is deemed not only "implicitly separatist," but displaying an "anti-monarchical undertone" in insisting the Irish parliament could veto the king's declaration of war (Small, 2002: 179).

Threatened by reactionary conservatives, Tone's publisher, the enterprising Catholic bookseller Patrick Byrne (also printer of the *Review*) destroyed the whole print run. Deprived of an audience, Tone penned a clever but unrestrained mock letter to a newspaper, thankfully for him never published, but here most insightful. Posing as a poor weaver, he (falsely?) declared himself "one of his Majesty's most liege subjects" (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 1998: 63). He had "accidentally met with" a startling pamphlet daring to question Ireland's requirement to embark in a war alongside Britain. For "even to *suppose* the contrary would be less wicked than imagining the King's death, which our law declares to be *high treason*." The weaver was remarkably informed on legalities, so this phrase may expose Tone's nervousness, amounting to an admission that he had (even anonymously) tested the boundaries of treasonable statements. Positioning himself as an honest if lowly "subject to his Majesty," he adopted a sham innocence in his feigned pleading. Though largely focused on how a war would hit the labouring classes, he reiterated his devotion to the connection with Britain. In an age which so valued rational thought, his fictitious weaver in the letter honourably reflected on the subject but eventually disagreed, as a man could "not only *imagine* but *avow* sentiments without feeling his head totter on his shoulders," or dream "at night of *blocks* and *axes*." Tone knew the law of treason, which included even imagining the monarch's death. This explains the histrionic allusion to the tools of the ensuing penalty—judicial execution in its most primitive form. But would Tone ever support regicide? Finally, he disclaimed "as a most abominable heresy" against his Majesty's "Crown and Government...this most pernicious and dangerous doctrine" that required Ireland to be involved in Britain's wars, and pronounced that "our King" had "not a right" to make terms of peace and neutrality for Ireland. Posing as "no lawyer, Sir," which in fact he was, he launched into mock, exaggeratedly drawn-out reasoning, with some barely-veiled hints of a lack of deference. Tone appears as a social leveller, who consistently vilified aristocrats, far beyond kings. His weaver believed it "to be law, viz. that as Ireland is an imperial kingdom... our King has the same *rights* in making war or peace for Ireland...in his royal wisdom." In a personable style suited to a tavern debate, it then "appears to me," he wrote, that it may be "*advisable for our two Houses of Parliament to address him to do so*" (ibid: 65) Tone was technically a precise writer, and exploited every instrumental tool of language—in this case, emphasis. He reversed the agency by suggesting that the monarch's prerogative to declare war was contingent on the Irish legislature's independent wish. Yet we do note the absence of any personalised animosity towards George III.

In 1791, Tone had been "principally instrumental" in the formation of a Society of United Irishmen founded in Belfast in October 1791, having written its published resolutions. These were also adopted by a second club in Dublin a few weeks later (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 2001: 321). They called for full political reform in a "cordial union" uniting Irishmen of all religions, and an equal representation of all the people in Parliament as the sole means to "oppose... the weight of English influence" in Ireland. But in a private letter discussing an early draft of the resolutions, seized by the authorities, Tone confided to Thomas Russell, his closest friend and soon a leading United Irishman, that they fell "short of the truth" and only went as far as was advisable at the time (Tone in Moody *et al*., 1998: 104-5). Tone shared his "unalterable opinion," which we trace back to his frenzied patriotic youth, that the connexion with Britain was "the bane of Irish prosperity," and though he had said nothing of "separation," that idea might soon establish itself universally. This view was focused on the optimal remedy for Ireland, and no relevant condemnation was offered of the system to be replaced by a more democratic one. Separation would be a "*regeneration* for this Country," against the backdrop of the French Revolution, being "that morning star of liberty to Ireland." In their resolutions, the United Irishmen advanced an optimistic and "euphoric rhetoric" more directly than previous radicals, and their political discourse clearly reflected French "republican vocabulary," most potently conveyed to Irish radicals through Thomas Paine's work (McBride, 2000: 165). Tone historicises this new dawn in his autobiography, identifying explosive events in France (prior to 1793) as heralding the end of "monarchy and aristocracy" and centuries-old "despotism" (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 2001: 294). This led to the extraordinary reception of Paine's *Rights of Man*, republished in many editions in Dublin from March 1791 onwards, including by Byrne (Dickson, 1993: 137-141). Tone later told French decision makers that Ireland had experienced a "revolution in the political morality of the nation" when France had established "unbounded liberty of conscience" (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 2001: 64). This made the English policy of "disunion of the sects" obsolete, and directed the nascent United Irish project. The French Revolution tested all Irishmen, who neatly polarised as genuine or symbolic "*Aristocrats*" and "*Democrats*": Tone stated he had been of the latter, from the very start (ibid: 295).

