Prout and Plagiarism

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The aim of this essay is to introduce the work of Francis Sylvester Mahony, wit, hack, toper, ruined priest, scholar and satirist, of whose prodigal array of pseudonyms 'Father Prout' is the one which posterity has preserved. It is with this appellation that he has, to quote his own words, come 'floating triumphantly down the stream of time, secure and buoyant in a genuine "Cork" jacket'.

Prout, so he tells us, was the offspring of a secret marriage between Swift and Stella, and was kidnapped at a tender age by the Englishman William Wood, in vengeance for the savaging which he had received in the Dean's Drapier's Letters. The villainous Wood left the child exposed on the bleak summit of Watergrasshill near Cork, identifiable only by a locket around his neck containing a lock of his mother's hair and inscribed with the motto Prout Stella Refugis, 'Prout' meaning literally 'to the extent that'. Father Prout, then, is Father-up-to-a-point, an accurate enough description of Mahony's dubious clerical status as a defrocked priest still in holy orders. It was the brutal abduction of the child which was the cause of his father's madness, though the story turned out well enough for the lad himself. Taken into the Cork foundling hospital, the young Prout escaped from the institution hidden in a wooden churn, to end up as the erudite clergyman of Watergrasshill whose papers have descended to us by the good offices of his editor Oliver Yorke, also alias Frank Mahony. Prout is hot in defence of his father's reputation, and asserts of the bare-faced political self-promotor Swift that he 'sought not the smiles of the court, nor ever sighed for ecclesiastical dignities' (p. 115). We read all this in Prout's essay 'Dean Swift's Madness, or the Tale of a Churn'.

1 Mahony stole the name from a real cleric, parish priest of Arnagehy, Co. Cork. There are some comments on the real Prout in William Le Fanu, Seventy Years of Irish Life (London, 1893), pp. 179-80, a work which also contains some observations on Sheridan Knowles and Sergeant Frank Murphy of the Fraserian circle.

2 Reliques of Father Prout (London, 1873), p. 104. All subsequent references to this work are given in parentheses. There is a reference to 'prouts' in James Joyce's Finnegans Wake ([New York, 1939] p. 482), followed closely by one to 'the bells of scandal' (cf. Prout's poem 'The Bells of Shandon').

3 Robert Mahony points out that Prout's defence of Swift as an Irish patriot, in the period of Catholic Emancipation, was quite unusual. It is clearly among other things an attempt to marginalise O'Connell. See his Jonathan Swift: The Irish Identity (New Haven and London, 1995), pp. 82-7.
Prout, then, has an illicit pedigree, like forged literary texts or false etymologies. The word ‘kidnapping’, so he informs us, is cognate with the word ‘plagiarism’, since in Cicero’s day kidnappers were known as *plagiarii*, after the lash or *plaga* which they could expect if apprehended. (This is itself a false etymology: *plagiarius* actually derives from *plagium*, a net to catch game.) To steal an infant is a kind of plagiarism, appropriating what is not your own, rather as Prout’s father Swift does with his assumption of literary personae, a tendency inherited by his son. Prout is a protem impersonator, a literary ventriloquist whose ‘soul is multilateral, his talk multifarious’ (p. iv). He is an odd mixture of the conservative and the carnivalesque, ‘a rare combination of Socrates and Sancho Panza, of Scarron and the venerable Bede’ (p. 167). The reactionary Prout is one of the ‘polished and high-born clergy of the old Gallican church’ (p. 5), deeply contemptuous of the vulgar herd of petty-bourgeois Corkonians with whom it is his lot to mingle. These, in his essay ‘The Watergrass Carousal’, include a down-at-heel fashion journalist who though not well-dressed himself is the cause of dress in others, and who, as the editor of a local newspaper, keeps an eye on Russia in his columns vigilant enough to annoy the Tsar. There is also a dentist who finishes his dinner parties with especially hard nuts, thus profitably converting his guests into patients.

Despite his conservatism, however, Prout is a kind of cultural studies exponent *avant la lettre*, whose chief field of scholarly inquiry, so he tells us, is popular song; indeed Mahony himself has survived on the strength of one such ballad, ‘The Bells of Shandon’. It is true that the Cork Fraserians practised along with their anti-plagiarising a kind of anti-popularising, translating ephemeral works into more durable linguistic media, as with William Maginn’s rendering of ‘Old King Cole’ in Hebrew. Maginn’s persona O’Doherty dreams of landing the office of Embalmer General, commissioned to turn living languages into dead ones for their better conservation. The danger, he reflects, would be to beautify the original to the point where it would be made better than itself, and so encourage readers to value inferior modern products by the allure of the linguistic wrapping he lends them. In his essay ‘The Songs of France’, Prout gives us a commendable French version of the anonymous eighteenth-century Irish verse ‘The Night before Larry was Stretched’. But since the point of this project is to help preserve the ephemeral as well as antiquate it, it could be said to be popularising enough in its perverse way.

A supposed correspondent to *Fraser’s Magazine* (in fact Mahony himself) describes Prout as being a ‘rare combination of the Teian lyre and the Tipperary bagpipe … of the Ionian dialect blending harmoniously with the Cork brogue; an Irish potatoe [sic] seasoned with Attic salt, and the humours of Donnybrook.

4 We have here a version -- perhaps even the origin -- of the old Irish anecdote about the editorial in the *Skibbereen Eagle* which declared that the newspaper was keeping a close eye on the Tsar, or in another version on the Treaty of Versailles.
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Wed to the glories of Marathon' (p. 66). Or as another commentator has it, 'a piquant mixture of toryism, classicism, sarcasm and punch'. Mahony, in short, is the very essence of carnival, with his abrupt lurchings from the erudite to the everyday, from pokerfaced pedantry to knockabout humour. In his essay 'The Painter, Barry', the Cork artist James Barry, painting at dead of night in the Vatican for fear (significantly enough) of snooping would-be plagiarists, is disturbed by a shadowy figure who, once wrestled to the ground, turns out to be the pope. The two then proceed to conduct a learned conversation. Dinner-table conversation, of which there is much in Mahony's writing as well as in his life, is itself a carnivalesque mode, combining the intellectual and biological, semantic and somatic, while exploiting the comic tension between the two.

Mahony, who was kicked out of the Clongowes seminary because of a gargantuan bash which got grotesquely out of hand, was never actually suspended from the priesthood - he was, as his editor Blanchard Jerrold remarks, 'a half-pay soldier of the Church, minus the half pay'. Though he was a pious right-wing Catholic, his notions of temperance, as a friend put it with exquisite diplomacy, were 'too liberal for the Church'. Ironically, however, he was a close friend of Father Mathew, commissioned a bust of the friar, and was commended by Mathew for the selfless courage he displayed while attending the poor as a young curate during the Cork cholera epidemic of 1832. As Mahony himself commented of his priestly status, he flirted openly with all nine Muses, since his vow of celibacy prevented him from forming a permanent liaison with any one of them. He was a bohemian backwoodsman who moved with aplomb from Horace to claret, a polyglot of enormous erudition who seemed with deliberate perversity to trivialise his own talents and cultivate an assiduous hackery.

In carnivalesque mode, Mahony deranges the proportions between central and peripheral, with a multifunctional style of writing like 'the proboscis of an elephant, that can with equal ease shift an obelisk and crack a nut' (p. 33). His art, so he informs us, is 'to magnify what is little, and to fling a dash of the sublime into a two-penny-post-communication' (p. 134); and this upending of literary hierarchies, this scrambling of the mighty and the myopic, can be seen as the aberrant colonial's smack at the literary categories of the metropolis.

6 Mahony might have been influenced here by Samuel Ferguson's knockabout piece 'Father Tom and the Pope' (Blackwood's Magazine, May 1838), which Yeats misattributed to William Maginn. See Peter Denman, Samuel Ferguson: The Literary Achievement (Gerrards Cross, 1990), p. 53.
7 There is today a Father Prout restaurant in Cork's Watergrasshill.
8 The Final Reliques of Father Prout, ed. Blanchard Jerrold (London, 1876), preface. Jerrold was the son of Mahony's friend Douglas Jerrold, editor of Punch.
9 Mannin, Two Studies in Integrity, p. 150.
Indeed he and William Maginn were such superlative hacks that they seemed to raise that lowly status to the second power, and so to transcend it. Like Oscar Wilde, Mahony is a major kind of minor writer, so doggedly, brilliantly peripheral that he ends up troubling the very distinction between that and centrality, as one might claim that the O’Connellite politics of his day did in their own way too. There is a cross-grained, perverse streak in his writings, as in those of Maginn, which is evident elsewhere in Irish letters, and which is closely linked to colonial eccentricity.

