

BREANDÁN MAC SUIBHNE

The End of Outrage

POST-FAMINE ADJUSTMENT IN RURAL IRELAND



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do Nóra Rose agus Sarah

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It has been said that a certain type of historian writes 'in the time between the dead and children, between irreparable suffering and hope for the unforeseeable to-come'.¹ Although my own forebears appear in these pages, genealogy's charms are lost on me: this book has been written less to tell Nóra Rose and Sarah whence they came, and more to give them a glimpse of how the world works. And, in a time of widening inequality and environmental collapse, it is with a wish that those two great girls, like the boys and girls who came before them, be persistent and make a difference.

Beagh

February 2017

¹ John D. Caputo, 'No Tear Shall be Lost: The History of Prayers and Tears', in David Carr, Thomas R. Flynn, and Rudolf A. Makkreel, eds, *The Ethics of History* (Evanston, IL, 2004), 91–118, 115–16.

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Abbreviations

<i>BH</i>	<i>Ballyshannon Herald</i>
<i>BN</i>	<i>Belfast Newsletter</i>
CRF	Convict Reference Files
CSF	Census Search Forms
CSORP	Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers
DCA	Donegal County Archive
<i>DJ</i>	<i>Derry Journal</i>
ED	Education Department
FB	Field Book
GRO	General Register Office
<i>GV</i>	Richard Griffith, <i>General Valuation of Rateable Property... Union of Glenties</i> (Dublin, 1857), commonly <i>Griffith's Valuation</i>
IPSCR	Irish Petty Sessions Court Registers
<i>LJ</i>	<i>London-Derry Journal</i>
<i>LSnl</i>	<i>Londonderry Sentinel</i>
<i>LStd</i>	<i>Londonderry Standard</i>
NAI	National Archives of Ireland
NFCM	National Folklore Collection, Main Collection
NFCS	National Folklore Collection, Schools Collection
NLI	National Library of Ireland
OffP	Official Papers
OP	Outrage Papers
OS	Ordnance Survey
OSFNB	Ordnance Survey Field Name Books
PB	Perambulation Book
PRONI	Public Record Office Northern Ireland
SOC	State of the Country Papers
TAB	Tithe Applotment Book
VO	Valuation Office

Prologue

The Era of Infidelity

Oh, ye Dead! oh, ye Dead! whom we know by the light you give
From your cold gleaming eyes, though you move like men who live,
 Why leave you thus your graves,
 In far off fields and waves,
Where the worm and the sea-bird only know your bed,
 To haunt this spot, where all
 Those eyes that wept your fall,
And the hearts that bewail'd you, like your own, lie dead.

Thomas Moore, 'Oh, Ye Dead!', *Irish Melodies* (1822)

West Donegal, 31 October 1856. On the dark night of *Oíche Shambhna* the Catholic poor feasted on nuts and apples, and they played games, many of them involving divination. A ring in a piece of barmbrack meant the finder would marry within the year, while a person who found a pea would remain single. Three bowls set in front of a blindfolded young woman determined her spouse: if she placed her hand in one containing clear water, she would get a young man; if the water was dirty, she would get an old man; if the bowl was empty, she would get none. And in nuts set alight near the hearth couples would read their fates: flames that joined foretold a strong union; flames that did not join were an indication that they would separate.

This long night also involved whiskey drinking, mischief, and boisterous fun. Young people sitting in a circle played *Thart-an-Bhróg*, surreptitiously passing a shoe from one to another, and then firing it at an unfortunate in the centre who was hunting for it. Fellows went out robbing cabbages, which they threw at the doors of those robbed, while others carved jack-o'-lanterns from turnips. And then, after they had ducked for apples and all games were played, they brushed the floor, loaded the fire with turf, arranged chairs or creepies (bogwood stools) in front of it, and they went to bed.¹

¹ NFCS 1,048 (Tullymore): 181: 'Superstitions', transcribed, in 1937–8, by Nan Melley (c.1923–92) from her father Con (d. 1962) who heard them from his father

