Allegiance and Illusion: Queen Victoria’s Irish Visit of 1849

JAMES LOUGHLIN
University of Ulster at Magee

Abstract
This article examines Queen Victoria’s first visit to Ireland in 1849. Taking place in the wake of the Great Famine, the occasion was, nevertheless, a great popular success and raised enduring expectations about inculcating loyalty to the Union among Irish Catholics. Through empirical analysis informed by insights drawn from studies of the social function of public ritual, this article will attempt to assess the visit’s significance, especially the extent to which it evidenced authentic loyalty, and whether it deserved to be regarded as the potential harbinger of a loyal and Unionist Ireland.

From the perspective of the late nineteenth century, as constitutional nationalism posed a serious threat to the integrity of the Union, the royal visit of 1849 stood out as an example of perfect unity between the sovereign and a hitherto disloyal Irish people, a visit some historians regard as an opportunity that the authorities foolishly failed to capitalize on.1 Certainly the visit appeared to belie the troubled history of the monarchy’s relationship with Ireland.

Ireland’s connection with the monarchy had three significant strands of varying importance: mythic, genealogical and constitutional. The history of the Stone of Scone – the coronation stone that until 1997 resided in Westminster Abbey – had been traced back to ancient Ireland, where for centuries it had been the coronation stone of the Irish High Kings at Tara; and from there it went, on loan, to Scotland early in the sixth century for the crowning of Fergus the Great, brother of Murtagh mac Erc, king of Ireland. The stone never came back to Ireland, and was removed to England by Edward I in 1297. Associated with the stone was a prophecy stating that wherever it was located a king of the Scotic (Irish–Milesian) race would reign – a prophecy that remained true, as the British royal family could trace its descent back through the Stuart line.

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to the historic kings of Ireland. Yet however strong the genealogical link of the monarchy with Ireland — the title 'King of Ireland' was first assumed by Henry VIII in 1542, 370 years after the first invasion of Ireland — there is little real evidence of a monarchical desire to acknowledge that genealogical strand, unlike the Catholic Irish who embraced enthusiastically the Stuart line in the seventeenth century. The eighteenth century, however, was to see the end of hopes for a Stuart restoration, and when Pope Clement XIII, accepting political realities, refused to recognize Charles Stuart's claim to the British throne, the way was open for that most important group of opinion leaders — the Irish Catholic hierarchy — gradually to shift its allegiance to the Hanoverian dynasty.

At the same time, however, the revolution of 1688 that deposed James II was to usher in a period of religious and economic persecution in Ireland. The penal laws, designed to extirpate Catholicism and leave its practitioners in a state of servitude, were less significant in practice than they seemed, but they persisted into the nineteenth century until abolished by the Emancipation Act of 1829, and were to remain an emotive element of Irish popular culture. Moreover, legislative removal did not entail the elimination of anti-Catholicism from British popular consciousness, and not from the mindset of the most important icon of British identity in the nineteenth century, Queen Victoria. She, like her predecessors, showed little interest in acknowledging her supposed Irish genealogy.

George III's understanding of his coronation oath in a British context had led him to refuse Catholic emancipation. George IV's coronation visit to Ireland in 1821 — the first by a reigning monarch since the Williamite wars — was deemed highly successful, owing partly to good preparation, friendly hints to the Catholic population, the support of Daniel O'Connell, and the king's lavish spending and enthusiastic greeting of high and low. But the visit did not inaugurate a new era in the

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3 Ibid., p. 83.
7 See, for example, the highly popular speeches of the Catholic demagogue, Revd Thomas Burke, *Lectures on Faith and Fatherland* (n.d. [1870s]).
8 The emergence of the monarch as the most important British national icon was largely a product of the long Napoleonic wars. See Linda Colley, 'The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation 1760–1820', *Past and Present*, cii (1984), 94–129.

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monarchy’s relationship with Ireland. Irish expectations of early abolition of the penal laws were to be disappointed, and when Catholic emancipation did come in 1829 it was forced on the king by political necessity. Like his predecessor he found it a deeply repugnant affront to his coronation oath.11 Nor, in turn, was Queen Victoria unduly inclined to look with favour on Ireland. The factors that conditioned her attitude were several: negative personal encounters; traditional British Protestant objections to the ‘spiritual tyranny’ of the Irish Catholic clergy; and the related threat of nationalist separatism, and its links with British ‘revolutionary’ movements such as Chartism. Yet, while the strong dislike of Ireland she developed over her lifetime had its origins in this period, Victoria had an equally strong view of the island as an inalienable part of her kingdom. It was a view that made imperative her first Irish visit in 1849.

I

Indicative of Victoria’s attitude to Ireland is the length of time she spent there. In the sixty-four years of her reign less than five weeks were spent in Ireland as compared to almost seven years in Scotland.12 Indeed, her affection for Scotland, and especially the Highlands and Highlanders, as law-abiding, loyal, industrious and Protestant illustrates the obverse side of her dislike of the unruly Catholic Irish. Between these polarities in her attitudes to the Celtic peoples of her realm lies the slightly puzzling lukewarmness of her relationship with Wales. If Ireland attracted the presence of the queen for only a few weeks compared to Scotland’s seven years, only seven nights were spent in Wales, despite the effusive loyalty of the people.13

The sovereign’s Celtic preferences were evident, not only in where she resided and for how long, but also in the dress and iconography she and Albert, the Prince Consort, adopted. Their obsession with Scotland and the Highlands dates from their first visit in 1842. It was given material expression in the acquisition of the Balmoral estate and the building of a castle in the medieval style, the creation of tartans for the royal couple, the wearing of the kilt, and the pictorial representation of the royal couple as clan leaders.14 In this way, the legitimacy of Scotland’s membership of the United Kingdom was invested by the royal couple with a subjective, personal dimension that was lacking in regard to either Ireland or Wales. In fact, in Scotland perceived threats to the social order, such as the so-called ‘radical war’ of 1820, seemed only to encourage mass

14 See the stimulating discussion in Adrienne Munich, _Queen Victoria’s Secrets_ (New York, 1996), ch. 2.
demonstrations of loyalty. As a nation the Scots had embraced enthusiastically a wider British patriotism from the late eighteenth century, an allegiance that found one of its most significant forms of mass expression in popular, if rowdy, celebrations of the monarch’s birthday.\(^{15}\) By contrast, politically volatile Ireland held no such attractions, while the only parts of Wales the queen found attractive were those that most resembled the Scottish Highlands.\(^{16}\)

Ireland impacted on the young Victoria in a number of guises, mostly uncongenial. Her mother’s relationship with the Anglo-Irishman, Sir John Conroy, was a great affront to her sense of propriety, to which his abrasive attempts to control the future sovereign added personal animus at the same time as it created divisions within her family.\(^{17}\) Collectively the Anglo-Irish, however, were not likely to be stereotyped unfavourably as Victoria was to do with the chiefly lower-class Catholic Irish. The source of her alienation from this group lay, it seems, with the intensely close and emotional relationship the young Victoria formed with her first prime minister, Lord Melbourne, whose influence combined valuable instruction in the arts of government with a contemptuous regard for the rebellious ‘low Irish’ and their supposedly fabricated grievances.\(^{18}\)

In these years the popular perception of the Irish in Britain deteriorated: an often quite affectionate and romantic view of a gentle, if rather ‘feckless’, people was invested with a vicious dimension as agrarian outrages in Ireland increased and as Daniel O’Connell’s campaign for the repeal of the Irish Act of Union got under way.\(^{19}\) In fact, O’Connell’s influence extended beyond British popular opinion to impact negatively on the queen personally. Despite the prime minister’s distaste for the Irish, Melbourne’s government was, in the late 1830s and early 1840s, dependent on O’Connell’s support in parliament. In a pre-Bagehotian age O’Connell had no time for the idea of the monarchy as a national institution existing above, and apart from, the party-political fray. He promoted a ‘Friends of the Queen’ committee designed to deliver Irish parliamentary seats in support of a monarchy-Whig alliance against British and Irish Toryism that would, he hoped, deliver Irish independence under the crown. The project would not succeed. Evidence of the queen’s opposition to repeal would alienate O’Connell, while she came to view his mass mobilization of priests and people in Ireland as deeply


\(^{16}\) Davies, ‘Victoria and Victorian Wales’, p. 10.