The line between the trivial and the substantial, then, is as hair-thin for Prout as the border between madness and sanity, or drunkenness and sobriety. He has some Foucauldian reflections on madness in the case of Swift, or should one say Swiftian reflections, musing that the frontier between the sane and the crazed is utterly indeterminate, not least for want of a ‘really solid sensible man’ to act as a norm by which to measure deviations. In similar spirit, he is fascinated by the precise metaphysical point at which sobriety passes over into inebriation. As far as authenticity goes, was Mahony himself entitled to be called ‘Father’, suspended as he was in some limbo between orgy and ordination? His very existence was liminal, his authority undecidable, his identity aporetic. The whole odious, gimcrack world of Benthamism and Whiggery struck him as hollow, parasitic, entirely intertextual: ‘all I read now’, writes Prout, ‘strikes me as but a new version of what I have read somewhere before … I’m sick of hashed-up works’ (p. 137). This of course is pretty rich, coming as it does from a master plagiarist whose whole selfhood is merely a recycled version of a derivative fiction. As with the practice of anti-plagiarism, the Tory Prout deplores the death of authenticity at the very instant that he saps away at the whole illusion of it. Fearful less forged Prout papers, or a ‘false paper currency’, might begin to circulate, his ‘editor’ Oliver Yorke solemnly gives notice to his readers that ‘no “Prout paper” is the real thing unless with label signed “OLIVER YORKE”’ (p. 232). We are not told how we are to determine whether this signature itself is forged or genuine. One is reminded of the man in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations who bought extra copies of the morning newspaper in order to assure himself that what the first copy said was true. What, in any case, is an original signature, since a signature can be authentic only by virtue of being a repetition? That a piece of writing can be fraudulently detached from its authorial source is constitutive of the act of writing, for both Jacques Derrida and Andrew Prout: ‘nothing so truly serves a book’, as the latter (though it could be the former) remarks, ‘as the writer’s removal from the sphere or hemisphere of his readers’ (p. x).

Maginn remarks himself how he is accused by some of ‘maintaining always the untenable side of any question’, just to demonstrate his logical dexterity (Works [New York, 1856], vol. iii, p. 155).
Enraged that Thomas Moore ('this Anacreontic little chap') has accused Henry O'Brien of plagiarism in his study of Irish round towers, Prout turns the charge back on Moore himself, a detestable self-publicising Whig in any case in Mahony's eyes. He does so by himself composing the French troubadour ballads of which, so he maintains, Moore's *Irish Melodies* are imitations, thus constituting them as a brand of 'petty larceny'. For good measure, he also arraigns Moore for having transmogrified his own 'Bells of Shandon' into his 'Evening Bells', and claims that some lines from Moore's 'Lalla Rookh' originally appeared in the Mogul language over the audience chamber of the king of Delhi. As it happens, Prout's own anti-plagiarising tactics are themselves plagiarised: he derives them, as he admits, from a French Jesuit who held that Horace's odes were written by a twelfth-century Benedictine monk. Generously enough, however, he acknowledges that some of Moore's 'translations' are very nearly as fine as the originals. The real-life Mahony, if that is not too strong an epithet, finds his fictional equivalent in the literary dilettante Joe Atlee of Charles Lever's novel *Lord Kilgobbin*, whose delight is 'to write Greek versions of a poem that might attach the mark of plagiarism to Tennyson, or show, by a Scandinavian lyric, how the laureate has been poaching from the Norsemen' (chapter 4). With Atlee, an Irish nationalist of sorts, this textual dialogism is turned against the most revered figure of the English literary pantheon.

The poet Béranger's father was a tailor, so Prout informs us, whereas Tom Moore's 'juvenile associations were of a grocer sort' (p. 259) - the reason why his compositions, with their 'mock-turtle pathos', are so highly spiced. This kind of word-play is second nature to Mahony, who likes to pronounce the word 'morale' as 'more ale', claims that 'Jupiter' is a corruption of 'Jew Peter', ruminates on the female root of the name of a fish ('Ann Chovy'), and finds in the Latin *dignitate* an inescapable echo of 'diggin' tatties'. Etymology concerns the exchange-value of words, and one of Mahony's most abiding metaphors is that of exchange-value/commerce/translation, a constant analogising of signs and commodities. This, in its own muted way, is a carnivalesque tactic, deflating the idealist pretensions of the spirit in Swiftian style by stressing its kinship with humdrum material life. It is also an appropriate metaphor (literally: transport, traffic) for one who sells words as commodities on the metropolitan market.

It is no wonder that the materiality of the signifier should have been a popular theoretical doctrine on Grub Street. Both Mahony and Maginn were fascinated by the material circulation of texts, the happenstance of literary transmission and reception. Translation, like the trade between colony and metropolis, involves a sort of unequal exchange, 'the interchange in vocabulary showing at times even a balance in favour of the substitute (language), as happens in the ordinary course of barter on the markets of the world' (p. v). (One

There are some comments on this controversy, and on Prout's part in it, in Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination* (Cork, 1996), pp. 121-6.
Terry Eagleton is reminded that for the poet Mangan the link between commerce and translation could be embarrassingly direct: he occasionally translated on the spot for cash in John O’Daly’s shop in Dublin.12 There can be no exact translation, so Prout maintains: ‘the tradottore differs from the traditore only by a syllable’ (p. 396), ringing a variation on the familiar Irish cognates of tradition, translation and treason. The Irish, one might say, are a kind of translation or mimicry of their colonial masters, but the line between this and political treachery is never well-defined. All translation for Prout is a kind of false etymologising, just as all tradition is a sort of illegitimacy and all meaning contaminated. As he stoically puts it, ‘there is ever a cankerworm in the rose; a dactyl is sure to be mixed up with a spondee in the poetry of life’ (p. 7).

As a cosmopolitan conservative, Prout is in favour of intellectual free trade but commercial protectionism, a universality of the spirit but a nationalism of the economy; and this, one might note, was a fairly unique position in the Ireland of his day, offensive at once to Irish cultural nationalism and British political economy. His translations are a way of ‘promoting the interchange of national commodities’: by translating from the French he has ‘enriched England at the expense of her rival, and engrafted on her literature the choicest products of Gallic culture’, so that the inhabitants of these islands may now whistle his ‘Songs of France’ ‘duty free’, in their native language (pp. 201–2). In translating Homer, Alexander Pope ‘works the mineral ores of Greece with the abundant resources of English capital’ (p. 395). William Maginn writes in his turn of translation as a kind of imperialism, admiring the poet who ‘having explored the mines of foreign intellectual ore, devotes himself to the glorious task of enriching his country’s treasure of words and thoughts – HER LANGUAGE – with the brightest and the rarest gems, the diamonds which his own hands have raked from their native beds, and washed in the streams of Helicon’.13

Maginn approvingly quotes from one of Pope’s letters which argues that ‘A mutual commerce makes poetry flourish; but then poets, like merchants, should repay with something of their own what they have taken from others’.14 Translation, in other words, is at once purchase and sale: by extending your own language with a foreign engraftment, you enrich the translated language too, disclose a depth within it, so that your profit can seem like payment. Dryden, claims Maginn, is right to hold, in his Essay on Dramatic Poesie, that Ben Jonson ‘invades authors like a monarch, and what would be theft in other poets, is only victory in him’. It is a kind of genius which according to Maginn ‘does but assert its own prerogative in rendering the intelligence of past ages tributary to its success’15 – an excellent résumé of anti-plagiarist practice. The

14 Ibid., p. 146.
15 Ibid., p. 132.
problem lies in the undecidable distinction between this form of ‘creative’ bor-
rowing and the petty pilfering of a Moore, who, Maginn believes, says nothing
which has not been said before but does not say it half so well. When does
inspirational influence become plain theft? Perhaps, Maginn considers, genuine
imitation consists in so mixing the gold of the ancients with one’s modern
materials that the difference between them disappears; but how is this not just
to claim that the finest poem is the most deviously derivative, the most cun-
ningly plagiaristic? The anti-Whig conservative in Maginn wishes to enforce a
distinction between authentic and inauthentic which his own metaphors
unwittingly deconstruct.