That final ritual demands little interpretative effort. The living were welcoming the dead. They were making space for them in that lifeless season when the sun does not rise high above the horizon and the nights are longest and there is no growth; they were deferring to the ancestors when the otherworld comes closest and threatens humankind. In the mid-1850s, then, the people vibrated between two cosmologies, one ancestral or fairy and the other Christian. Central to the non-Christian system were ritualized gatherings around fires or wells, often on dates determined by solar or lunar cycles.² Here, near the little towns of Ardara and Glenties, on the night of 23 June, every house had a bonfire, and in some townlands there was one large fire, around which people from all houses gathered, and when the fire had burned out, they would take the cinders and scatter them through the fields of growing crops and they would rub the ashes on their cattle.³ They called that night *Oíche Fhéile Eoin*, St John's Eve. The following day was the reputed birthdate of John the Baptist, but the festival had no significant Christian dimension. Certainly, no special prayers were said to the Evangelist, and no priest presided. Their *pietas* was, indeed, for older, quieter things.⁴ Those bonfires blazed when the day is longest—the summer solstice (midsummer) occurs on 20–2 June—and, if only flickeringly apprehended by those gathered around the crackling bogwood, it was the life-giving power of the sun, not the man who announced the coming of Christ, that they venerated.

Oíche Fhéile Bhríde (1 February), *Bealtaine* (1 May), and *Lúnasa* (1 August) were other sun-defined occasions of festivity. The Catholic poor, in the words of the novelist John McGahern, were going about their 'sensible pagan lives' as they had done 'since the time of the Druids'.⁵ And while these people were emphatically Catholic—they prayed *Ár nAthair atá ar Neamh* . . . , Our Father who art in Heaven . . . and *'Sé do bheatha Mhuire* . . . , Hail Mary Full of Grace . . . —they were remarkably indifferent to the requirements of their Church.⁶ Attendance at Sunday mass was an obligation, on pain of mortal sin, upon Catholics, yet in 1834 the parish priests of Ardara and Inishkeel (Glenties) estimated that,

Condy (b. c.1850). For a nineteenth-century account of *Samhain*, see Hugh Dorian, *The Outer Edge of Ulster: A Memoir of Social Life in Nineteenth-Century Donegal*, ed. Breandán Mac Suibhne and David Dickson (Dublin, 2000), 262–71.

² Gearóid Ó Cruaíoch, 'The Merry Wake', in James S. Donnelly, Jr and Kerby A. Miller, eds, *Irish Popular Culture, 1650–1850* (Dublin, 1998), 173–201, 191.

³ NFCS 1,048 (Tullymore): 198; account by John McHugh, aged 12, Tullycleave, in 1938.

⁴ Brian Friel, *Translations* (London, 1980), Act III.

⁵ John McGahern, *Memoir* (London, 2005), 211.

⁶ On mass attendance, see David W. Miller, 'Landscape and Religious Practice: A Study of Mass Attendance in Pre-Famine Ireland', *Éire-Ireland*, 40/1–2 (2005), 90–106.

respectively, 19.3 and 29.8 per cent of their parishioners were turning up, despite there being then three chapels (Ardara, Glenties, and Fintown) between the two parishes. Fintown's chapel had only just opened, but the towns had boasted purpose-built chapels—not *scáthláin*, shelters—since the 1790s. And across the Gweebarra estuary, in the poorer Rosses, none of four chapels, two dating to the 1780s, had a weekly mass: Dungloe and Lettermacaward each had a single mass every second Sunday, Belcruit had mass on two consecutive Sundays, and Arranmore every third Sunday; here, priests estimated that 25–7 per cent of Catholics attended those services.⁷