\(^{17}\) Cecil Woodham-Smith, \textit{Queen Victoria; Her Life and Times 1819–1861} (1972), p. 70.


threatening. Nevertheless, O'Connell’s promotion of allegiance to the queen at a formative phase of his repeal mobilization would be of some significance in accounting for Irish attitudes to the queen during the visit of 1849, by which time the repeal movement was in disarray and O'Connell dead. A negative Irish impact on the queen in the 1840s was also, more threateningly, registered by Chartism, a radical British reform movement whose Irish leaders, James Bronterre O’Brien and Fergus O'Connor, sought to co-ordinate anti-government agitation in both islands. Accordingly, Victoria came to regard the Irish as largely responsible for popular discontent that appeared to be bringing the country to the verge of revolution. There might be a case for reform in Ireland but she was chiefly concerned with the repression of ‘violence and disorder’. In so far as she was disposed to constitutional change in Ireland, it was along lines consistent with her opposition to repeal: abolition of the Irish Viceroyalty, with Ireland being governed in the same manner as Scotland.

To appreciate fully the depth of Victoria’s developing antipathy to the Irish, it is instructive to note her view of the monarchy’s role in the constitution in general and the allegiance it was due. David Cannadine has persuasively argued the falsity of the conventional view of the Victorian monarchy as one that prepared the institution for its modern constitutional role. He believes that Albert and Victoria sought not to diminish the monarchy’s political power but to increase it, seeing in the institution the only true representative of the national interest, as against the selfish and sectional interests of political parties. And to be effective in pursuit of the national interest the monarchy had to be creatively involved in the governing process: it had to be actively, rather than impotently, above politics. It was a role that Bagehot would not allow for, one that had more in common with the eighteenth century than the nineteenth, and one that had been transmitted to Victoria by William IV.

The queen’s conception of allegiance was not one which the subject accorded symbolically to the crown through the parliamentary institutions of the state, but one that was accorded directly and personally to the sovereign. In fact, it was observed during her reign that her conception of her constitutional role was one determined, not historically by the play of politics, but by divine will:

she was the anointed of the Lord, called by the most solemn warrant to rule a great nation in the fear of God. . . . When the Queen spoke of her subjects as ‘loyal’ she meant it in the medieval [my italics] sense. The relationship was not, in her eyes, voluntary or sentimental but imperative . . . Subjects must be ‘loyal’; if they loved their sovereign, so much the better for them and for her, but affection was not essential. In her phraseology this constantly peeped out – ‘I, the Queen’, ‘my people’, ‘my soldiers’. She regarded herself . . . as the pivot round which the whole machinery of state revolves.25

She held forth, precisely in this vein, to Lord John Russell during a heated discussion on revolutions in early August 1848: ‘Obedience to the laws & to the Sovereign, is obedience to a higher Power, divinely instituted for the good of the people, not of the Sovereign, who has equal duties & obligations.’26 It was in this light that she viewed the Irish. Yet, it was an attitude that was only too likely to result in disappointment. When the Irish were perceived to act treasonably the ‘insult’ would be felt personally and directly, rather than symbolically.

The nature of Victoria’s relationship with Ireland was to a significant extent conditioned by events outside her control. For example, the Great Famine of the late 1840s was to have a profoundly negative impact on her reputation among the Irish at home and abroad. Leaving over one million dead from starvation and millions more as forced emigrants, the famine would enter Irish nationalist mythology as a great atrocity perpetrated by a callous English government. Certainly, there was a tendency in England to blame the famine on the supposed character faults of the native Irish.27 The nationalist myth of a deliberately enacted policy aimed at exterminating the native population may have been untrue, but there is, nevertheless, enough evidence to show that anti-Irish prejudice played a significant role in the determination of policies that made the sufferings of the famine-stricken greater than they need have been.28

It was almost inevitable that the blame cast upon the government for the famine would attach itself to the queen. A myth about Victoria’s miserly attitude to famine relief would emerge that can easily be read as

26 Quoted in Longford, Victoria, p. 198.
27 See for example, Foster, ‘Paddy and Mr Punch’, pp. 176–82.
a variation on the theme of government-facilitated genocide, and which still exerts an influence on Irish opinion today. The myth became fully developed only during the nationalist struggles of the later nineteenth century, but its origins entered the Catholic Irish popular imagination during the famine itself, and was, therefore, present at the time of the royal visit of 1849. Politically, however, the most dramatic backdrop to the Irish visit was provided by events in Britain and Ireland during 1848, events given a revolutionary edge following the abdication of King Louis-Philippe in France in February.

Chartism, Irish nationalism and the events in Paris combined to unsettle the royal family, with Prince Albert urging on the prime minister, Lord John Russell, any feasible plan of Irish reform for immediate implementation to forestall revolution, and a distraught Victoria praying that if the worst came to the worst she and Albert would at least be allowed to remain together. In the event, however, London was not Paris. The 10th of April – the date of an expected revolt on the occasion of a Chartist petition to Parliament – came and went with relatively little revolutionary activity, while in Ireland a revolt by the Young Ireland Movement in July was a wholly ineffectual affair. With the revolutionary tide clearly subsiding, the government began to think of a new era in Anglo-Irish relations.

Capitalizing on the effects of the famine, the Encumbered Estates Act, enacted by Parliament in 1849 as the royal visit was about to take place, would remove the most indebted landlords and give hope that a new beginning on the land question could be made, while the government also attempted to conciliate through endowment the Irish Catholic clergy – a body of men that, given popular British religio-national prejudices,

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29 It was claimed that she donated only £5 to famine relief. In fact she personally contributed £2,500, while an appeal she made for funds raised, in conjunction with other appeals, £435,000. See Peter Gray, Famine, Land and Politics: British Government and Irish Society 1843–1850 (Dublin, 1999), p. 259.

30 When the board of University College Cork declared its intention of excavating and restoring a statue of Queen Victoria which had lain buried in the college grounds since 1944 a chorus of protest against the ‘Famine Queen’ was raised (The Times, 25 June 1994). A similar reaction was forthcoming from Sinn Fein when Belfast City Council considered restoring a statue of Victoria to its original site in a nationalist part of the city (Belfast Telegraph, 2 Nov. 2000).