Mahony, who rambled aimlessly as far as Asia Minor, rejects all provincial-
ism of the mind in the name of exchange, hybridity, cosmopolitan cross-breed-
ing; yet he denounces any economic version of such spiritual laissez-faire as
injurious to the poor and unprotected. Free trade, then, is for him just a cultur-
al trope; but since Mahony, along with Maginn, no doubt as a stout Tory
endorses imperialism as a fact as well as a literary strategy, this would not be
wholly compatible with the economic protectionism he also favours. The dis-
tinction can only be kept in place by insisting on the purely figurative force of
one of its terms (imperialism), which threatens nonetheless to intrude its ‘liter-
al’ meaning and so to undercut the protectionist case. Mahony, in any case, is
like his colleague vehemently opposed to economic laissez-faire: if you’re going
to dismantle protective commercial barriers, why not, he enquires, do away
with the quarantine laws while you’re at it and permit a free trade in plague?

Moore steals supposedly from the French troubadours, but there are built-in
security devices against such expropriation: ‘Unfortunately for such
attempts, the lays of the Norman troubadours, like the Government rope in
the dock-yard at Portsmouth, have in their texture a certain twist by which
they are recognised when they get into the possession of thieves’ (p. 247).
Writers who pillage foreign produce are really smugglers, as opposed to those
who pay the customary duty of acknowledgement. The god Mercury derives
his name from merc or merchandise, and he is also of course, so Prout
reminds us, the god of wit, messages, eloquence, mediation, highways, com-
merce, diplomacy, mobility, secrets, translation, interpretation – and robbers.
(He might have added: borders.) Mahony’s own work is entirely mercurial and
hermetic – though he notes the oddness of this deity of locomotion and rapid-
ity being also the protector of fixtures, milestones, permanence, and – an
unfortunate phrase for a cleric – ‘monumental erections’ (p. 401).

challenging Maginn to a duel over this article.
17 Perhaps another false etymology; the point is evidently controversial.
18 Susan Mitchell describes George Moore as ‘a born literary bandit’ (George Moore
[Dublin, 1916], p. 103).
Maginn also observes that Mercury, said to be the inventor of written characters, was the patron of thieves, and explains this connection mock-pedantically by claiming that Mercury was the prototype of Moses, also associated with letters and in Egyptian eyes a thief. ‘He who could make a pun would pick a pocket’, he quotes Dr Johnson as proclaiming. As a conservative quick-change artist or antiquarian modernist, however, Mahony resolves this apparent conflict of change and conservation in his own person. Like Maginn, he was the best sort of Tory, the Johnsonian variety who believes that Whiggish liberalism will simply injure the poor. O'Connell — the ‘bog-trotter of Derrynane’ — was his predictable bête noire, a man who, so he scathingly remarks, never put a Latin hexameter together in his life. In his late reports from Italy for Dickens's *Daily News*, in which the land of Sardinia figures as a thinly veiled allegory of Ireland, O'Connell appears as Dandelone, the champion of 'immaculate emancipation', and Thomas Moore as Thomaso il Moro. The Whigs are 'Perukes', and the Irish Famine the great chestnut rot. But Mahony's anti-O'Connellite animus is less red-neck reaction than the old canard that the Liberator was ripping off the poor.

Indeed in his own tongue-in-cheek or tongue-in-glass way, Mahony was a kind of nationalist. His ‘Poetical Epistle from Father Prout to Boa’ admires Dickens's concern for the poor but urges him also to ‘Think of the poor / On t’other shore, / Poor who, unheeded, perish, / By squires despoiled, by “patriots” gull’d, / I mean the starving Irish’. His ‘Apology for Lent’ commends the ‘Celtic and Eastern races’ (which mysteriously includes Greeks, Arabs and Irish) for the lightness of their diet, in contrast to the Teutonic craving for heavy meat, or the ‘gross, carcase-eating propensities of John Bull’ (p. 16). ‘We are in truth a most abstemious race’ (p. 25), he comments without twitching an eyebrow, casually poking his finger through an anti-Irish stereotype. When he adds later that the Irish are ‘the most ill-fed people on the face of the globe’ (p. 25), one registers the political animus lurking behind the bland iconoclasm. It is curious, Prout reflects, that no monument exists to that demographic hero Sir Walter Raleigh, who by importing the potato has fed more families and provided a greater impulse to procreation than any other benefactor of humanity.

What Prout is up to in this essay, in fact, is a kind of dietary theory of history, one centred like so much from Swift to Samuel Beckett on the body, and

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20 See, for Mahony’s correspondence from Rome and Paris, *The Final Reliques of Father Prout*. Like James Joyce, Mahony when abroad was interested in what was afoot in Ireland, and was proud of the tombs of the fled earls O'Donnell and O'Neill in Rome, which John Hogan took it upon himself to repair.
21 *Final Reliques*, p. 234. If one is to judge by Dickens's satirical portrait in *Bleak House* of Mrs Jellyby, busy with overseas charity but careless of want at home, he would not perhaps have responded to this appeal with wholehearted enthusiasm.
22 As opposed to the tobacco theory of history expounded in 'A Tavern in the Town', in James Stephens's *Here Are Ladies* (London, 1913). Stephens speculates that our ancestors’
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the starving body at that. Ancient Rome having ‘burst of its own plethory’, it was fasting which, in a kind of culinary version of the Freudian doctrine of sexual sublimation, ‘originated civilisation and commerce’. This theory of the rise of an ascetic anti-materialism is, like Freud’s, a thoroughly materialist one. ‘In the progress of maritime industry along the shores of southern, and subsequently northern Europe’, Prout maintains, ‘we find a love for freedom to grow up with a fondness for fish’ (p. 20). Indeed it is Lent, of all things, which cements the union between Britain and Ireland, since if fasting were abolished in Ireland the natives would eat rather than export their meat, and Repeal of the union would quickly follow. Conversely, were Lent to be revived in England, the consequent fall in the price of cattle and the flourishing of the fishing industry would ‘eventually harmonise the jarring interests of agriculture and manufacturing industry’ (p. 24). Mahony adds for good measure a few notes on the pig-based parallel between the Irish and the Israelites: in both cultures the pig is a sacred object, and the mass export of the creatures from Ireland resembles nothing quite so much as the rush to the sea of the Gadarene swine. Shortly after these musings, Prout expires on Shrove Tuesday, having consumed a particularly indigestible pancake.

Prout describes British rule in Ireland as ‘oppressive’, and is not slow to sing the praises of Irish history. In ‘A Plea for Pilgrimages’, he lectures Sir Walter Scott, who has come to kiss the Blarney stone, on that object’s venerable pedigree. It was, so he claims, brought to Cork by the Phoenicians, who cleared the pillars of Hercules and landed with it in the Cove of Cork. (Carthage, he informs us, is ‘Tarshish’ in Hebrew, which means ‘valuable stone’.) The Blarney stone beggars all rivals: ‘the long-sought lapis philosophorum, compared with this jewel, dwindles into insignificance’ (p. 50), along with the Luxor obelisk, the treaty-stone of Limerick and the Elgin marbles. Without the eloquence and ‘splendid effrontery’ which it affords, how, he asks, could Dan O’Connell have come to con the world? But Irish history extends back still further: the Nile was so named after the tribe of O’Neils, its aboriginal inhabitants, who threw up a few pyramids before they set sail for Ireland. The poet Richard Milliken’s ‘The Groves of Blarney’, so Prout has ascertained through his researches, was originally an ancient Greek lyric, and the industrious cleric has compared Greek, Latin, Norman-French and Irish manuscript versions of the poem, all of which, apart from the Irish, he duly gives us, while rejecting as spurious the Arabic, Armenian and Chaldaic fragments which survive. Moreover, since it

lack of pockets, and consequently of the ability to carry around tobacco, was responsible for their diverting their energies into wars, revolutions and the like. He also reflects that what is unique to the human animal is brewing and shaving. There is much of Mahony’s pokerfaced mock-erudition in Stephens’s soberly expounded metaphysical fantasies.

W.J. McCormack has some illuminating comments on the political subtext of Milliken’s poem in The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing (Derry, 1991), vol. i, p. 1102. ‘Groves’, he
was the Irish monks of Bobbio who counselled Dante not to write his *Divine Comedy* in Latin, the Irish can take credit for the whole of Italian literature. Mahony’s antiquarianism is of course a send-up, but his backward glance is also genuine conservative nostalgia. Is the homesickness of ‘The Bells of Shandon’, with its ritual denigration of foreign exotica in favour of provincial Cork, straight, tongue-in-cheek or poised more likely at some undecidable in-between? Bakhtinian revellers like Mahony and Maginn were in one sense free cosmopolitan spirits, heretically at odds with a chauvinist, parochial culture, their writing shamelessly mongrelised and macaronic in a way which constitutes a silent rebuke to the linguistic purism of a narrowly conceived Irish nationalism. But like the great nationless modernists who were to follow them, they paid the price of this deracination too, forced to cobble together styles, forms and idioms in the absence of a vigorous set of native English-language traditions. They are drudges, parodists and *bricoleurs* adrift between cultures, shuttling from one (sometimes) invented tongue to another, gifted wastrels who squander their extraordinary philological talents on poems in praise of port, wicked burlesques of Wordsworth and a pathology of punning.