There are no hard data on the composition of these congregations. Still, *seanchas*, oral history, about the avarice of priests—there were fees for baptism, marriage, and burial—and the priests themselves having been reared on snug farms or in shops suggest it was the better-off sorts who most frequently attended chapel. It was those sorts too who were more likely to confess and receive communion, which all Catholics were required to do at least once a year, at Easter. Hence, for the typical smallholder, hoking an existence from a few acres of potatoes, their priest married couples and baptized the new-born, administered the last rites to the dying and buried the dead, but chapel and clerically directed devotions did not have a central place in their lives. Moreover, many ostensibly Christian traditions had traces of an older magic. For instance, the cult of the early Christian ascetic, St Conall, was important to the people.⁸ Conall's feast falls on 22 May, and between then and 12 September, great numbers would undertake a *turas* or curative pilgrimage to the ruins of a medieval monastic settlement in Inishkeel, a relatively flat and fertile island, about 80 acres in extent, which down to the early nineteenth century was the site of the district's most prestigious burial ground. At Narin, after a spring tide, that is, in the days following a new or full

⁷ *First Report of the Commissioners of Public Instruction, Ireland*, HC 1835 (45), xxxiii, 272a–273a, 278a–279a, 280a–283a. Purpose-built chapels had been erected in Ardara and Glenties by 1795. At the time of the survey (1834), Ardara's first chapel had recently (1832) been replaced by a building in the west end of town; see Edward Maguire, *A History of the Diocese of Raphoe*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1920), i. 478–9; P. J. McGill, *A History of the Parish of Ardara* (Ballyshannon, 1970), 13–23, 27, and Liam Briody, *Glenties and Inniskeel* (Ballyshannon, 1986), 30, 33. In the mid-1830s, there was, in fact, another older chapel in the parish of Ardara, at Mullyvea; however, the parish priest had downgraded or abandoned it and it is not mentioned in his return to the Commissioners; see Ch. 7 of this volume.

⁸ Lochlann McGill, *In Conall's Footsteps* (Dingle, 1992), esp. chs. 3–6, explores the cult of Conall. Also see Patrick O'Donnell, 'Inniskeel', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 8 (1887), 781–94, and McGill, *Ardara*, 13–23. On the *turas* in Irish Catholicism, past and present, see Lawrence J. Taylor's fine historical ethnography, *Occasions of Faith: An Anthropology of Irish Catholics* (Dublin, 1995), ch. 2, and Angela Bourke's luminous Introduction to Anna Rackard and Liam O'Callaghan, *Fishstonewater: Holy Wells of Ireland* (Cork, 2001), 7–12.

moon, it is possible to walk dry-shod to 'the island'. On reaching it, pilgrims used to discard their shoes and stockings, if they were wearing any, and to recite a series of fixed prayers as they circled holy wells, sacred stones, and the ruins of medieval churches; the *turas* culminated in the pilgrims passing 'healing stones' around their bodies, in the hopes of alleviating pain or averting illness.⁹

Again, no priest presided and, into the nineteenth century, the most conspicuous figure in the *turas* was a lay-man, the senior member of the Breslin family, who used to stand at *Leaba Chonaill*, Conall's Bed, a rock on which people suffering from back trouble would lie in expectation of a cure, and hold out the *Bearnán*, a simple hand-bell (c.700–900 AD) housed in an ornate silver shrine-case (c.1400 AD), for the pilgrims to kiss; the bell, it was said, had belonged to Conall. The Breslins had been an 'erenagh' or prebendary family, responsible for the management of ecclesiastical lands, from medieval times to the seventeenth century, when, with the overthrow of the Gaelic order, those lands had passed to the newly established Protestant Church. Still, the enshrined hand-bell had remained in their possession, and, besides taking it to the island when the *turas* was being performed, the head of the family would display it to the sick and the dying. John O'Donovan, who inspected the 'beautiful and elaborately decorated relic' in 1835, was very taken by its representation of the crucifixion, and he imagined Breslin on the island, with the 'elaborately ornamented' shrine, 'exhibiting to the enthusiastic pilgrims, the glittering gems and the symbol of the bloody sacrifice in which the creator of the world drained all his veins of the electric stream that supported his humanity'.¹⁰

Through the *turas* and the kissing of the *Bearnán*, no less than the various seasonal festivals, the people were keeping faith with their forebears, but O'Donovan was cognizant that in west Donegal, and indeed elsewhere in the west of Ireland, many 'venerable old customs' were passing away: 'a different era—the era of infidelity—is fast approaching!', he wrote in 1837.¹¹ Here, in the townlands north of Ardara that are the

⁹ The National Folklore Collection contains many accounts of the *turas*; see e.g. stories collected by the pupils of Kilclooney and Clogher schools in the late 1930s in NFCS 1,048–9. For an account by anthropologist John Henry Hutton, see 'Pilgrimages to the Holy Well and Ruined Church of St. Conal on the Island Inishkeel, Gweebarra Bay, Co. Donegal', *Folklore*, 31/3 (1920), 231–3.