To counter reluctant Protestants fearing a Catholic majority in Parliament, Tone composed his most effective pamphlet. His *Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*, published also by Byrne in August 1791, stands out as one of the age's "finest pieces of political propaganda," in the wider United Irish mission to foster informed, public debate (Quinn, 2002: 44). Tone vigorously addressed "childish fears" about outdated misapprehensions of allegiance to the Pope to "the dark ages of superstition" (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 1998: 121). Since 1774, Catholics could, and did, take an oath of allegiance to their monarch. The *Argument* does introduce what are arguably some radically modern concepts,

which Tone would relentlessly pursue. Ireland, unlike England, had "*no National Government*," and only an "evil" one, the root cause of her disgrace (ibid: 111). The king resided in England, where the "interests of the King, Ministers and People" moved forward in the same direction. Ireland had a government "derived from another country," and resting on venality, but beyond her shores reform was "levelling ancient abuses in the dust." Tone also alludes to "natural rights" urging the people upwards, and in a later edition from March 1792, to "a Revolution commencing in the public mind" (ibid: 191). His friend Russell had deemed the *Argument* a "damned hard side blow" at King William III, the emblem of an everlasting Protestant succession to the throne, and the "first strike at his memory," which is still always referred to as "glorious and immortal" in loyalist rhetoric (Quinn, 2002: 133). But in one interpretation, Tone had also "extravagantly" declared his allegiance to George III by stating that if an occasion arose, he'd "cheerfully...spill my blood in his service" (Small, 2002: 196; Tone, in Moody *et al*., 1998: 114). This analysis, from a scholarly political science perspective, only surveys Tone's public writings, and may not have fully grasped, or indeed distanced itself, from his vivacious, blunt and often ironic writing style. One compelling dimension is missing: after the crushing of the rebellion in 1798, and the recognised need for democratic concessions to Ireland, the campaign to grant (propertied) Catholics the right to sit in Parliament, and complete their emancipation, was renewed. Pitt's government was favourable but all narratives foreground George III's ongoing refusal, stating in 1799 that this would "breach his coronation oath," which made him defender of the Protestant faith of the British state (Black, 2006: 196-7). Tone could have directed his arguments or literary venom at this personalised objection to his lifelong democratic campaign, yet never did.

Punitive measures to silence the radical press and public debate would, by the late 1790s, drive many into exile from Ireland, though forms of furtive satire and resistance would emerge. The year 1792 marked a point of no return in Irish radical agitation, as is illustrated by a very rare cartoon, in a risk-taking publication Tone subscribed to (*Universal Magazine*, February 1792).

Entitled "English Policy,"[3] and created by artist William Paulet Carey, it depicts *Britannia* perched on a throne inscribed "ENGLISH supremacy," symbolically trampling on the crown of the Irish kingdom. Somewhat grotesquely, her harried sister *Hibernia* is crouching at her feet, her throat and ankles in fetters, and hands bound in a chain with huge links inscribed with the evils of the colonial system, e.g. corruption and venality. *Hibernia*'s harp has been seized by a sinister Lion, another symbol of the British monarchy, who is arrogantly plucking it. In late

3 The author wishes to thank James Kelly, Professor of History at Dublin City University for identifying W.P. Carey as the artist (and probably engraver) of this cartoon. Kelly is the author of a forthcoming article on Carey: James Kelly (forthcoming), "William Paulet Carey and Irish caricature, 1780-1792", *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*.