This inbred, fragmentary form of writing then gives off all the resonance of a directionless, self-involved colonial society, not least in its virulent literary sectarianism. Though Prout loftily proclaims that there is no place for religious or political differences in the realm of Parnassus, he also characterises the *Edinburgh Review* as ‘that rickety go-cart of drivelling dotage’ (p. 163), and brutally traduces a friend in print. He also writes that Attila king of the Huns, and Leigh Hunt king of the Cockneys, have both spread ‘havoc and consternation’ in Italy (p. 318). William Maginn almost lost his life for writing a vicious review, called Sheridan a ‘buffoon’ and Macaulay a quack and moral beggar. As with the great modernists, one needs to recall the pains of exile as well as the pleasures of the polyglottic, the oppressive as well as emancipatory aspect of colonial identities which are unstable, self-fashioning, intertextual. Mahony, like Wilde, died as a lonely expatriate in Paris. He was a potentially major writer striving very hard to become a minor one, and brilliantly succeeded.

suggests, may be a family name. Mahony’s father, a prosperous wool merchant, moved his factory to Blarney from Cork. Prout himself plans a university of Blarney, which would combine ‘cultivated fun and the genial development of national acuteness’ (p. 65).

24 There is apparently no evidence for this claim.

25 The disastrous effects of taking the poem entirely straight are betrayed in the earnest academicist comments of Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren in their *Understanding Poetry* (New York, 1938), pp. 133–6. I am grateful to Dr Tadhg Foley for this reference.

26 The protagonist of Graham Greene’s *Travels with my Aunt* declares that he would have been content to be a poet in a quite humble station, like ‘an English Mahony’.
The Romantic artist was primarily concerned with his own liberty – his freedom to express his genius, as much as his emancipation from the dictates of academies and the whims of patrons. Paradoxically, however, he achieved this less frequently in representations of subjects with political meanings than in those which had none – a scene of his own choice from literature or history, a portrait, a landscape or even a still-life … and his obsession with his own work and personality and uniqueness was eventually to drive him to take refuge in the doctrine of l'art pour l'art.²

The democratization of artistic vision thus had the result of distancing the artist further from society; accentuating the difference between those who, in Edward Said's words, had permission to narrate, and those who were increasingly deprived of the right to represent themselves, or to speak in their own voice.³

It is in the context of bridging this gulf, of preventing a fatal dissociation of artistic and political liberty, that the utopian prospect presented itself to the romantic imagination of the artist as outcast, or, conversely, of the dispossessed themselves acquiring the tools of the trade, and achieving artistic expression. In 1824, two remarkable works were published by Irish writers which addressed different variations on these themes, Lady Morgan's *The Life and Times of Salvator Rosa* and Thomas Moore's *Memoirs of Captain Rock*. In the former, the artist turns bandit; in the latter, the bandit becomes an artist. The publication of both works incurred considerable political risks, drawing opprobrium from the dominant political factions of the day, but in the end they undermine their imaginary transgressions, displacing the voices that lent them their radical appeal.

Lady Morgan's romantic biography of Salvator Rosa followed the succès de scandale of her incendiary two-volume work on Italy, published in 1821. This latter work, which indicted the nepotism and depravity of the petty absolutist regimes in Italy, also condemned the corruption of the British government which contrived to suppress the spirit of liberty in Italy. It was this attack on British foreign policy which drew the wrath of reviewers in leading conservative organs such as the *Edinburgh Magazine*, leading to equally vehement replies from the author. The book was also banned by both the papal and Austrian authorities, with copies being seized and burned in Turin, and in 1824, the Emperor took the grand step of issuing a decree which prohibited Lady Morgan from visiting his dominions.⁴ When, in her biography of Salvator, the

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3 For a sustained analysis of the silencing, and silences, of subaltern cultures, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (London, 1988).
turbulent artist is depicted as going over to the side of banditti and rebels in their struggles against injustice, it is difficult not to suspect that her hero is taking on many of the traits ascribed to romantic outcasts in her own Irish novels. Salvator, and the banditti he fell in with, were a thorn in the side of the Italian authorities, but Lady Morgan never omits an opportunity to draw analogies between Ireland and Italy, comparing Salvator to Ossian and even to O'Carolan, the last of the Irish bards, in the courtesy and respect they both received from liberal patrons.

Yet, as Hugh Honour observed, the logic of this romantic cult of banditti is that the sympathies of the writer lie ultimately with the artist rather than with the low life in which he sought refuge. Commenting on the bold imagination and 'deep sagacious study of Nature' evident in Salvator's early work, Lady Morgan writes that:

His 'Robber Chief' was always distinguishable from the ruffians he led, less by his habits than by those distinctions which high breeding on the human, as on the brute subject, rarely fails to impress ... A splendid illustration of this remark lies before the author, as she writes, in an etching of Salvator's. It is a single figure, of a Captain of Banditti. He is alone, near a rock; his hair floating wildly on the wind, his countenance marked by that deep melancholy, that pensive and meditative sadness, which the turbulent remorse of vulgar minds never produces.

The cost of elevating the bandit to the solitary status of the artist is to erase entirely the social milieu which gave popular legitimacy to brigandage, and, indeed, to eliminate the collective sense of purpose of the bandits themselves. As Ranajit Guha explains, this attempt to divest peasant insurgency of that 'praxis called rebellion' lends itself to 'metaphors assimilating peasant revolts to natural phenomena: they break out like thunder storms, heave like earthquakes, spread like wildfires, infect like epidemics. In other words, when the proverbial clod of earth turns, this is a matter to be explained in terms of natural history'. Even when human explanations are advanced, they invariably tend to assume 'an identity of nature and culture, a hall-mark, presumably of a very low state of civilization' attained by the insurgents.

5 Lady Morgan, *The Life and Times of Salvator Rosa*, vol. ii (London, 1824), p. 33. The thinly veiled comparison between Ireland and Naples pervades the work: 'In the year 1647, the kingdom of Naples exhibited a spectacle of rapacity and misrule in government, and of misery in the people, which even unhappy Ireland, in her worst days, has perhaps never surpassed' (vol. i, p. 265). See also vol. i, p. 391, and vol. ii, p. 147.

6 Ibid., vol. i, pp. 130-1.

7 Ranajit Guha, 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency,' in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (eds), *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York, 1988), p. 46. This univer-
From this point of view, the choice of the sobriquet ‘Captain Rock’ for the most notorious insurgent movement in nineteenth-century Ireland seems ill-advised, but as if with this in mind, the fictive narrator of Thomas Moore’s *Memoirs of Captain Rock* moves quickly to correct any misunderstanding of the group’s political and ideological leanings:

With respect to the origin of the family name, ROCK, antiquarians and etymologists are a good deal puzzled. An idea exists in certain quarters that the letters of which it is composed are merely initials, and contain a prophetic announcement of the high destiny that awaits, at sometime or other, that celebrated gentleman, Mr Roger O’Connor, being, as they fill up the initials, the following awful words, – R o g e r O C o n n o r, K i n g! Others perceive in the name an indication of the design of the Papists to establish their own religion in Ireland, through the instrumentality of Captain ROCK, and quote in support of this conjecture the sacred text – ‘On this Rock I will build my church’.