¹⁰ Ardara, 19 Oct. 1835, O'Donovan to Larcom, in *Ordnance Survey Letters, Donegal*, ed. Michael Herity, with a preface by Brian Friel (Dublin, 2000), 100–2.

¹¹ Roscommon, 29 June 1837, O'Donovan to Larcom, quoted in Gillian M. Doherty, *The Irish Ordnance Survey: History, Culture and Memory* (Dublin, 2004), 137. On O'Donovan's sense of 'tradition' withering, *ibid.*, ch. 6, and Stiofán Ó Cadhla, *Civilizing Ireland: Ordnance Survey, 1824–1842: Ethnography, Cartography, Translation* (Dublin, 2007), 156–63.

main focus of this book, that era of infidelity can be said to have definitively arrived in the last third of the century, when, over much of that area, English replaced Irish as the language of the home, children ceased to hear the old songs and stories, and rituals that had mattered from time immemorial were performed no more. But, in truth, a time of great betrayal had been a long time coming. The dust had settled on the Down Survey (1656–8) by the early 1700s, and, the conquest complete, a transition from an oatmeal- to a potato-based diet—a sudden change, in fact, as potatoes were a ‘garden crop’ (not a staple food) through the 1600s but, by 1753–4, they constituted the winter diet of the Rosses where, in that season, ‘very few’ ate any bread¹²—allowed people to marry younger and settle on land that would not yield decent cereals. More households, in turn, meant more families rearing a cow or pig, and, as the district’s involvement in the livestock and grain trades increased, markets were also found for herring and salmon, kelp, rabbit-skins, smuggled tobacco, and *poitín*, illicit whiskey, distilled from barley. The pace of demographic expansion was extraordinary: the rectors of Lettermacaward and Templecrone estimated that there were 420 families in the Rosses in 1766; by 1841, the number of families had trebled to 1,274; there was a commensurate increase south of the Gweebarra.¹³ And that growth in population was itself a force for cultural change. The cheap fiddle replaced the pipes as the ubiquitous instrument at dances before the end of the 1700s, and families settling permanently on mountain townlands may have contributed to the decline of *buailteachas*, booleying, that is, young people spending the summers on highland pastures herding cattle; notwithstanding some redoubts in the Rosses and south of Ardara, booleying seems to have been significantly curtailed by the early 1800s.¹⁴

¹² A——B——, ‘An Account of the Customs, Manners, and Dress of the Inhabitants of the Rosses on the Coast of the County of Donegal, Ireland, in a Letter to the Author’, in Joseph C. Walker, *An Historical Essay on the Dress of the Ancient and Modern Irish* (Dublin, 1788), 141–9, 145–6; this letter, dated Dublin, 1788, describes how, in 1753, a Mr N——, possibly one of the Nesbitts of Woodhill (Ardara) or Kilmacreddan (Inver), had accompanied a friend to the district on legal business. The author remarks on women knitting stockings but nobody wearing any, suggesting the stocking trade was already well developed, and notes both men and women were ‘excessively fond’ of spirits and tobacco.

¹³ In 1766 the rectors of Inishkeel and Killybegs estimated that their parishes contained 1,043 families; the 1841 Census returned 3,737 families in those parishes, with Killybegs by then divided into Upper and Lower sections. For the regional context, see Kerby A. Miller and Brian Gurrin, ‘The Derry Watershed: Its Religious and Political Demography, 1622–1911’, *Field Day Review*, 9 (2013), 38–53.