ENGLISH POLICY, DIVIDE AND CONQUER,
or the Present State of Parties.
NECESSITY
STATE
CHOICE
ENGLISH
IRISH
Privy Seal
Lord Chancellor
Speaker
Secretary
Attorney General
Solicitor General
Master of the Rolls
Chief Baron
Chief Justice
Camden
Westmorland
Fitzwilliam
Portland
Grenville
Pitt
Dundas
Windham
Loughborough
Thurlow
Keppel
Keppel Admiral
Rodney Admiral
Howe Admiral
Hood Admiral
Barrington Admiral
Jervis Admiral
Duncan Admiral
Nelson Admiral
Abercrombie
Moore
Wellington
Cornwallis
Clinton
Lake
Gower
Cornwallis
Fitzgibbon
Clare
Beresford
Foster
Parsons
Corry
Ponsonby
Grattan
Burgh
Flood
Hussey
Curran
Plunket
Bushe
Saurin
Wolfe
Sheridan
Fox
Burke
Erskine
Grey
Whitbread
Tierney
Sheridan
Adam
Lauderdale
Moira
Grey
Grenville
Grey
Grenville
Grey
Grenville

1792, government newspapers decried the formation of republican-leaning clubs in Dublin (Curtin, 1985: 478). One was established upon all the worst "principles of the French nation," as its toast was "May mankind trample upon *Royalty,*" and a "six-penny *Jacobin club*" meeting paces away from the Castle was "a proper object for police attention" (*Freeman's Journal*, 6 November 1792: 4). But these "clubs for erecting a Republic upon the ruins of our just and limited Monarchy," i.e. one protected from tyranny by the power of Parliament, demanded vigilance and more vigorous loyalism (*Freeman's Journal*, 11 December 1792: 4). In an otherwise probing discussion, these clubs were not linked to their obvious, immediate context, the early months of the French Republic and the trial of Louis XVI. Tone had reacted thus in his diary to the fall of the monarchy: "*The King of France is dethroned!!* Very glad of it, for now the people have fair play," but he hoped the army would stand "by the Nation" (Tone, 18 August 1792, in Moody *et al*., 1998: 250). Seditious links with France to import arms were forged in November 1792 by Edward Fitzgerald, a younger son of the Duke of Leinster (Ireland's highest peer). At a multi-national banquet of radicals on 18 November, including Paine and obscure Paris-based Irishmen later to assist Tone, Fitzgerald relinquished his hereditary title and became "le Citoyen Édouard" (Ferradou, 2015: 24). But armed revolution was not the only form of direct action. Tone's *Argument* had led to his appointment as a secretary to a Catholic Committee, and he helped them organise a democratically-elected and truly representative, i.e. national, convention in Dublin in December. Then, just before a three-year gap in his diary, he insightfully noted: "The King of France was beheaded on the 21st. I am sorry it was necessary" (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 1998: 403). Tone the polemicist was anti-monarchist, but as an individual does not project brutality, nor politically endorses regicide. The war between France and Britain in 1793 created a revolutionary dynamic, and Tone was banished from Ireland in 1795 after collaborating with an agent sent from France (William Jackson).

Exiled in Philadelphia, Tone promptly wrote a memoir for Pierre Adet, the French minister plenipotentiary in America, summarising the strategic advantages to France of separating Ireland from Britain. A French military expedition could provide the framework for an ordered Irish revolution, but a landing proclamation must stipulate that the invaders "came not as enemies but as allies," and would "promise" total freedom of religious worship (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 2001: 4). France would enable the "people to redress their grievances, to assert their rights, to subvert the ancient tyranny of their oppressors and to establish the independence of Ireland on the ruins of English usurpation"; yet a republican government was not (yet) specified. Adet prepared a summarised translation sent to Paris, but interestingly personified the physicality of separation by adding a metaphor, predicting that the Irish "rompraient entièrement avec Georges III" (Tone, ibid: 9). This phrase is absent in Tone's original. He arrived in Paris in February 1796 and began protracted negotiations with several decision makers.

In an age of ideological warfare, some points needed clarification. Foregrounding the emancipation of Catholics "comme le point de ralliement des mécontens [*sic*] d'Irlande" was hardly reassuring for France's "gouvernement républicain," wrote the minister for External relations, Delacroix (Tone, ibid: 39: Kleinman, 2016). Barely a month after his arrival, Tone submitted memoranda to Delacroix on Irish politics, and logistical and military measures which would follow a French landing. While radicals had to be cautious "in their measures," their object was to subvert English tyranny, establish Irish "independence… and frame a free republic on the broad basis of liberty and equality" (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 2001: 66). Considering his diaries for the pivotal years 1793-95 are lost, this is the first clear enunciation of the form of government a sovereign Ireland would adopt, in "strict alliance with France" (ibid: 88). When Tone first met General Lazare Hoche, soon to head a major, failed expedition to Ireland in December 1796, the Frenchman asked if he expected any "royalism, or aristocratism" to surface in reaction (ibid: 234). Tone said no, and reiterated they would most undoubtedly establish a republic. Lauding the Directory's firmness in quashing Babeuf's conspiracy (10 May 1796), which could have hindered the Irish plans, he did pity one of the arrested[4] as a sincere and "undoubted republican" (ibid: 179). Yet he did not comment on the introduction of a new paradoxical "Serment de haine à la royauté" (Deleplace, 2009: 13), which he may himself have uttered as a guest at a grandiose "fête" in honour of Bonaparte at the Luxembourg palace in 1797 (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 2007: 181; Kleinman, 2017: 84-5). One diary entry became a veritable site of Irish memory, in which Tone referred to a specifically Irish corps to act as scouts after the French invasion (Kleinman, 2016: 2). Their flag should be green "with the Harp, surmounted by a Cap of Liberty," which reminded him of the problematic "button for the National Volunteers" he had suggested when they were formed in Dublin back in November 1792 (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 2001: 210). Promptly banned, their green-striped trousers had emulated the French National Guards, and their insignia had obviously centred on an uncrowned harp, as on this green flag, discussed in Paris.