For good measure, another apocryphal explanation is thrown in, connecting the movement to the alleged Semitic or Phoenician origins of the Irish through the Stone of Jacob which was brought to Ireland from Egypt before the time of Moses. This is now, we are told, under the coronation chair in Westminster Abbey, but its Irish provenance cannot be doubted since ‘it is said to make a remarkable noise when any of the true descendants of Milesius sit upon it’! Notwithstanding the irreverent and whimsical tone, Moore’s Captain Rock has run together in his own name three of the forces designed to strike fear in the heart of the Protestant Ascendancy: the Catholic cause in its most sectarian and millenarian forms; republicanism, of the maverick variety associated with the eccentric Roger O’Connor, brother of the leading United Irishman, Arthur, but also in the idiosyncratic form in which it percolated through popular culture; and finally, at a more recondite level, the Gaelic tradition in its distinctively anti-colonial Phoenician variant, associated also with salizing thrust, removing all specific consideration of time and place, is, no doubt, that which led Sir Joshua Reynolds to praise the congruence between man and nature in Salvator’s landscapes: ‘What is most to be admired in him is the perfect correspondence which he observed between the subjects which he chose and his manner of treating them. Everything is of a piece: his Rocks, Trees, Sky, even to his handling, have the same rude and wild character which animates his figures’ (‘Discourse V’, *Discourses on Art* [London, n.d.], p. 62).

8 [Thomas Moore], *Memoirs of Captain Rock, the Celebrated Irish Chieftain, with Some Account of his Ancestors, Written by Himself* (London, 1824), p. 6. Subsequent references parenthetically in text.
leader Catholic propagandists and, of course, with Roger O’Connor’s own deranged foray into antiquarianism, *The Chronicles of En*, published in 1822.

In terms of its immediate causes, the Rockite movement which swept Munster in the early 1820s was motivated by economic issues having to do, firstly, with the agricultural crisis precipitated by the ending of the Napoleonic wars, and, secondly, with perceived injustices in the exaction of tithes for the Protestant church. Religious grievances gained in intensity due to the refusal to grant Catholic emancipation as a trade-off for the Union, but acquired a lethal millenarian dimension as a result of the widespread influence of what came to be known as Pastorini’s prophecies following the calamitous famine and typhus epidemic of 1817. The notorious eighth chapter of Pastorini’s prophecies, which predicted an apocalyptic destruction of the Protestant Ascendancy by 1825, was so dirtied by reading, presumably at the hands of menials, in one inn visited by a traveller that it was scarcely legible, and through hand-bills, ballads and other ephemeral matter, the prophecies circulated throughout Munster in tandem with the upsurge in Rockite activity.

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9 According to Joseph Lee, the immediate cause of the unrest of 1821-3 was a wave of evictions on the Courtney estate in Limerick, which occurred against a backdrop of potato crop failure and 25 to 30 per cent falls in grain prices (‘The Ribbonmen’, in T. Desmond Williams [ed.], *Secret Societies in Ireland* [Dublin, 1973], p. 27). Daniel O’Connell also mentions the enforcement of the practice of economic distrain, which prevented the peasantry from having access to their own subsistence crops such as the potato. (See Thomas Moore’s report of his conversation with O’Connell, 11 August 1823 in *The Journal of Thomas Moore*, ed. Wilfred S. Dowden, vol. ii [Newark, 1984], p. 67.)

10 The so-called Pastorini prophecies were a turgid series of commentaries on the Book of Revelation, entitled *The General History of the Christian Church from her Birth to her Final Triumphant State in Heaven, Chiefly Deduced from the Apocalypse of St John the Apostle*. They were written by the Catholic bishop, Charles Waimesley (1722-97), vicar apostolic for the western district of England, under the pen-name ‘Signor Pastorini’, and first published in 1771. They predicted that Protestants would be wiped out in 1825, thus heralding the Second Coming. Pastorini’s prophecies appeared in a Dublin edition as early as 1790, and were blamed by Richard Musgrave for stoking the embers that ignited in the 1798 rebellion. They acquired a new lease of life during the agricultural slump which followed the Napoleonic wars, attaining almost fever pitch in the years leading up to 1825 in Ireland. See James S. Donnelly, Jr., ‘Propagating the Cause of the United Irishmen’, *Studies*, lxxix, 273 (1980), and ‘Pastorini and Captain Rock: Millenarianism and Sectarianism in the Rockite Movement of 1821-4’, in Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly, Jr. (eds), *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest 1780-1914* (Dublin, 1983).

11 The date of Armageddon for the Protestant population varied from 1821 to 1825, but, in a rebuke to those sceptics who doubted the accuracy of the prophecies after they were found wanting in 1825, Charlotte Elizabeth, in her proselytizing novel *The Rockite* [1832], warned that the end was indeed nigh, for the real day of reckoning was rather in 1829: ‘It is worthy of remark, that among the predictions of the noted Pastorini, he fixed the 14th day of April, 1829, for the first act towards the destruction of Protestantism. Let those who remember that on the 13th of April, 1839, the royal assent was given to the eventful Bill [i.e. Catholic Emancipation], say what inducement the votaries of Pastorini
The unrest reached proportions where it was declared by the authorities to be 'nothing short of rebellion', and an indication of the reprisals visited upon the insurgents may be deduced from the grim proceedings of one trial in February, 1823, in which thirty-six capital convictions were handed down, more than one in ten of the total number committed for trial.12

This was the political climate in Ireland when Thomas Moore returned in July 1823 on the visit that prompted his writing of the fictive Memoirs of Captain Rock. As soon as he arrived in Dublin, Moore called upon Lady Morgan whom, he noted, 'is just about to publish a life of Salvator Rosa'.13

Passing through Kerry en route to Killarney a few days later, Moore muses on Lord Bellamont's description of the Kerry landscape that might have come straight from Lady Morgan's life of Salvator: 'All acclivity and declivity, without the intervention of a single horizontal plane; the mountains all rock, and the men all savages'. That Moore's thoughts were preoccupied with a different kind of rock formation is clear from a following sentence where he mentions his discovery that the name of Captain Rock was reputed to be derived from Roger O'Connor's initials. Subsequent journal entries describing his stay at Killarney, and the scenic splendours of the renowned lakes, are punctuated by ruminations on the Rockite movement, which show a determination on his part to understand the sources of their grievances, and a questioning of the existing colonial stereotypes of agrarian insurgency. Visiting Ross Island and Inisfallen on the Lakes, he notes that 'Never was anything more beautiful', but instead of being entranced by nature, his attention is directed at 'the peasants that live on the opposite bank' who come over with fruit when strangers appear, 'their appearance, with their infants, stepping from rock to rock, across the cascade, highly picturesque'. Moore then reflects on the small acts of hospitality practised by even the poorest cottiers, which leads him to observe that the Rockite movement, instead of being involved in mindless destruction, may operate as a cohesive force in their localities, attempting to control inter-communal violence such as faction fights at fairs.14

This impression is reinforced when he meets O'Connell, who, responding to his enquiry 'on the state of intellect and education among the lower orders, said they were full of intelligence'. O'Connell recounted the instance of a recent trial in which he defended a common gardener named Hickey, 'a sort of

14 [Journal Entry], 8 August 1823; ibid., p. 665. For the important integrative effects of the Rockite movement in forging solidarity among the Catholic population on the eve of the Catholic Emancipation campaign, see the 'Introduction', in Clark and Donnelly, Irish Peasants, pp. 33-4.
Captain Rock’ who ‘always wore feathers to distinguish him’. When O’Connell was attempting to shake the credibility of the young boy who was the main witness against him, Hickey ‘asked him not to persevere, as it was useless, and his mind was made up to suffer’. By the end of August, Moore decided to interrupt the life of Richard Brinsley Sheridan which he was working on, and embarked on background reading for a short book on Ireland. By early October this had taken shape as the memoirs of the fictive Captain Rock, and the work was published in April of the following year. Its publication, as Moore was pleased to observe, created a sensation, the first edition of the work selling out on the day of publication. The book went into five editions in 1824, and spawned a whole genre of ‘Captain Rock’ memoirs, including a run of a weekly newspaper allegedly published by the Captain in London;^5 Roger O’Connor’s own Letters to his Majesty, King George the Fourth, by Captain Rock (1827);^6 another account detailing the Captain’s visit to Rome,^7 and, not unexpectedly, a vehement counter-offensive from the Protestant side, Mortimer O’Sullivan’s Captain Rock Detected: or, the Origin and Character of the Recent Disturbances, and the Causes, both Moral and Political, of the Present Alarming Condition of the South and West of Ireland, Fully and Fairly Considered and Exposed: by a Munster Farmer (1824).