35 Freeman’s Journal [hereafter FJ], 28 July 1849.

36 John Prest, Lord John Russell (1972) [hereafter Prest, Russell], pp. 296–8.
were viewed as being almost as threatening to the constitutional order as revolutionists. The initiative failed. Nevertheless, it is a useful indication of official reforming intent at a time when the government and the administration in Ireland were growing confident once again of their ability to secure Irish allegiance to the Union. In this context, it is worth comparing Prince Albert’s prescription for Ireland’s ills at the end of the year with his earlier, rather panic-stricken, advice. Now he discounted a rush to legislate, advising instead a combination of Malthusian and Smilesian remedies – a regulation of population in accordance with food supply, the cultivation of habits of industry and self-reliance, the exploitation of the country’s natural resources and the spread of ‘sound knowledge’ – as the best means of countering ‘the malign influence of those who inflamed the people with mad dreams of old wrongs to be avenged, and of the blessings of a separate nationality’. The most significant indicator of the government’s more optimistic attitude to the state of Ireland, however, was the decision to allow a royal visit in 1849.

II

In 1849 conditions for such a visit hardly seemed ideal. The Whig magnate, Lord Fitzwilliam, writing from Dublin, thought that a visit ‘in splendour’ would, in the still prevailing famine conditions, be in very bad taste. The queen responded to such concerns by asking that an unostentatious tour be arranged, and showed a determination to go, partly because Ireland was a region of her kingdom she had never visited before, but also because she feared that since a visit had been openly bruited for at least six years, the impression might be created among her Irish subjects that she was afraid to come. Moreover, the Irish viceroy, Lord Clarendon, to whom she communicated her instructions, was keen to promote it. Clarendon, though he shared with the prime minister, Lord Russell, a concern about how the queen would be received in Ireland, thought that there had never been a more propitious time since Victoria had ascended the throne:

Agitation is extinct, Repeal is forgotten – the seditious associations are closed – the priests are frightened and the people are tranquil. Everything tends to secure for the Queen an enthusiastic reception, and the one drawback, which is the general distress of all classes, has its advantages.

38 Prince Albert, Memorandum on Ireland, 10 Oct. 1848 in Martin, Prince Consort, ii. 135–6; Albert to the Home Secretary, Sir George Grey, 22 Dec. 1848, ibid., pp. 138–9.
40 Longford, Victoria, p. 188; Prest, Russell, p. 300.
41 Ibid.
for it will enable the Queen to do what is kind and considerate to those who are suffering.\textsuperscript{42}

That representative organ of British middle-class opinion, the \textit{Illustrated London News}, went further in its opinion of how ‘general distress’ had shaped the conditions for a successful visit:

\begin{quote}
  famine and plague have taught all classes that the real evils of Ireland are social and not political . . . In the face of calamities such as those which have afflicted Ireland, it is little that Parliaments or Monarchs can do. It is not laws that are wanted but confidence [my italics]. Hence it is that the visit of Her Majesty to Ireland is calculated to do more good than any enactments which a populace might demand or a Parliament devise.\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

Moreover, the royal party, Lord Palmerston claimed, could depend on the effusive nature of the Irish character to ensure a good popular reception;\textsuperscript{44} and the government made a significant contribution to making this likely by rushing a bill through parliament allowing for the commutation of death sentences passed on the insurgents of 1848.\textsuperscript{45} The views of both Clarendon and Palmerston reflected an enduring belief of all those charged with the government of Ireland in the nineteenth century, namely, that if only the influence of agitators and priests could be neutralized, the natural loyalty of the Irish people would readily find expression. And with the belief that just such an occasion now existed, care was taken with the preparations for the royal visit to ensure its success.

Given the extent to which Ireland had recently drawn on the public purse the ostentation and expense associated with a state visit were thought inappropriate, especially as Ireland, in her current impoverished state, could not be expected to foot the bill. These considerations were pressed on the prime minister by Prince Albert, whose suggestion that the trip take the form of a yachting excursion, taking in Cork, Waterford, Dublin and Belfast before proceeding onwards to Scotland, was accepted, following Russell’s insistence that it run over several days.\textsuperscript{46} Clarendon, who only accepted the post of viceroy on the understanding that it would be abolished on his retirement, and, seeing this royal visit – apparently the last that would be held under the old administrative regime – as signaling a new beginning, went to considerable personal expense to make it a success.\textsuperscript{47} Necessarily, functions at Dublin Castle during the visit would also be of a more elevated nature than the usual viceregal occasions.

\begin{enumerate}
  \item\textsuperscript{42} Martin, \textit{Prince Consort}, ii. 192.
  \item\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Illustrated London News}, 4 Aug. 1849.
  \item\textsuperscript{44} Palmerston to Russell, 5 Aug. 1849 in Gooch, \textit{Russell Corr.}, i. 235. It was, in part, resentment at perceived British expectations of the Irish responding to the queen ‘in the character in which Paddy is best known . . . servile, extravagant and ludicrous’ that motivated nationalist opposition to the visit. See \textit{FJ}, 30 July 1849; James Murphy, \textit{Abject Loyalty: Nationalism and Monarchy in Ireland during the Reign of Queen Victoria} (Cork, 2001) [hereafter Murphy, \textit{Abject Loyalty}], pp. 86–7.
  \item\textsuperscript{45} Lee, \textit{Victoria}, pp. 202–3.
  \item\textsuperscript{46} Russell to Clarendon, 23 June 1849, \textit{QVL} (1st series), ii. 223–4; Prest, \textit{Russell}, p. 300.
\end{enumerate}
The decision to present to the queen only those introduced by someone who had attended her court at St James’s caused offence among those who did not qualify.48 Other preparations for the visit caused more widespread criticism. A decision to keep the royal progress to the main Dublin thoroughfares, to avoid scenes of desolation, provoked criticism from both nationalist and Tory sources that the real Ireland was being hidden: a ‘great lie’ it seemed was about to be enacted, and this impression moved some who might have been expected to attend Castle functions, such as Lords Montegle and Fitzwilliam, to abstain.49 When the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Timothy O’Leary, suggested making municipal funds available to furnish street illuminations, he was met with a chorus of protest demanding that any such funds should be directed to the relief of the starving.50 Among Dublin tradespeople, opinion was divided between those doubtful about the morality of the visit in the still prevailing famine conditions, and those conscious of its possible stimulus to trade.51 It was a sign of the way in which popular opinion was moving that the latter view proved persuasive. It was reflected also in the failure of Dublin Corporation, a repeal-dominated body, to pass a resolution calling for an Irish parliament, even one coupled with protestations of loyalty to the queen,52 though it seems that the authorities took the precaution of incarcerating anyone suspected of posing a threat to the visit’s success.53

In order to contain expenses, the visit was not to be a state occasion. Nevertheless, a special coach was built in Dublin to convey the monarch through the city, while the royal couple expressed their concern that the visit should be ‘well done’ by declaring themselves ready to receive ‘any declarations of loyalty the people of Dublin may wish to display’. Also, the royal party itself was to be large – thirty-six people, including four royal children, while despite the financial constraints, at the end of July triumphal arches, platforms and ‘devices’ were erected. Dublin Castle was given a facelift, the Four Courts illuminated by gas on the night of the royal arrival, and Nelson’s Pillar by electric light.54 For her part, the queen signalled her concern to conciliate Irish Catholic opinion by letting it be