Tone's most developed revolutionary vision of the Irish republican society to come has been generally overlooked, but has been duly deconstructed in Small's analysis. Commissioned in the French army, he was tasked with writing addresses and proclamations for distribution after the landing. His anonymous *Address to the people of Ireland on the present important crisis* is a drawn out and densely-worded pamphlet, ostensibly seeking to convince his compatriots to rise up and "emancipate your country from a foreign Yoke" (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 2001: 391). A tactical document to rouse a military response, it nowhere voices the goal of a republican form of government for a liberated Ireland. Whether this was a deliberate strategy or not is mystifying. Small identifies core strands in this

4 Jean-Baptiste Drouet (1763-1824).

Address of Irish reformist thought inherited from the patriotic agitation of Tone's youth, such as criticising how Britain inhibits Irish commerce, condemning corruption, and linking "political liberty to Protestantism" (Small, 2002: 250-1). Tone had compared at the outset the Reformation's subversion of "Popery" to his conviction that republicanism would eventually subvert monarchism. He locates the present crisis, i.e. the invasion of Ireland within an enthusiastic and visionary "new order" spreading in Europe (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 2001: 377). This flowed out of the "stupendous revolution" in France, which had established its "mighty republic on the broad and firm basis of equal rights, liberties and laws." Republicanism was a doctrine which would finally "subvert that of monarchy and establish a system of just and rational liberty on the ruins of the thrones of despots of Europe." Eventually, as in previous works but with pronounced Painite features, the pamphlet addresses the undemocratic nature of Ireland's unelected government. This was rooted in its "vain appearance of a parliament" and a hereditary "king [and] house of lords representing themselves" (ibid: 385). Tone virulently condemns the open corruption of Irish politicians, but retraces the chain back to the sovereign. His penchant for irony explains his mock loyalty: the "means by which" Irish peerages were obtained and the "motives which determined the king of England, the fountain of honour," to raise faithful subjects to high rank were so notorious he needs not repeat them.

Tone then launches into a diatribe of a vigour unseen anywhere in his writings, and his criticisms of the king have been deemed not only to have been "vicious by mid-1790s standards" but also to be poles apart from his (supposed) "willingness to shed blood for him," as was seen earlier in the *Argument* (Small, 2002: 251-2). In the first place, he asks, "what is your king?" (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 2001: 379). A "foreigner" and "native of a country that holds you in contempt… who never condescends to visit Ireland." From his closet at St James, he distributes "honours and awards" to "English sycophants or more despicable Irish apostates." Does he not regard you as a "rabble of mutinous slaves" rather than a "nation of valuable subjects"? People of Ireland, "this is your absentee monarch!," the "idol before whom you are to fall down and worship… with the sacrifice of your blood" (ibid: 380). Tone is confident that he is appealing to people "convinced" by Paine's arguments of "the absurdity of hereditary monarchs" and legislators, as no one had their shoes mended by "hereditary cobblers" (ibid: 379). Here he is reworking Paine's original amusing metaphors of "hereditary mathematicians" and poet laureates to include the common man (Paine, 1791: 71). Tone has finally verbalised a forthright rejection of a top-down, unelected and unrepresentative head of state.