In his classic study of ‘The Prose of Counter Insurgency’, Ranajit Guha notes that, almost without exception, primary or contemporary documentation concerning agrarian insurgency is official in character:

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\text{Even when it incorporated statements emanating from ‘the other side’, from the insurgents or their allies for instance, as it often did by way of direct or indirect reporting in the body of official correspondence or even more characteristically as enclosures to the latter, this was done only as a part of an argument prompted by administrative concern.}^{18}
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15 Captain Rock in London, or the Chieftain's Weekly Gazette ran from 1825 to 1827, as a propaganda sheet for the Catholic cause, purporting to continue the Captain's memoirs, attacking leading anti-Catholic propagandists such as Robert Southey. It was edited, and a large part of it written, by the Wexford-born writer and journalist, Michael J. Whitty, whose Tales of Irish Life, 2 vols (1824), was illustrated by Cruikshank, and subsequently translated into German. Annual collections of Captain Rock in London were also published in book form.

16 For a discussion of O'Connor, in keeping with the tone of his own forays into print, see Joep Leerssen, Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Imagination of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century (Cork, 1996), pp. 82-5. O'Connor's work is discussed in the context of a perceptive appraisal of Moore's The Memoirs of Captain Rock.


Moore's *Captain Rock* parodies this containment exercise, for the 'memoirs', in typical gothic fashion, fall into the hands of an evangelical Protestant, who is sent to Ireland to raise 'that unfortunate race from the darkness'. This framing narrative attempts to re-assert its authority at the end by recounting how the Captain was eventually arrested and deported in an old green coat worn by no less than Napper Tandy, but in fact the Captain himself has the last word in the form of letter from Cobh, which looks forward to a prosperous future for 'the ROCK dynasty' (p. 375) on account of continual government oppression.

The difficulties in establishing a framing narrative, ordering the disparate elements in a story or picture and subjecting them to a unified point of view, presented itself not simply as an aesthetic difficulty but as an intractable political problem for the authorities of the day. In his inquiry into *Local Disturbances in Ireland*, published in 1836, the eminently rational George Cornewall Lewis makes an observation which is worth quoting at length:

> when men's interests impel them to use violent and illegal means, and to form secret combinations, in order to gain certain ends, we are not to suppose that those ends are always directly conceived, or that the purposes of the Whiteboy association are as clearly defined, for example, as those of a geological or an astronomical society. Men are often concerned in the working of a system, nay, they may even contribute to its development, without presenting clearly to their minds the objects at which they are aiming, or the rules by which they are guided. The happy combinations of genius, accompanied with an obscure consciousness of the end in view, have produced some of the most perfect creations of art and poetry. If Homer and Shakspeare [sic] could be raised from the dead as they were in life, they would probably give but an imperfect idea of the processes by which they arrived at the perfection of epic and dramatic poetry. How much less are we to expect from an illiterate Whiteboy, that he should be able to express the ends of his association in a neat and precise formula, that he should be able to define with logical accuracy the objects of an union which he had joined only from a vague instinct of self-preservation.

19 According to Patrick O'Sullivan the instability of the narration is a shortcoming in the work: 'Throughout the book there are problems of tone. Often in the main text, it is not clear whether Moore speaks with his own voice, as it were, or in the character of Captain Rock. And in the footnotes it is not clear whether it is Moore, Rock or the Missionary editor who speaks' ('A Literary Difficulty in Explaining Ireland: Tom Moore and Captain Rock, 1824', in Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley (eds), *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1939* [Savage, MD, 1989], p. 244). It could be argued, however, that such oscillation in the narrative voice(s) is precisely the 'literary difficulty' in explaining Ireland, or subjecting it to one authoritative point of view.

In this extraordinary statement, Lewis is suggesting in effect that such coherence as an agrarian society possesses is not unlike that to be found in a work of art – a kind of emergent unity held in place by the process of creating the work, rather than the clarity and self-consciousness of 'identity', personal or national, promulgated by the enlightenment. But when this process is confounded, and the unity is unresolved or incomplete, the dynamics of identity remain inscrutable. This is not to say that there is no ordering intelligence at work: the difficulty is that it does not yield itself up to a detached observer, or to external forms of control. That the problem ultimately lies with the spectator, rather than those involved in the process, is clear from Lewis's admonition that 'we must ... guard against an error, not infrequently committed, of attributing to insurgents a fixed design'. It is we who are unable to 'fix the design': it is in the insurgent's interest not to make it so transparent that it can be read off at will, particularly for the purposes of government surveillance or counter-insurgency.

The Agitated Eye: Art and Agrarian Unrest

For an example of a work in which these issues are contested at both an aesthetic and political level, we can turn to Daniel Maclise's remarkable painting *The Installation of Captain Rock*, first exhibited at the Royal Academy to uncomprehending reviews in 1834 (see Plate 1). Its departure from Salvator-type conventions of isolated banditti deriving their mandate from their rugged environment is clear from the staging of the installation in a ruined abbey, a material embodiment of history in the Irish popular imagination. This setting – soon to become a trope in nationalist iconography – derives perhaps from the opening scene of Moore's *Captain Rock* where the narrator,...

21 The detached observer need not, of course, be external: in the form of an 'impartial spectator', it recommended itself to Adam Smith as a model for a higher, inner self which was in a position to command the flux of passions and bodily appetites. The equivalent of this in an agrarian organization was the alleged existence of a ringleader, usually from a superior, educated social background, manipulating the impressionable lower orders behind the scenes. Patrick O'Sullivan identifies this as the trope of 'the man in the gig' which lent itself to the more paranoid accounts of agrarian or urban unrest given by the ruling elites. It surfaces in Ireland in the submission of Major George Warburton to the Parliamentary committee on the Rockite disturbances established in 1824, which reported 'a person sent from Dublin, who came in a gig from Limerick' to stir up what could possibly be described as the first 'rock gig' in Ireland. ('A Literary Difficulty in Explaining Ireland', p. 235).

22 A midnight ruin also provides the setting for 'The Ruin: A Fragment', a narrative within a narrative contained in Mortimer O'Sullivan's *Captain Rock Detected* – though, on this occasion, it is presented in a more sinister, sectarian light.
under the influence of 'some genial “Mountain dew”', sallies forth at midnight to visit 'the ruins of a celebrated abbey, which stand, picturesquely enough, on the banks of a river'. As he approaches the abbey 'a dark cloud happened to flit over the moon' and obscure the abbey, but passing through 'its great portal':

[I] found myself all at once, to my astonishment and horror (the moon at that moment breaking out of a cloud) in the midst of some hundreds of awful looking persons – all arrayed in white shirts, and ranged in silent order on each side to receive me! This sight sobered me completely – I was ready to sink with terror – when a voice, which I could observe, proceed from a tall man with a plume of white feathers in his hat, said, sternly, 'Pass on' ... . [It] was not long before I learned, from his own lips, that I actually stood in the presence of the great CAPTAIN ROCK.  

That the ruins of an abbey in this context do not refer to the wear and tear of time in the diffuse, metaphysical sense of some romantic poetry, but to actual historical events, is perceived by the reviewer of the painting in *Fraser's Magazine*, who writes under the pseudonym 'Morgan Rattler': 'The scene is laid in a ruined abbey – a very common sight in the south of Ireland, thanks to the old Fitzgeralds, and Butlers, and the more recent labours of Cromwell and Ireton'.

Raising the spectre of Cromwell brings together the twin legacies of the Protestant Reformation and colonial rule in Irish history, and infuses the Rockite movement, as depicted in the painting, with overt political and religious leanings, transforming it into a proto-nationalist organization. The religious overtones are evident in the setting itself, particularly in the grim reaper-like figure of the monk, holding a crucifix, who comes to officiate at the wake of the dead insurgent leader. Related to both colonial and religious concerns is the demotic hedge schoolmaster, haranguing the assembly with a newspaper, or some other form of printed matter, protruding from his pocket. He is being listened to with reverential awe by an impressionable neophyte who is carrying some books, and if we revert to Moore's *Captain Rock*, it is likely that these edi-

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23 Moore, *Memoirs of Captain Rock*, pp. xi-xii. As a footnote indicates, the head-dress refers to 'Hickey, a pseudo Captain Rock who was hanged last Summer at Cork, [and who] appears to have generally worn feathers on his nightly expeditions' (p. xii) – information derived, as we have noted above, from Moore’s conversation with Daniel O’Connell on his visit to Kerry (see *Journal*, 11 August 1823, p. 667).
24 'Morgan Rattler', 'Some Passages on a Visit to the Exhibition of the Royal Academy', *Fraser's Magazine*, x, no. 55 (July 1834), p. 118. Subsequent references parenthetically in text.
Plate 1 Daniel Maclise, The Installation of Captain Rock
fying texts include Pastorini's Prophecies and, equally ominous for the political authorities, Paddy's Resource, the popular ballad collection of the United Irishmen. As if with this subversive vignette in mind, James Donnelly notes in relation to the diffusion of seditious doctrines in the early nineteenth century:

To the circulation of millenarian ideas in oral form schoolmasters made a major contribution. Schoolmasters, in fact, played an important role in the Rockite movement, as they did in other popular political and agrarian agitations before and after 1800. Many rural schoolmasters as a matter of course carried 'articles', the cant term for the Whiteboy oath and regulations, and presumably those of Captain Rock, which they used to enlist recruits when the occasion arose ... Schoolmasters were also invariably well versed in the millenarian prophecies attributed to Colum Cille and Pastorini.