49 Cecil Woodham-Smith, The Great Hunger: Ireland 1845–9 (1964) [hereafter Woodham-Smith, Great Hunger], pp. 384–5. This sentiment was also reflected in the respectable Irish Liberal organ, FJ, 29 June and 3 Aug. 1849.
50 Woodham-Smith, Great Hunger, p. 385. Indeed, it was argued that when news reached London of the Lord Mayor’s intentions it deterred donations for relief of the destitute in Ireland. See FJ, 31 July 1849.
51 Clarendon regarded the visit as a significant stimulus to trade. See Maxwell, Clarendon, i. 303. This was a traditional argument made in favour of royal visits which FJ (26 July and 3 Aug. 1849) sought to undermine by claiming that the refurbishment of Dublin Castle was being undertaken with materials ordered from England.
52 See The Times, 9, 14, 24 July 1849.
53 See FJ, 25 July 1849; The Times, 26 July 1849.
54 The Times, 30 July 1849; Woodham-Smith, Great Hunger, pp. 387–90.
known that she had refused to make a donation to a Protestant charitable institution, precisely because it was ‘exclusively Protestant’.\textsuperscript{55}

The queen’s visit to Ireland was not, as she stated, undertaken without some personal cost. A bad sailor, she suffered ‘dreadfully’ on the trip over to Ireland on the royal yacht, \textit{Victoria and Albert}, while it was known that Dublin suffered a cholera outbreak during the period of the visit.\textsuperscript{56} The first port of call was Cobh, county Cork, on 2 August, where the queen briefly stopped so that the people could have the satisfaction of renaming it ‘Queenstown’, in honour of its being the first spot on which she set foot upon Irish ground, thus following the precedent set by George IV in September 1821, whose landing at Dunleary, county Dublin, led to the town being renamed Kingstown.\textsuperscript{57} The royal party then immediately re-embarked and proceeded up the river Lee to Cork city.\textsuperscript{58}

From the start the visit was a success,\textsuperscript{59} the popular reception of the royal party by the people of both Cobh and Cork city being highly enthusiastic, with parliamentary, political and ecclesiastical dignitaries paying homage.\textsuperscript{60} To mark its success the mayor of Cork was knighted on the deck of the royal yacht. Of her progress through Cork city the queen recorded:

\begin{quote}
I cannot describe our route, but it will suffice to say that it took two hours; that we drove through the principal streets; twice through some of them; that they were densely crowded, decorated \ldots{} with flowers and triumphal arches; \ldots{} that our reception was most enthusiastic; and that everything went off to perfection, and was very well arranged. Cork is not at all like an English town. [It] \ldots{} looks rather foreign. The crowd is a noisy, excitable, but a very good-natured one, running and pushing about, and laughing, talking and shrieking.\textsuperscript{61}
\end{quote}

Victoria’s account of her Irish visit reveals a sharp eye for human and topographical detail. While the visit was structured in such a way as to conceal evidence of famine and destitution, the fact that in Cork, and later Dublin, ‘the men are very poorly, often raggedly dressed’, did not escape her attention.\textsuperscript{62} The journals also reveal – especially where her Stuart predecessors were concerned, and to whom she had a rather

\textsuperscript{55} The Times, 1 Aug. 1849.
\textsuperscript{57} Lee, \textit{Victoria}, p. 203.
\textsuperscript{58} Queen Victoria, \textit{Leaves from the Journal of our Life in the Highland}, ed. Arthur Helps (1868) [hereafter \textit{QV, Leaves}], p. 249.
\textsuperscript{59} Prince George, the Queen’s first cousin, was in charge of military arrangements during the visit and earned the applause of the royal couple. Clarendon and Sir George Grey for a flawless operation. See Giles St Aubyn, \textit{The Royal George: 1819–1904: The Life of H.R.H. Prince George Duke of Cambridge} (1963) [hereafter, St Aubyn, \textit{Royal George}], pp. 44–5.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{QV, Leaves}, p. 250. In Cork, as in Dublin, initial attempts to include political aspirations in the address to the queen were abandoned in favour of an uncontentious loyal welcome (\textit{The Times}, 6 Aug. 1849).
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{QV, Leaves}, p. 251.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., pp. 251, 261, 262.
illogical romantic attachment — her knowledge of Irish history. On the way into Waterford harbour on 4 August, she noted: ‘We passed a little fort called Duncannon Fort, whence James II embarked after the Battle of the Boyne.’ From Waterford the royal party proceeded to Kingstown. Again, the popular reception was ecstatic: ‘An immense multitude had assembled, who cheered most enthusiastically, the ships saluting and the bands playing and it was really very striking.’ Nor did Dublin disappoint Victoria: ‘It was a wonderful and striking scene, such masses of human beings, so enthusiastic, so excited, yet such perfect order maintained . . . a never-to-be-forgotten scene; when one reflected how lately the country had been in open revolt and under martial law.’ Delighted at her reception by the people of Dublin, Victoria was well disposed to being impressed by Dublin as a city, praising its layout and public buildings. The care taken by the city authorities to ensure the visit was a success is reflected in Victoria’s account of her entry to the city:

There are no gates to the town, but temporary ones were erected under an arch; and here we stopped, and the Mayor presented me with the keys with some appropriate words. At the last triumphal arch a poor little dove was let down into my lap, with an olive branch round its neck, alive and very tame.

The first four days of the royal stay in Dublin were taken up with routine visits to public institutions, and meetings with, and the receiving of addresses from, leading personages, political, civic and religious, the latter including Dr Murray, the Roman Catholic bishop of Dublin. In addition, there were drawing rooms, balls and levees held at Dublin Castle. The last day of the Dublin visit was mainly given over to a visit to Carton, the residence of the duke of Leinster, a visit which impressed the queen especially by the evidently harmonious hierarchical relationship that existed between the duke and his tenantry: ‘the Duke is so kind to them, that a word from him will make them do anything.’ It was reported, moreover, that a display of Irish dancing provided by the duke’s tenantry for the queen’s benefit, was performed by disciples of ‘neat and comfortable appearance’ belonging to Father Mathew’s temperance movement, representatives, in fact, of the more respectable Ireland that, it was hoped, the royal visit would promote.

From Dublin the royal party proceeded to Belfast. Passing Carrickfergus, the queen noted its significance as the place where William III landed in Ireland. At Belfast the same popular delight that was occasioned by the royal round of public engagements in Dublin was evident, but more

63 Lee, *Queen Victoria*, pp. 260, 574.
64 QV, *Leaves*, p. 252.
65 Ibid., p. 254.
68 See *FJ*, 9, 10 Aug. 1849.
impressive given the fierce antagonism that normally existed between the province’s religious and political groups, and despite the fact that the queen, as she had in Dublin, refused to visit exclusively Protestant charitable institutions. But at most, Belfast – which impressed Victoria less than Dublin in respect of arrangements and popular reception – was a brief staging point on the royal progress from Dublin to her beloved Scottish Highlands, and she rounded off her journal record of the royal visit with a tribute to the Irish Constabulary, ‘all Irish, and chiefly Roman Catholics; and not one of whom, during the trying times last year, fraternised with the rebels’.