As useful as Small's deconstruction is from a scholarly perspective, it only considers Tone's pamphlets, and by omitting the occasionally mercurial and often biting diary, it has not fully grasped the scope of his writerly capacity for sarcasm. Tone had opened the *Address* with a vital pragmatic point, which is also

lost in Small's possibly excessively methodological analysis. He wrote as a "friend" to Irish liberty and independence who could *now* "venture the truth," because he had no "fear of being stopped short" by a formal accusation of a criminal offence "by his Majesty's attorney general" (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 2001: 376). In other words, in France in late 1796, Tone's pen was finally and totally unleashed. A copy of the printed *Address* was found in October 1798 on the French ship Tone had sailed on. It was reprinted to expose the "false suggestions and disingenuous representations" deployed by the French to seduce and betray the Irish people that the connexion to Great Britain was "injurious" and "degrading" to the Irish people ('Advertisement', *Address to the People…*, Belfast 1796 [sic]: 3-4 in Tone, in Moody *et al*., 2001: 375). Assuming the printers initially thought it had been written by Frenchmen, then translated, they interestingly did not consider the passages cited above as potentially disloyal or treasonable, if an Irishman's authorship was suspected.

Disregarding Tone's private writings may seem a more scholarly approach when considering political rhetoric, but he came to see his diaries as autobiographical; they were made public, and entered the nationalist literary canon. Impulsive statements are thus relevant and must be considered in any balanced discussion of an individual's public views. Small and Elliott point to apparent lingering hints of loyalism in Tone's views, though this opacity did not prevent his revolutionary actions. Random quips may reveal a very cautious self-discipline, holding back from verbalising treason, even in exile, but also lead to misinterpretations of his perceived loyalty. Musing in his diary about the royal family's rebuttal of an Irish linen trader's overtures, preferring "out of spite" the German equivalent, he cynically spoke out words from the anthem: "God save Great George, our King!" (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 1998: 147). But on 25 October 1792, weeks after the French republic was established, he feigned respect and noted: "This is the King's (God Bless him) accession. How many more accessions shall we have?" (ibid: 316). Writing to his friend Thomas Russell from America, he expressed sharp opinions formed in his first month on post-colonial politics, and leadership. Washington was emerging as a "high-flying aristocrat… too long in power," and not infallible (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 2001: 12). He then added a facetious comment on what Ireland had, in contrast: "the blessing of a privileged order, and a hereditary peerage, not to mention the best of sovereigns, whom I mention with honour" (ibid: 13). But weeks before joining the final French expedition to Ireland which would cost him his life, nearly two years a French officer, he quipped: "This is his Majesty's birthday!," which he had nearly forgot, then broke out into song: "(Sings) 'God Save great George our king!' I feel myself extremely loyal… Well, God knows the heart! Many a body says *well*, that thinks *ill*, & c., &c…" (Tone in Moody *et al*., 2007: 278). Even in his diary, peppered with Anglophobic outbursts, he remained elusive, though this mock loyalism probably brought him back to the heady patriotism of his youth.

Tone's character has overwhelmed academic historians, not only in terms of overcoming how romantic nationalism adulated him, but also due to the immediacy and buoyant quality of his voluminous diary (Elliott, 2012: 298, 395-401; Kleinman, 2017: 78; Kleinman 2024: 47 & 49). A close and constant read of it familiarises us with Tone's penchant for irony, which we suggest underpins the *Argument*, a strategically cautious pamphlet promoting Catholic rights, and his comment in it that he would cheerfully spill his blood in the king's service (Tone, in Moody *et al*., 1998: 114). He thirsted for military adventure, at any cost, but a few lines down also wrote that "the most truly loyal subject" in Ireland owed his "first duty" to his country, his second to his King." Both Small and Elliott, we wish to suggest, have not properly seized on Tone's sarcasm and double meanings, which shielded his rejection of royalism as unaccountable and obsolete. That his diaries for the pivotal years when Irish radicals became revolutionary conspirators (1793-95) are missing creates a critical gap in the progression of his ideas. Retrospectively, he also appears as a socially-conservative democrat, whose goal was accountable government, but whose electors' rights would be linked to property. His weaver may have been informed, but not yet a citizen in the way the 1916 generation would see it.