As Moore's reference to Paddy's Resource as a set-text in hedge schools indicates, the schoolmaster was also a conduit of popular republicanism. This is elaborated by Thomas Crofton Croker in his Researches in the South of Ireland, written during the upsurge of Rockite activity in the early 1820s:

In an evening assembly of village statesmen he [the schoolmaster] holds the most distinguished place, from his historical information, pompous eloquence, and classical erudition. His principles verge closely indeed on the broadest republicanism; he delivers warm descriptions of the Grecian and Roman commonwealths; the ardent spirit of freedom and general equality in former days - and then comes down to his own country, which is always the ultimate political subject of discussion.

25 With evident relish, the Captain lists some of the improving literature which had helped to form his impressionable mind, in the absence of formal schooling due to discrimination against Catholics: 'In History, - Annals of Irish Rogues and Rapparees. In Biography, - Memoirs of Jack the Batchelor, a notorious smuggler, and of Freeney, a celebrated highwayman. In Theology, - Pastorini's Prophecies, and the Miracles of Prince Hohenloe. In Poetry, - Ovid's Art of Love, and Paddy's Resource. In Romance-reading, - Don Belianis of Greece, Moll Flanders. &c.&. ' (pp. 187-8). So far from being a mischievous product of Moore's imagination to alarm the authorities, this list would seem to have been derived from Hely Dutton's Survey of Clare (Dublin, 1808) where, among the reading books actually used in the 'schools', are (in Dutton's own description) ' - Irish Rogues and Rapparees. - Freney, a notorious robber, teaching them the most dangerous mode of robbing. - the most celebrated pirates. - Jack the Bachelor, a noted smuggler. - Fair Rosamund and Jane Shore, two prostitutes ... - Ovid's Art of Love. - History of Witches and Apparitions. - The Devil and Doctor Faustus. - Moll Flanders - highly edifying, no doubt.' (cited in P.J. Dowling, The Hedge Schools of Ireland [Cork, 1968], pp. 64-5).

26 James Donnelly, Jr., 'Propagating the Cause of the United Irishmen', p. 120.
We are told, then, in a passage that must surely be a trial run for one of the Citizen’s diatribes in the Cyclops chapter of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, that the demagogue:

Praises the Milesians – curses ‘the betrayer Dermod’ – abuses ‘the Saxon strangers’ – lauds Brien [sic] Boru – utters one sweeping invective against the Danes, Henry VIII., Elizabeth, Cromwell, ‘The Bloody’ William ‘of the Boyne,’ and Anne; he denies the legality of the criminal code; deprecates and disclaims the Union; dwells with enthusiasm on the memories of Curran, Grattan, ‘Lord Edward,’ and young Emmet; insists on Catholic emancipation; attacks the Peellers, horse and foot; protests against tithes, and threatens a separation of the United Kingdoms.

Crofton Croker adds that the schoolmasters’ political sentiments are not confined to ‘mere declamation’ but pass into print ‘in the shape of popular ballads’, and into political action through his planning of ‘the nocturnal operations of the disaffected’, writing their threatening proclamations with names ‘studiously mis-spelled and pompously signed’ such as ‘Captain Moonlight’ and ‘General Rock’.

The unresolved legacy of Lord Edward, Emmet and 1798 is discernible in the left background of the painting where a green shirited croppy is retrieving pikes, not from the proverbial resting place of the thatch, but from the Ivy of the ruins above the schoolmaster’s head – itself an ironic comment on the secretion of history in the antiquities which scar the Irish landscape. In the left foreground, a number of the brotherhood make a pledge and join hands over the table in a manner reminiscent of the Swiss patriots in Fuseli’s famous painting, the *Oath on the Rutili* (plates 2, 3 and 4) and, as if to complete the allusion to Fuseli’s work, the new Captain Rock in the centre of the picture is cast in the image of its central heroic figure.

27 Thomas Crofton Croker, *Researches in the South of Ireland, Illustrative of the Scenery, Architectural Remains, and the Manners and Superstitions of the Peasantry* (London, 1824), p. 328. It is likely that Maclise was acquainted with this book, as he illustrated other work by Crofton Croker, and drew a portrait of him.

28 The promotion of ‘Captain’ Rock to ‘General’ is also the distinguishing feature of the account of the leader who addresses the nocturnal gathering of Rockites in Mortimer O’Sullivan’s *Captain Rock Detected*.

29 That Captain Rock brought this legacy with him to London is evident from Moore’s lifelong sympathies with the United Irishman, dating from his early friendship with Emmet in Trinity College, Dublin. These sentiments found expression in his various homages to Emmet and Sarah Curran, in his later *The Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* (1831), and *The History of Ireland* (1858) (for Moore and the United Irishmen, see Mary Helen Thuente, *The Harp Re-Strung: The United Irishmen and the Rise of Literary Nationalism* [Syracuse, 1994], chap. 6). Michael J. Whitty, the editor of *Captain Rock in London*, also printed eulogies to Wolfe Tone in the publication, and wrote a biography of Emmet.
Plate 2 Johann Fuseli, The Oath on the Rutli
Plate 3 Daniel Maclise, The Installation of Captain Rock (detail)
Plate 4  Daniel Maclise, The Installation of Captain Rock (detail)
This scene is described in the *Tipperary Tales*, which, according to the Royal Academy catalogue, provided MacUse with the inspiration for the work:

Amid the tears and lamentations of women, Delaney advanced to the tomb on which the murdered man was laid, and placing his right hand upon the body, swore to revenge his death. Ere his solemn vow was thrice repeated, a hunchback mendicant had elevated himself upon the shoulders of one of the heterogeneous assembly, and with the old milking cap worn by the former leader of the faction, crowned Delaney as 'Captain Rock', muttering 'Upon this Rock I will build my church'.

It was this endowment of what were perceived as Irish rabble with the dignity and noble bearing of classical heroes in a burlesque, sacrilegious setting which caused most offence to the reviewer in *Fraser's Magazine*, just as it did to Crofton Croker in his character sketch of the hedge schoolmaster. It was understandable, the reviewer in *Fraser's* wrote, that Madise wished to make a 'perfectly Irish picture', yet, he adds, 'I deeply regret that [he] ... did not change the VENUE', and 'transfer the scene to some other country and some other age ... [and] persons in whom we might acknowledge some sympathy':

Might not some such passage as is here represented be imagined in the history of Spartacus, that immortal slave and rebel? Might we not have him in the ruins of some ancient temple, vowing vengeance against imperious Rome and the Roman name, over the body of some fellow-slave, done to death by the cruelty of his Patrician master, and surrounded by the multitude of slaves, male and female, belonging to some great household? (p. 117)

The breach of the protocols of history painting was not just in the contemporary setting, but in the profusion of local details and ribald behaviour conventionally associated with representations of low life in Dutch or Flemish