¹⁴ On *buailteachas*, see McGill, *Ardara*, 75–8, and Mark Gardiner, ‘The Role of Transhumance within Rundale’, *Ulster Folklife*, 58 (2015), 53–63. On music, see Allen Feldman and Éamonn O’Doherty, *The Northern Fiddler: Music and Musicians of Donegal and Tyrone* (Belfast, 1979) and Caoimhín Mac Aoidh, *Between the Jigs and the Reels: The Donegal Fiddle Tradition* (Manorhamilton, 1994), ch. 2.

Landlords, meanwhile, made efforts at developing their estates, securing patents for fairs and distributing spinning wheels, helping tenants to get spirit licences—here, as on other commercial frontiers, the trading post cum drinking shop was the crucial start-up—and promoting the development of towns. In 1760, George Nesbitt (1732–1827) effectively established Ardara at the place where the Owentucker had been bridged in 1723 by securing a patent for four annual fairs and a weekly market; the Hamiltons were forever endeavouring, against all odds, to ‘improve’ the area around Fintown; and, most dramatically, in the 1780s, the Conynghams, with public money, built a fishing station on the island of Inis Mhic an Doirn, which they duly renamed Rutland after the lord lieutenant who sanctioned the grants.¹⁵ The grand jury, the landlord committee that ran the county, had significantly improved the infrastructure of west Donegal in the mid-1700s—a decent road was first made around the coast of the Rosses in 1758—and, under the Road Act of 1765, it annually allocated funds for roads and bridges, creating, in the process, a cohort of quarrymen and contractors who employed parties of labourers. By 1800, much of west Donegal’s modern road network had already taken shape; and it was in need of regular repair, the wages for which work fed labouring families.¹⁶ People who had been familiar with the district in the mid-1700s were now remarking on the extent to which it had changed: a man who had spent 1753–4 in the Rosses found, on his return in 1787, that the people were ‘totally altered in their carriage and conduct, their habiliments and habitations, their occupations and manner of living... so much improved by their intercourse with others’. Where formerly, he had not seen a man with anything other than a waistcoat and breeches on him, he then met ‘spruce young lads fashionably dressed on Sundays, in sattin waistcoats and breeches, with white silk stockings, silver buckles, and ruffled shirts’.¹⁷

¹⁵ McGill, *Conall’s Footsteps*, 209, 222–6; Niall Ó Dómhnaill, *Na Glúnta Rosannacha* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1952), 160–3; Pádraig Ua Cnáimhsí, *Idir an Dá Ghaoth: Scéal Mhuintir na Rosann* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1997), 37–46; Wes Forsythe, ‘Improving Landlords and Planned Settlements in Eighteenth-Century Ireland: William Burton Conyngham and the Fishing Station on Inis Mhic an Doirn, Co. Donegal’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 112C (2011), 1–32.

¹⁶ William Crawford, ‘The Evolution of the Urban Network’, in William Nolan, Liam Ronayne, and Mairéad Dunlevy, eds, *Donegal: History and Society* (Dublin, 1995), 381–404. Also see the 1801 grand jury map, by William McCrea of Lifford, DCA, GJ/2/19.

¹⁷ ‘An Account’, 148. For other perspectives on west Donegal in the mid-1700s, see NAI, Phillips Manuscripts, M. 2,533 William Henry, ‘Hints towards a Natural and Topographical History of the Counties Sligoe, Donegal, Fermanagh and Lough Erne... 1739’, 40–4, and Richard Pococke, *Pococke’s Tour in Ireland in 1752*, ed. George T. Stokes (Dublin, 1891), 62–9.