The queen’s delight at the success of the Irish visit is evident not only in her journals, but also in the correspondence of the royal couple. So pleased was she at her reception in Ireland that she conferred the title ‘Earl of Dublin’ on Edward, the young Prince of Wales. She also complied with the pleading of a woman – who assured her that if she ‘made’ one of her children ‘Prince Patrick’ all Ireland ‘would die for you’ – by giving Prince Arthur, born in 1850, the secondary name ‘Patrick’.

Victoria’s delight at her reception in Ireland was based on beliefs about what that reception seemed to imply about Irish loyalty to the crown and constitution. The expectations the visit gave rise to in this respect were most explicitly stated by Prince Albert, who, in recording the demonstrations of popular loyalty, noted: ‘In Cork, so lately a stronghold of disaffection. . . delighted affection was everywhere seen.’ In Waterford a rising was expected in 1848, now Waterford, like Cork, was ‘alive with loyal enthusiasm’. It was a popular loyalty that Albert himself had sought to encourage in a speech to the Royal Dublin Society, when he praised the society for its work in raising the ‘productive powers’ of the country, in creating employment and encouraging habits of industry. Of Victoria’s contribution to the visit’s success, Lord Lansdowne remarked: ‘The Queen

71 Just a few weeks earlier, on 12 July, a number of Catholics, possibly up to thirty, were killed in a sectarian riot between Orangemen and Ribbonmen at Dolly’s Brae near Castlewellan, county Down. See Kevin Nowlan, The Politics of Repeal: A Study in the Relations between Great Britain and Ireland 1841–50 (1965), p. 228. A parliamentary inquiry into the riot was ongoing during the royal visit (FJ, 3 Aug. 1849), while the potential for the riot negatively to affect the royal visit existed in the presence among the royal party of Lady Fanny Jocelyn, daughter-in-law of Lord Roden, the Orange leader on whose property the riot took place. See Murphy, Abject Loyalty, p. 87.
72 Murphy, Abject Loyalty, pp. 96–7.
73 See The Times, 13 and 16 Aug. 1849; QV, Leaves, pp. 264–8. Following the visit the queen made a donation of £300 for the relief of the poor of Belfast, communicated in terms intended to discourage sectarianism (The Times, 30 Aug. 1849). It was an example in the Irish context of the ‘welfare monarchism’ that, as Frank Prochaska, puts it, ‘was triumphant in the reign of Victoria’. See his Royal Bounty: The Making of a Welfare Monarchy (1995), p. 67.
74 See, for example, Victoria to King Leopold of the Belgians, 6 Aug. 1849 in QVL (1st series), ii. 224–6; Victoria to Clarendon, 18 Aug. 1849 in Maxwell, Clarendon, i. 303–4.
75 QVL, Leaves, p. 269.
76 Martin, Prince Consort, ii. 207.
77 Sir George Aston, His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught and Strathearn (1929), p. 35.
78 Martin, Prince Consort, ii. 205–6.
79 Ibid. ii. 209.
herself, has, by her manner, given universal satisfaction, omitting nothing that could please, so that the feeling in her favour has gone on crescendo from the moment of her arrival.\(^80\) The viceroy, Lord Clarendon, commented on the royal couple’s behaviour that it ‘was the beau ideal of what was right under the circumstances’.\(^81\) Moreover, the Dublin Metropolitan Police seems to have done its bit to ensure that no alienating factor intruded to mar the good relations between monarch and people by the rather dubious practice of declining to prosecute pickpockets arrested in Dublin, on the grounds that nearly all of them were believed to be English, and that the disclosure of their nationality would have mortified the queen.\(^82\)

As to the beneficial effects of the visit in stimulating Irish loyalty, enough evidence seemed to exist to justify the observations of Lansdowne and Clarendon. Victoria’s first cousin, the duke of Cambridge, a very young Edward Carpenter, later bishop of Ripon, and Lord Dufferin, later viceroy of Canada and of India, were among the crowds that greeted the queen in Dublin, and testified to their enthusiasm,\(^83\) while nationalist and Tory opinion which had been unfavourable to the visit at the outset, whether for political or moral reasons, swung around to support it as the visit proceeded.\(^84\) Indeed, the \textit{Freeman’s Journal} described Dublin during the visit as ‘like a city risen from the dead’.\(^85\) Moreover, the unity between antagonistic religious and political groups that the visit appeared to call forth, also appeared to persist after it was over, most surprisingly, in Belfast.\(^86\)

In Kingstown, one of the most popular actions of the queen was made just before her departure, when she stepped down from the royal yacht on to the paddle-box that was used to travel between the yacht and the shore and lowered the royal standard three times in acknowledgement of the great reception she had been given. Clarendon remarked: ‘there is not an individual who does not take it as a personal compliment to himself.’ Even the separatists, he enthused, were now, according to police reports, among the queen’s most loyal subjects.\(^87\) If he was aware of it, Clarendon was undoubtedly gratified by the fact that ‘God Save the Queen’, a


\(^{84}\) Woodham-Smith, \textit{Great Hunger}, p. 397.

\(^{85}\) \textit{FJ}, 10 Aug. 1849.

\(^{86}\) However, what was evident in Ulster loyalist press reports of the visit was a tendency – one that would develop over time – to employ the royal presence as a tool for asserting a binary opposition between loyal and prosperous Ulster and disloyal, backward, southern Ireland. See \textit{Belfast News-Letter} [hereafter BNL], 17 and 21 Aug. 1849; \textit{Londonderry Sentinel}, 17 and 24 Aug. 1849.

\(^{87}\) Clarendon to Sir George Grey, 14 Aug. 1849, \textit{QVL} (1st series), ii. 226. Reflecting this sentiment \textit{The Times} (9 Aug. 1849) exclaimed: ‘The Queen’s visit to Ireland is the concluding chapter of the history of the Irish rebellion of 1848.’ See also \textit{FJ}, 11 Aug. 1849.
frequent accompaniment to royal events in Dublin, had, apparently, originally been composed in honour of the Catholic James II and was now being sung by the descendants of his Irish supporters in honour of a Protestant queen. He would have been even more gratified had he known of the demoralizing effect the Irish reception for the queen had upon the most dangerous of the revolutionary leaders of 1848, John Mitchel who remarked: ‘the debased nation set its neck under her feet in a paroxysm of fictitious “loyalty”. It is painful to relate, but it is the disgraceful fact.’

Given his anxieties for the success of the visit, Clarendon’s evident wish to read into the queen’s reception the elimination of Irish disloyalty is understandable. It symbolized a new beginning for the Irish people, ‘a turn in the tide of their affairs after four years of suffering, with an unprecedented influx of strangers and expenditure of money, and as they will contrast this year with the last, their conclusion must be unfavourable to political agitation’. Undoubtedly the visit was a considerable success, but it did not mark the great turning point in Anglo-Irish relations that Clarendon initially expected. So what was the nature of its success? What exactly did it signify?