Finally, viewing radical Irish republican language only through the prism of Tone's written legacy, or indeed his formal polemical writing, is too narrow. Other compelling modes of expression, such as verse and prose satires, or "literary mischief," were produced; toasts became bolder and divisive (Thuente, 2000: 67; Curtin, 1998: 174; Powell, 2006, 527-8). A literary burlesque (1793-94) written by the United Irishman William Sampson, with Thomas Russell, portrays "the Lion of Old England" as decent but "easily-duped and flattered," obviously symbolising George III (Thuente, 2000: 73 & 82). The lion dies at the end, "repenting his tyranny" but envisioning a reformed kingdom. Republican catechisms were also seized, and a brief one was broadly circulated during the 1998 bicentenary of the rebellion. Playfully militant, it rises to an imagined subversive action. The pupil first identifies the "branch" of the Tree of Liberty grown "In America," which bloomed "In France," and its seeds then fallen "In Ireland." The apprentice citizen is finally asked, introducing personal but aggressive agency, "Where are you going to plant it?" The bold reply is: "In the Crown of Great Britain." In the tense context of the ongoing Troubles in Northern Ireland but in the spirit of reconciliation, a monument with the catechism carved in stone was erected in 1998, with this last line omitted. Though historians are aware of those last words, which demonstrate the increasing lack of deference among the people, and express the revolutionary republican spirit of 1798, they are now lost in the digital age. Tone's diary description of a national emblem became iconic in cultural nationalism, but we can now link it to the later reaction of the colonial authorities who deemed it treasonable. After his arrest, a "green flag with the harp without the crown," made in France, was sent to Dublin Castle (Tone, in Moody

et al., 2007: 368). This mild subversion of symbols differs from an extremely rare and more organically subversive United Irish green ribbon, displaying an upturned British crown with shamrocks growing out of it.

Overall, the rhetoric behind the 1916 Rising, the first in "a chain of revolutionary insurgencies against imperial" power dynamics triggered by World War I, reflected early 20th-century Irish anti-monarchism (Jones, 2016: 264). The last royal visits to Ireland before the war had provoked advanced nationalists, who seized on these events to display their disloyalty, often landing them in court and even prison (Pašeta, 1999; Taylor, 1999: 204). Tone and his contemporaries had never experienced such opportunities; yet their republicanism was long viewed through the prism of this anti-monarchism of 1916. A leading scholar of the period has specifically discussed how anti-monarchism was a "key component" of the Irish Revolution, which fuelled a virtual "culture war" in the 1910s and 1920s, opposing loyalists to those who could no longer accommodate royalism within Irish identity (Jones, 2016: 262). Most usefully for this exploration, she highlights that this "anti-monarchist" sentiment of early 20th-century Irish republicans has "received little historical attention," with the focus "almost entirely on republicanism." This echoes the principal literature on Tone, the United Irishmen, and the 1798 rebellion, in which anti-monarchism as a neatly-defined topic is both absent from indexes and almost entirely from discursive text. As the driving force of Irish nationalism, this paradigm really only crystallised towards the 1870s and 1880s, and again was directed at servants of the crown rather than the person of the monarch (Taylor, 1999: 140-1). After 1922, Irish nationalism polarised and virulent republican anti-monarchism took hold. Unburdened by the micro-historical detail of radicalism in the 1790s, Tone became an anachronistic figurehead. But he was also emblematic of the constructive optimism of the Enlightenment, an era of regeneration and opportunity. By associating, the Dublin United



Green silk ribbon, ca. 1798. Courtesy of Whyte's Auctioneers, Dublin.

Irishmen had "thought little about our ancestors" but "much of our posterity" (Tone in Moody *et al.*, 2001: 156). An impassioned writer who electrified nationalist readers for generations, Tone certainly interlaced his writings with impulsive outbursts. Yet what amounts to his private turned public "theory of passions" was fuelled by optimism, and not odium (Kleinman, 2017: 79, 83; Kleinman, 2024 :47). It did not extend to a hate paradigm directed at the monarch, e.g. in the oath introduced after the Babeuf plot, which he could not have been unaware of (Deleplace, 2009: 3). The United Irish creed he had shaped was incompatible with hatred as a "sentiment républicain" (ibid: 5). At his court martial, Tone admitted high treason, uttered nothing disloyal, but reiterated that considering the "connexion with England" to be Ireland's bane, the great object of his life had been to "break" it (Tone, in Moody *et al.*, 2007: 397). He was interrupted, but then referenced his endeavour to "raise three million" of his Catholic countrymen to the "rank of citizen." On behalf of the United Irishmen, Tone had claimed the right to alter a tyrannical system, achieve democracy, and end the unnatural divisions among his countrymen. It was this revolutionary vision, in which power rested in a people as a nation, and not his (assumed) anti-monarchism which inspired later revolutionaries.

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