If that particular description gives a false impression of the levels of refinement being generally attained in west Donegal, the demand for agricultural produce ran high in Britain through to Waterloo, drawing more households into the market economy and distributing new commodities more widely. Notwithstanding landlord initiatives, the cattle- and stocking-dealers and egg- and butter-men who travelled the new roads—and, indeed, the tinkers with their ‘standings’ at fairs—were the point men of commercialization.¹⁸ The men who drew eggs or butter to Derry carried back ‘needles, pins, thimbles, and smoothing irons, in short a hardware store on a small scale’, and the later wealth of some families, including the McDevitts of Glenties who prospered first in inn-keeping (from the 1700s) and then, most spectacularly, in the stocking trade, had its origins in the horse and cart, if not the ass and creel.¹⁹ Seasonal migration of young adults to the harvest in east Donegal and Scotland, movements well established by 1800, further monetized local economies—payment of rent in kelp, grain, and rabbit-skins or by the working of duty days increasingly gave way to cash transactions—and helped the district to cope with lower agricultural prices after 1815. Derry, meanwhile, had long-established trade-links with Philadelphia that caused its hinterland to be early identified as a labour pool for Pennsylvania’s coalmines and canals. In the north-east of that state, anthracite started to be mined in great volume c.1820; men from west Donegal were among the first to dig the ‘hard coal’ and enterprising ‘Yankees’ were soon coming home for short stays to fetch more broad-shouldered young fellows for the mine patches.²⁰ By the 1830s, local traders, acting as agents for Glasgow companies, were putting out muslin for poor women to ‘sprig’ (embroider), and soon other dealers, who had hitherto bought stockings on fair days, would themselves secure contracts with Scottish and English firms and start putting out yarn, keeping women and girls in steady employment. The district, in short, was being fitted into the periphery of the world economy

¹⁸ The district’s integration into the regional economy can be glimpsed in a report in *LJ*, 8 June 1784, detailing how ‘a man of the name of Boyle, who came to this town from Rosses to buy meal, was robbed or defrauded of 153 guineas, his watch and great coat by a fellow who pretended to befriend him in his business in Derry’. The ‘unfortunate merchant’ did not recover his property.

¹⁹ An egg-man as described in Dorian, *Outer Edge*, 211–12.

²⁰ E.g. James Cannon, born in 1815 in Rosbeg, was a miner in Summit Hill by 1832. He took US citizenship in 1839 and the following year he returned home. There, he married Rosa (Hugh) McAlloon in 1841, and in winter 1844–5 he left again for Pennsylvania, taking his wife and two children with him. They settled in Mauch Chunk, where James mined and Rosa kept Donegal boarders. See the entry on their son, Michael Cannon, an attorney, in *Luzerne Legal Register*, 14 (1885–6), 25–6, and James’s obituary in *Hazleton Plain Speaker*, 28 Mar. 1892.

and, between seasonal migration to Scotland, protoindustrialization at home, and the coal and canals its men were digging in industrial America, expectations were rising. A Dublin reporter who visited Ardara attributed significant material improvements to sprigging: 'When the sewed muslin trade was introduced . . . the young girls found that they could not work at it, in their dark and dirty houses, and they insisted on their parents providing chimneys and windows.'²¹

By the time of the Famine, the social structure had changed significantly from that of the mid-eighteenth century. The Protestant proportion of the population had been dwindling for decades—as far back as 1766 the rector of Lettermacaward had decried the 'decay' of its small Protestant community and 'Papists supplanting Protestants in their land'²²—good farms long tenanted by Protestants were passing to Catholics and a Catholic middle class was growing in size, confidence, and ambition.²³ With the central state now eclipsing the old state of local notables, new opportunities were opening in the administrative apparatus—young men were becoming teachers and clerks, constables and coastguards. But the mass of the people remained mired in poverty. Thomas Ainge Devyr, a native of Donegal town, who travelled the roads of west Donegal buying yarn and selling hardware, before opening a store in Killybegs, used to frequently cross the Gweebarra by ferry:

Here, I witnessed the boatman's family at their meal of bog potatoes, often without a relish of salt; never with anything better. I saw his children, from five to ten years of age, without any other covering than a piece of ragged flannel pending from the waist, and on one, a child of about three years of age, I never saw a rag of clothing of any kind, although I saw it many times, both in Summer and Winter.