III

The literature on the socio-political role of ritual offers some useful lines of inquiry with which to explore the significance of royal ceremonial in the Ireland of the late 1840s, though no perfectly applicable tool of analysis. For example, neo-Durkheimian explanations which interpret ritual variously as reflecting, reinforcing or constituting the integration of society around a common set of values, fail to account convincingly for the royal visit of 1849 given the deep chasm in values – especially religious and political values – that divided Britain and Catholic Ireland. Stephen Lukes points to the weakness of such theories in simplistically assuming value consensus in societies riven with division between dominant and ‘subordinate classes’, citing the sociologist Michael Mann, to the effect that the apparent value consensus of such societies – especially the compliance of subordinate classes – is largely explicable in terms of the absence of consistent values and beliefs that would provide such classes with ‘realistic’ oppositional alternatives.

Mann’s insight, suitably adjusted, is of some value in clarifying our understanding of the royal visit of 1849. Clearly, it was not the case that

88 Charles Dimot, ‘God Save the Queen: The History of the National Anthem’, History Today, iii (1953), 361–2.
90 Clarendon to Sir George Grey, 15 Aug. 1849 in Maxwell, Clarendon, i. 303.
92 Ibid., pp. 62–3.
93 Ibid., pp. 63–4.
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oppositional values and alternatives to the existing constitutional order did not exist in Ireland, rather that the constitutional and revolutionary movements which mobilized them had failed. Time would show that later nationalist movements could mobilize them more effectively than had been done in the 1840s. At the same time, Mann’s focus on the need for a more nuanced understanding of the environment in which ritual takes place is of central importance to an understanding of the significance of the royal visit.

The environment of 1849 had some of the characteristics anthropologists define as ‘liminality’ – a transitional state outside the usual forms and structural relationships of ‘everyday life’ that has its own forms of ‘communitas’. Set against the background of the highly troubled Anglo-Irish relationship in general, and the Great Famine in particular, the royal visit appears as an almost unreal occasion divorced from the environment in which it took place; and it can be argued that its apparent success was due precisely to the fact that it occurred at a transitional moment in Irish history. The famine was destroying the old rural social order, while the new one, consisting of the substantial tenant-farmer class that would develop over the twenty-five years from 1850, and whose interests, which a substantially anti-monarchical Parnellite nationalism would effectively mobilize for its own purposes from 1879, had yet to develop. Moreover, in this context, with both revolutionary and constitutional nationalism in disarray, the royal visitors not only faced no significant movement opposed to monarchy, but could actually capitalize on strands of O’Connellite propaganda that now lacked organizational direction.

That propaganda had focused on repeal of the Union, but in association with vigorous protestations of loyalty to the throne. O’Connell’s influence is evident in the oaths sworn by branches of the Ribbon movement. A secret society existing to defend the chiefly agrarian interests of lower-class Catholics, often by violent means, its oaths tended to vary somewhat depending on locality, with some groups ‘pledging the most devoted fealty to the Queen; others . . . swearing allegiance to “Daniel O’Connell, real King of Ireland and his eldest son, Maurice O’Connell, as Chief Commander”’. But even if O’Connell’s message did not always translate well at local level, it can, nevertheless, be argued that the most influential strand in nationalist ideology in the 1840s legitimized, for a

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political mass movement uniting all classes of the Catholic community, loyalty to the queen as a core value, and an identity with her once an appropriate occasion arose which allowed it to be expressed. Further, with this in mind, it is worth considering Theodore Hoppen’s argument about the primacy of local over nationalist interests for the Irish people in the nineteenth century. The argument may be somewhat overstated in places, but is at its strongest for the middle decades of the century, the period between the great mass movements of O’Connell and Parnell. Arguably, with O’Connell dead by the time of the queen’s visit, the Irish public arena was one that facilitated demonstrations of allegiance without qualification. This was also facilitated by the nature of communication between sovereign and people, visual and verbal.

The queen was a pretty young woman whose pleasant personality and attire, which usually sported an appropriate Irish motif, were well calculated to appeal to a people only too ready to be pleased, while the giving and acknowledging of homage was conducted in language at once simplistic, abbreviated, non-contentious and essentially celebratory. It was a highly formalized kind of public interaction, consisting of very limited personal contact, but was potent in its ability to foster expressions of loyalty. Erving Goffman has persuasively argued that knowing how to balance social distance with familiarity is crucial to the effectiveness of public performance: ‘restrictions placed upon contact, the maintenance of social distance, provide a way in which awe can be generated and sustained in an audience, a way . . . in which the audience can be held in a state of mystification in regard to the performer.’ In fact, evidence exists that techniques of regulated contact, designed to maximize awe of the royal presence, had been employed by British monarchs from the reign of George IV to that of Edward VII. Certainly Victoria’s activities in Dublin demonstrate a refined skill in the art of public interaction. An insightful assessment, noting her ‘distinct theatrical instinct’, remarks that she ‘was unrivalled in her sense of the proper mise-en-scène of a formal ceremonial’. In the 1840s she had an avid interest in the theatre, both as patron and as participant in family amateur productions. Accordingly, it would not be implausible to see her acknowledgement of the crowds at Kingstown by lowering the royal standard three times as a piece of royal theatre timed for maximum effect.

100 Sir Frederick Ponsonby, Recollections of Three Reigns (1951), p. 194.
103 It was a talent she would draw on to great effect during the later years of her reign. See Richard Williams, The Contentious Crown: Public Discussion of the British Monarchy in the Reign of Queen Victoria (Aldershot, 1997), pp. 216–18.
The factors that assisted harmony between monarch and subjects also facilitated what might be described as the mesmerizing effects of royal charisma, the source of which Clifford Geertz has located in the relationship between symbolism and power.\textsuperscript{104} The queen’s presence was not just symbolic of the constitutional order, but given the institutional centrality of the monarchy in what was still a pre-Bagehotian age – as evidenced not least in O’Connell’s own marrying of monarchy and Whig politics – it was an authentic embodiment of the power that order possessed. Symbolism in itself clearly would have been insufficient to invoke charisma effectively. The viceroy may have been the monarch’s representative – more properly, substitute – in Ireland, but the fact that he was a government appointee undermined the claims of his office authentically to embody the majesty of monarchy and the authority of the constitution.\textsuperscript{105} In the presence of the queen, however, the Dublin crowds could have a sense of their acknowledgement by the most powerful symbolic and authoritative source in the British state.

But if royal charisma is a product of the integration between symbolism and power, its effect – which Geertz argues is more keenly expressed among those farthest away from the centre of power\textsuperscript{106} – is emotional rather than rational. In fact, in 1849 the impending, rather than actual, presence of the monarch was capable of bringing it forth. Reports of Victoria’s arrival at Cork fuelled wild rumours in Dublin that she was already at Kingstown and would proceed secretly to Dublin Castle, thus denying the people the opportunity to offer her a public welcome.\textsuperscript{107} Graphic accounts exist of the effect upon the Dublin crowds when the queen did arrive in Dublin, in Edward Carpenter’s description of ‘the delirious delight which can be manifested by a multitude of human beings’, of how the people, ‘not content with watching it [the royal coach] pass, seemed to turn and move along with it’,\textsuperscript{108} and in Lord Dufferin’s

\textsuperscript{104} See Clifford Geertz, ‘Centres, Kings and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power’, \textit{Culture and its Creators: Essays in Honour of Edward Shils}, ed. Joseph Ben-David and T. N. Clark (Chicago, 1975) [hereafter Geertz, ‘Centres, Kings and Charisma’]. It was to be found in the connection ‘between the symbolic value individuals possess and their relation to the active centers of the social order . . . it is involvement with . . . such arenas and with the momentous events that take place in them that confers charisma. It is a sign . . . of being near the heart of things’ (ibid., p. 151).