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30 Cited in W.J. O'Driscoll, *A Memoir of Daniel Macfise, RA* (London, 1871) p. 50. There is a remarkably similar scene in Charlotte Elizabeth's *The Rockite* (1832), which also features a roofless ruin, a corpse on a bier, a table around which gang members are playing cards, drinking whiskey from a broken can, and repairing muskets, while 'a solitary dark looking man turned over a large heap of soiled newspapers; selecting and marking such paragraphs as he deemed calculated to excite the bitter feelings of rebel hostility against the government in church and state' (pp. 181-2). A haranguing priest, citing 'the great heretic, Cromwell', whips up sectarian animosities against loyal Protestants, until the climactic moment when the new leader steps out from among the assembly: 'He now stood erect among the conspirators; the pallid hue of his cheek succeeded by a hectic flush, and his eye kindled with passionate thought, while the muttered vow of misguided zeal bound his soul to the commission of crimes, from which his gentle soul had hitherto recoiled' (p. 188).
painting. The solemnity of the oath of the Rockites is offset by revelry and drunkenness: the group at the table where the oath is being taken are drinking whiskey from eggshells, while at the far side of the painting, as the Fraser's review describes it, 'a boccaugh, or sham cripple, mad with patriotism and pothien, unbuckles his wooden leg, and flourishes his crutch, — he is actively drunk; another leans on him passively ditto, and his face is expressive of a hiccup'. As Svetlana Alpers has argued, the prejudice against Dutch art among proponents of the grand style in history painting derived not only from its democratic sympathies with low life, but also its association with domesticity and the feminine. In this sense, Macise runs both 'high' and 'low' traditions together, and this transgression of styles is signalled in the painting by the inscription of the feminine in the public space of insurgent nationalism, and the juxtaposition of women (including, remarkably, a nursing mother) alongside images of male virtue and prowess, albeit in its suspect Irish variety. This was going too far for the Fraser's reviewer. 'Rockites', he protested, 'were not in the habit of holding their “high solemnities” in ruined abbeys, or of bringing their women and their children with them to their meetings'. It seems, moreover, that both 'women and children' learn fast, for in the left foreground a mother dotes on an infant who is puffing a sword from a scabbard, while in the background at the top of the painting, a young woman is helping an injured Rockite to find refuge in the abbey. In the centre of the painting, a group of keeners lament the dead leader, one 'chanting forth the praises of the deceased in the wild Ullalooh', while another female figure ties a sash on the new Captain's belt.

More than any other departure from propriety, however, it was the eroticism of insurgency, 'the kissing and the courting ... going on with the business of the hour', which attracted the attention of the Fraser's reviewer: 'All the women', he writes, 'especially the sister who is tying on the sash, and the delicious little minx who is affecting to dread the report of the gun, are most exquisitely depicted' (p. 119). This recalls the pedagogy of the oppressed in Captain Rock's hedge school, as outlined by Thomas Moore, where Ovid's 'Art of Love' was specifically paired with the popular insurgency of the United

31 Svetlana Alpers, 'Art History and its Exclusions: The Example of Dutch Art' in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (eds), Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany (New York, 1996), p. 195. Putting in a good word for the democratic sympathies of the Flemish school, Lady Morgan noted that 'dead fish and dead game are at least not more offensive objects for familiar contemplation than murdered saints and tortured martyrs' (The Life and Times of Salvator Rosa, vol. i, pp. 196-7).

32 In a similar scene in Charlotte Elizabeth's The Rockite, a young woman takes up her position by the corpse 'and from that distant corner her suppressed “Ullaloo”, the low dirge of death came with an effect, the mysterious wildness of which, little calculated to strike the uncultivated taste of the majority, was yet strongly felt by Driscoll, and not yet lost on the priest' (p. 189).
Irishmen’s ballad anthology, *Paddy’s Resource*, on the curriculum. The sensuality of the women is so pronounced in Macise’s painting that the Fraser’s reviewer feels called upon to deny that they are Irish:

That sunny hair, those blue eyes, that delicately fair complexion, were never yet to be seen, excepting amongst the English of England and the English of Ireland … the faces of the ladies (for such they be) are as distinguishable from the murky faces of the peasantry as the pure crystal waters of Lake Leman from the dusky current of the Rhone. (p. 119)

It may be that this social elevation is required to explain the ease with which the women occupy public space, but one of its implications is the familiar trope in colonial fantasy whereby the colonised male is deemed to be, at most, the social equivalent of the metropolitan or upper class female. This is, no doubt, intended to diminish both, but it may have the opposite effect of bringing gender and the physicality of the body to bear on colonialism in a way that calls for a total transformation of domestic and political space. By combining public and private spheres into its dissident version of the hidden Ireland, *The Installation of Captain Rock* attests to one of the most important aspects of popular insurgency, the integration of rituals of resistance into the everyday rounds and folk customs of rural life. Agrarian secret societies organised at wakes, weddings and seasonal festivals so that the persistence of folk culture itself, even in its apparently most innocent guise, became charged with political significance. ‘Whiteboys’, according to Michael Beames, speaking of such societies in general, ‘transferred the peasant symbols for “combat and cure” from the stage of communal ritual to the arena of social conflict and its resolution’. Thus, he continues, secret societies did not present themselves to the peasantry as the kind of exotic outcasts conjured up by the romantic imagination, but rather as bearers of rough justice who shared a common language with their victims:

The experience of the Whiteboy victim, when he was a member of the peasantry, becomes clear: when confronted by his attackers he did not perceive them as a group of bizarrely dressed banditti, but as figures he must have seen on countless occasions, season by season, year by year, in the passage of rural life. As such, their significance and their claim to legitimacy cannot have been lost on him.34

It is this refusal of the politics of the picturesque, and the external vantage point of the rural poor that accompanies it, which accounts for perhaps the

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33 See note 25 above.
most disquieting and powerful aspects of Maclise’s painting. Notwithstanding
tits apparent confirmation of some of the main stereotypes of Irish insurgency—
that sedition is compounded by inflated rhetoric, superstition, drunkenness
and licentiousness—reviewers of the picture were profoundly unsettled by its
mode of address, as if somehow all was not as it seemed, and the pictorial form
was also undermining this negative image of insurgency: ‘I regret that Maclise
painted this particular picture’, concluded the Fraser’s reviewer, ‘for I am much
mistaken he will be taken for a radical, or still worse, a Whig: the fact being
that he has never dabbled the least in politics, and has nothing of political feel-
ing, excepting that instinctive disposition to free and gentle Toryism, which is
proper to high-minded gentlemen’. The problem here had to do with the fact
that the painting lacked one of the key components of the grand style, an
underlying unity or singularity of effect which allowed the composition to be
taken in at a glance, and which resolved the various contrasts and conflicts in
the work. What we are presented with instead, as the Fraser’s reviewer com-
plained, is as much material ‘as would enliven a dozen pictures, and more
extravagance than would spoil a score’ (p. 119). As a result, there is ‘want of
unity in the design’ derived from an ‘admixture of tragedy, comedy and farce’
which is difficult enough to resolve in poetry or prose, but almost impossible
in the ‘mute and motionless’ medium of painting. As in the case of the break-
down of the framing narrative in Moore’s prose narrative of Captain Rock,
the absence of an organizing perspective suggests that the subject matter being
represented is not under control, particularly from an external vantage point.
The formal instability of the work disturbs the composure of the viewer, viti-
ating the disinterested stance of the ideal spectator:

> In a word, to use a familiar illustration, a calm, cold spectator coming to
gaze upon a picture in which the fitful ebullitions of our nature are rep-
resented, is pretty much in the situation of a man perfectly sober enter-
ing a company excited and flushed with liquor. (p. 119)

The presentation of the scene, in other words, compromises the aesthetic dis-
tance of the ‘calm, cold spectator’, drawing him into the scene and changing his
nationality in the process (it is not too difficult to figure out what nationality
merits the description of being ‘calm, cold’ and ‘perfectly sober’, as against being
‘excited and flushed with liquor’). The real offence here is bringing aesthetic
transcendence down to earth, and giving a crude local habitation to the disin-
terested equipoise of art. As the Fraser’s reviewer again put it, in less polite
terms:

> No human being entering the exhibition, unless he be some scoundrel
agitator, can have the slightest sympathy [with its subject]. If the visitor
be English, his feelings revolt against the portraiture of those Irish kernes - those rebel ruffians, whose savage deeds, whose atrocious blood-guiltiness he is continually contemplating through the magnifying medium of the lying newspapers. If the visitor, on the contrary, be Anglo-Irish, what are the feelings towards the Rockites? The most intense contempt and hatred commingled - the feeling of the man towards the poisonous reptile: he knows that the Rockites are the most treacherous and cowardly rascals in the wide world, excepting only the agitators by whom they are incited (p. 117).

Clearly, no Irish need apply here for the position of ideal spectator - or at least those Irish from the ranks of the rural poor. It is this unmasking of the political assumptions built into the refinement of the art world which poses the greatest threat to the civilizing designs of imperial culture. Instead of being impartial, the spectator is revealed as a hostile witness, and it is this, perhaps, which accounts for the most incongruous detail in the picture, the scene in the lower right hand corner where a wizened old Terry Alt with a wooden leg is encouraging a young recruit to shoot directly at the beholder (plate 5). The intention here may be to clear a space for the excluded Irish viewer, as if Macise is insisting that the subjects of a painting have some say at last in their
own self-image. This may account for the lack of a controlling vision in the painting, for if, as Cornewall Lewis suggests, artistic form is closely bound up with problems of political articulation, then this is one clear case where aesthetic problems only admit of political solutions.