\textsuperscript{105} The viceregal system was mercilessly ridiculed by Thackeray in the 1840s: the ‘basest Dublinites . . . go in long trains to a sham court – simpering in tights and bags, with swords between their legs . . . There is no aristocracy in Dublin. Its magnates are tradesmen . . . What call have these worthy people to be dangling and grinning at Lord Lieutenants’ Levees, and playing sham aristocracy before a sham sovereign? Oh that old humbug of a [Dublin] Castle! It is the greatest sham of all the shams in Ireland’ (‘The Irish Sketchbook’ [1843] in W. M. Thackeray, \textit{Sketchbooks} (1902), pp. 577–8). Dublin Castle was not only the ceremonial centre of the viceroyalty but also the administrative – coercive, to the nationalist mind – centre of Ireland. As such, it was universally reviled by nationalists and republicans. See, for example, Justin McCarthy, ‘Dublin Castle’, \textit{Contemporary Review}, xlvii (1885), 153–63; J. J. Clancy, ‘The “Castle” System and its Operation’, \textit{Subjects of the Day}, iii (1890), 81; R. B. O’Brien, \textit{Dublin Castle and the Irish People} (1909).

\textsuperscript{106} Geertz, ‘Centres, Kings and Charisma’, 151.

\textsuperscript{107} \textit{The Times}, 7 Aug. 1849.

account of the popular reaction to the queen’s departure from Kingstown: ‘Upon the beach were crowded in thousands the screaming people full of love and devotion for her, her children, and her house, swinging to and fro like some horrid sea.’ Clearly, the situation described is one in which the ordinary rules of social class and behaviour have dissolved in the euphoria of the moment; so much so, in fact, that it is tempting to apply Richard Wortman’s description of the nationally epitomatic function of royal ceremonial in the Russia of Victoria’s contemporary, Tsar Nicholas I, in the Irish context: Victoria and Albert, the ‘signifiers’ of an apparently loyal Irish people, symbolically engulfed the ‘signified’, Ireland.

Attempting to make sense of what were regarded as truly remarkable phenomena, Clarendon argued that the royal presence facilitated a respectable demeanour on the part of the Dublin crowds which had its own self-enhancing effects:

the people are not only enchanted with the Queen and the gracious kindness of her manner, and the confidence she has shown in them, but they are pleased with themselves for their own good feelings and behaviour, which they consider have removed the barriers that hitherto existed between the Sovereign and themselves, and that they now occupy a higher position in the eyes of the world.

And Clarendon’s view, once circulated, seemed to take on the character of revealed truth. Prince Albert exulted in reports, ‘from every quarter’, that ‘the Irish themselves are pleased with themselves, and take a pride in the mode in which they expressed their attachment to the throne of the Queen personally, which is the best effect we can desire.’ Clarendon’s conclusion, that the visit was ‘a great fact’ given the problems that could have emerged in ‘bringing her and this excitable nation together for the first time’ is incontestable, apart from the ethnic stereotyping his language expresses.

Yet, despite his initial delight at the visit’s success, Clarendon, on reflection, was less euphoric about its lasting effects. In fact, he concluded, if the beneficial effects of the visit were to be capitalized on, stern coercion measures would be needed to ‘protect the people from themselves and those by whom they have been so long deceived’. The royal visit alone could not produce a social revolution ‘nor at once remove evils that are the growth of ages’. Accordingly, he could not go the ‘length’ of the

109 Lyall, Dufferin, p. 69. The memory of the Fenian leader, John O’Leary, that he had been present in Dublin during the royal visit and saw the crowds receive the queen in stony silence (Recollections of Fenians and Fenianism (2 vols., 1896) [hereafter O’Leary, Fenians], i. 61), is so at variance with an abundance of evidence to the contrary that it can be safely disregarded.


111 Clarendon to Sir George Grey, 14 Aug. 1849, QVL (1st series), ii. 226.


113 Clarendon to Sir George Grey, 17 Aug. 1849, in Maxwell, Clarendon, i. 303.

114 Clarendon to G. L. Lewis, 27 Aug. 1849, ibid. i. 304.
prophets who were now springing up and predicting ‘all manner of permanent good from the temporary presence of our gracious Mistress’. Nor could important organs of opinion in Britain such as the Quarterly Review and Punch, which, removed from the intoxicating atmosphere of Dublin, were more likely to view the visit in a critical light. Their scepticism about the visit’s beneficial effects was to be vindicated. It was based on a belief that the mass loyalty the queen’s presence called forth in Dublin, if not merely ephemeral, was at best *aspirational* in nature, indicating the Ireland which it might be possible to create, but without acknowledging of the range of complex problems in the way of firmly establishing it.

In his discussions of crowds, John Berger argues that when such gatherings occupy public spaces in defiance of constituted authority they are asserting symbolically a power they have yet fully to possess: ‘Demonstrations express political ambitions before the political means necessary to realise them have been created.’ This insight has been tellingly applied to O’Connell’s ‘monster meetings’. It can, however, also be usefully applied to the royal visit of 1849. Despite the fact that the queen was the pre-eminent embodiment of constituted order, in Ireland the period since the Union had demonstrated the extent to which that order lacked popular legitimacy. In this context, and as Clarendon’s more reflective assessment of the visit’s significance indicates, the unity of sovereign and people that it demonstrated was symbolic and unstable. No less than O’Connell’s mass meetings, it expressed a political ambition before the actual means necessary to realize it had been created. That the visit appeared much more successful than it actually was is largely explicable in terms of the forms of concealment that royal ceremony often embodies.


The argument, largely, applies to the Irish visit of 1849. That the visit was intended to help thwart a radical reorganization of Anglo-Irish relations is clear. At the same time, calculating manipulation is an insufficient explanation of the outlook of politicians such as Clarendon, for whom manipulation went together with an apparently genuine belief in the redemptive powers of the royal presence. For a critique of Cannadine, especially in regard to the positive and socially beneficial dimension to royal ritual, see W. M. Kuhn, *Democratic Royalism: The Transformation of the British Monarchy 1861–1914* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 1–10.

116 See the commentary in Joseph Hone, ‘Queen Victoria in Ireland’, *History Today*, iii (1953), 501.


and which Bagehot defined as the ‘greatest’ function of the British monarchy.120

Certainly this function facilitated what was to all appearances the most striking achievement of the visit, namely, the legitimization of an arguably alien constitutional order and power structure in an island, and among a people, imbued with a deeply embedded popular culture that essentially rejected that order. In doing so it disguised, or masked, the reality of profoundly deep religious and political divisions within the country, no less than fundamental problems complicating the Anglo-Irish relationship. John Mitchel, who was appalled by the Irish reception of the queen, denied, on reflection, that authentic allegiance could be inferred from it, claiming it was because of the natural courtesy of the people and the attraction of a pageant, together with viceregal largess to the Catholic middle class and hope that Victoria would pardon the 1848 insurgents.121 Whatever the merits of Mitchel’s argument, the royal visit of 1849 did entail a large element of concealment.

The ambitions of those anxious for a successful visit even went so far as the concealment of the effects of famine, an impractical ambition and one which raised deep moral objections across the political spectrum. Other forms of concealment, however, were more successful. At the most obvious level, the visit masked the continued existence of nationalism. One pressman, presumably nationalist, was said to have been sacked for a misprint in his coverage of the visit that was considered deliberate: ‘The Queen pissed over the bridge.’122 More seriously, not all separatists had abandoned their activities. Rebellion may have failed in 1848, but the farcical nature of that revolt left many radical nationalists ashamed and keen for another attempt to obliterate its memory: the queen’s visit appeared to offer an appropriate opportunity to redeem Irish revolutionary honour. A network of ‘Democratic Clubs’ linked together in the Irish Democratic Federation set about acquiring firearms and made plans, for both a rising and a kidnap attempt on the queen during her stay in Dublin. There was, apparently, no real hope of a successful rebellion, rather a startling propagandist counterstroke intended to undermine the authority of the monarchy was envisioned.123 On being made aware of the plan the Young Ireland leader, Charles Gavan Duffy, pointed out forcefully its foolhardiness. The plan, nevertheless, proceeded to implementation. It was aborted only at the last minute, when only 200 men assembled on the designated night, a force deemed insufficient to defeat the Dublin Castle garrison.124 In the event, the revolutionary apparatus that had been assembled in 1849 soon disintegrated with nothing more

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120 Constitutional royalty ‘has the function . . . by far the greatest . . . It acts as a disguise. It enables our rulers to change without heedless people knowing it’ (Bagehot, English Constitution, p. 97).
124 Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, Four Years of Irish History 1845–1849 (1883), pp. 759–63.
to show for its efforts than an assault upon the constabulary barracks at Cappoquin, county Waterford, on 16 September, one month after the queen’s departure. As such it fell outside the context of the royal visit and thus did not mar the close relationship that apparently existed between the sovereign and her Irish subjects.

Another area of concealment lay in the homage paid by the Irish Catholic clergy to the queen in 1849. This was less comprehensive than it appeared. In fact, the clergy’s address to the queen was signed by only thirteen out of twenty-seven prelates, reflecting divisions between the archbishops of Tuam, Cashel and Dublin. Dr MacHale of Tuam, the spokesman of the radical wing of the hierarchy, the administrative body of the church, unsuccessfully demanded that it arrange a meeting with the queen to explain the real state of the country. Again unsuccessfully, he urged that any address by the hierarchy to the queen should indict the government for the deaths of thousands of his flock. In the hands of the compliant Daniel Murray of Dublin, however, the hierarchy’s address was devoid of contentious issues. Accordingly, MacHale and Archbishop Slattery of Cashel refused to attend her court in Dublin. Further, the unity of religious denominations that the visit seemed to call forth belied the anger of some sections of Ulster Protestant opinion at an apparently more enthusiastic royal response to the Roman Catholic address, than to the address submitted by the Presbyterian clergy.

This reaction may have been hyper-sensitive, and it missed a more important point: namely, that among the representatives of the Roman Catholic and Protestant communities who paid homage to the sovereign significant differences existed in the degrees of allegiance offered and legitimacy accepted. The royal visit, as with many such visits, partook of a divine, no less than a secular, dimension. The queen was not only head of state but also head of the Established Church of England and Ireland. For Anglicans, the divine dimension was inescapable from the homage offered, something that presumably applied, in a wider Protestant sense, to Presbyterians also. For Roman Catholics, however, the divine dimension could not have been present. The homage offered was to the queen as head of state only; and a religio-political crisis over Catholic religious jurisdiction – the ‘papal aggression’ of 1850 – would

126 The See of Armagh was vacant because of the death of Archbishop Crolly. Only after the visit was over were the hierarchy’s addresses to both Victoria and the Prince Consort published, with the names of those who supported them attached. See FJ, 13 Aug. 1849.
128 BNL, 17 Aug. 1849.
130 The crisis was occasioned when Pius IX publicly re-established the English hierarchy with territorial designations, thereby provoking a no-popery frenzy in Britain. See Prest, Russell, pp. 319–26; Longford, Victoria, pp. 203–4; Walter Walsh, The Religious Life and Influence of Queen Victoria (1902), pp. 71, 75.
soon arise in Britain and Ireland that would make this clear, as well as stimulate the still influential anti-Irish and anti-Catholic prejudices that coloured popular British attitudes to Ireland, prejudices that the queen herself, to a significant extent, shared.

Those prejudices, moreover, would have been reinforced in May 1849 when the first of a number of attempts on the lives of members of the royal family by Irishmen took place. William Hamilton fired on the queen at Constitution Hill as she was returning from her official birthday celebrations. Hamilton was transported for seven years although he was deranged and his gun unloaded. Victoria, however, was more conscious of the fact that he was Irish than that he was insane. A reciprocal antipathy would take some time to develop, and even then it would be subject to qualification. The ‘Famine Queen’ myth that developed as part of nationalist propaganda in the late nineteenth century appears not to have impaired the queen’s reputation as a model of English domestic and family values – which appealed to the Irish middle classes no less than those of Britain – even among Fenians.

Concealment and liminality are the keys to understanding the success of the royal visit of 1849. Yet both were temporary in nature. One was a product of royal charisma and effectively executed ceremony; the other a function of socio-economic and political changes that were about to usher in a profound transformation in Ireland and, in the process, complicate increasingly the relationship between the monarchy and the Irish people. Not until the coronation tour of Edward VII in August 1903 did Ireland again experience the kind of public response to a royal visit that occurred in 1849.

131 Longford, Victoria, p. 192.
132 Parnell controversially developed the theme for a receptive Irish-American audience during a fund-raising trip to the USA in 1880. See Parnell to the Editor, New York Herald, 1 Feb. 1880 in P. J. Tyan, The Irish National Invincibles and their Times (1894), pp. 147–8. Accordingly, this theme developed somewhat earlier than the Golden Jubilee of 1897, which James Murphy identifies as its point of origin. See Murphy, Abject Loyalty, pp. 290–1.
133 John O’Leary described Victoria as ‘a highly respectable foreign lady, apparently with the merits and demerits of the English bourgeoisie . . . she could not well help being English and a Queen, or, rather the English Queen of Ireland’ (O’Leary, Fenians, i. 131).
134 When the ‘papal aggression’ controversy erupted Ireland was about to undergo a Catholic devotional revolution under Cardinal Cullen, with an attendant expansion in the number of lower clergy drawn largely from the increasingly powerful tenant-farmer population. As they were inclined to nationalism in a way the hierarchy generally was not, their influence would, over time, work to inhibit hierarchical compliance with Vatican and government wishes. See Emmet Larkin, The Making of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland 1850–1860 (Chapel Hill, NC, 1980), pp. 3–95; Desmond Bowen, The Protestant Crusade in Ireland 1800–70 (Dublin, 1978), pp. 230–1; Lyons, Ireland since the Famine, pp. 116–25; Garvin, Irish Nationalist Politics, pp. 55–7.
135 The 1903 coronation tour was contemporaneous with the parliamentary passage of the Wyndham Act, which effectively solved the Irish agrarian problem. Irish public opinion was largely persuaded that the king had actively pursued its enactment.