Devyr once spent two days in that boatman's 'hovel' when 'tempestuous water' prevented a crossing, and he shared the family's 'scanty meal of potatoes, that smelled and tasted of the turf on which they grew'; 'nothing better could be procured for money, though several abodes of man were scattered along the bank'.²⁴ Such families, if well supplied with food and fuel, were living barely above the waterline of despair, and when, in

²¹ Henry Coulter, *The West of Ireland: Its Existing Condition, and Prospects* (Dublin, 1862), 303–4.

²² Quoted in J. B. Leslie, *Raphoe Clergy and Parishes* (Enniskillen, 1940), 105.

²³ Miller and Gurrin, 'Derry Watershed', 38–53.

²⁴ For this description, see Thomas Ainge Devyr's *Our Natural Rights: A Pamphlet for the People, by One of Themselves* (Belfast, 1836); the pamphlet is reproduced in his *Odd Book of the Nineteenth Century; or, 'Chivalry' in Modern Days* (New York, 1882) [Irish and British Section], 112–35.

1830–1 and, again, in 1835–7, poor weather diminished potato crops, there were reports, from priests, ministers, landlords, and coastguards, of deaths from fever and ‘actual starvation’; but for government relief efforts, and appeals to charities by priests, significant numbers would likely have perished.²⁵ Hence, while the Catholic community was understood to be making social advances on the eve of the Famine, by virtue of some people acquiring better land, building businesses, and securing salaried jobs, ragged smallholders and labourers were pushing further onto the bog, up the mountain sides, and into the fishing villages; inequality, within the community, was widening and the cultural ties that bound it were loosening.

If the market was the most assiduous force for change, the relaxation of penal laws in the last third of the eighteenth century had allowed the Catholic Church to assert itself as an arbiter of behaviour. Priests endeavoured to eradicate ‘superstition’ and regulate conduct at wakes and funerals, patterns, and seasonal festivals. Indeed, in 1835, O’Donovan observed that ‘lately’ the *turas* to Inishkeel had become an occasion of ‘amusement and drinking, so that the RC clergy thought it proper to condemn the practice’.²⁶ And ‘amusement and drinking’ were not the only aspects of the *turas* likely to upset priests. The head of the Breslins used to exact a fee from pilgrims who wished to kiss the sacred bell. *Pingin domhsa agus póg don Bhearnán*, A penny for me and a kiss for the *Bearnán*, was the refrain remembered locally.²⁷ In fact, in 1835, the *Bearnán* was no longer being brought to the island. O’Donovan was told that Conall Mhícheáil of Glengesh, who claimed to be the senior Breslin, had fallen on hard times and, for £6, sold the 1,000-year-old bell and 500-year-old shrine to Major James Ezekiel Nesbitt (1763–1845) of Woodhill, the son of the man who established Ardara; others put the price at ‘three young cows and an annuity’. Present at the transaction was James Dombrain (1794–1871), Inspector General of the Coastguard and ‘a most intimate friend’ of Nesbitt; he had only been appointed to Ireland in late 1819, which dates the sale to the 1820s or early 1830s.²⁸ It was in the ‘most lamentably deaf’ Nesbitt’s house, that O’Donovan inspected the shrine, but he mixed with people of all classes, and he heard that Conall Mhícheáil’s sale of the relic took place ‘to the great displeasure of St. Conall and his own

²⁵ These crises are the subject of extensive correspondence; see e.g. NAI, CSORP 1831/613; 1831/845; 1831/2,183; 1837/5/5–68; NAI, OffP I 1836/318; 1836/131; NLI, MS 13,383 Folders 1, 2, and 4.

²⁶ Ardara, 18 Oct. 1835, O’Donovan to Larcom, in *Ordnance Survey Letters*, Donegal, 97–9.

²⁷ McGill, *Ardara*, 17.

²⁸ McGill, *Conall’s Footsteps*, 86. On Dombrain, see Edmond P. Symes, ‘Sir James Dombrain and the Coastguard’, *Dublin Historical Record*, 56/1 (2003), 56–70.

relatives, who received no part of the money', and who disputed his claim to be the head of the family and his right to dispose of it. 'He will have no luck now', O'Donovan wrote, echoing the disputants, 'because everything got on the devil's back falls under his belly.'²⁹

Other people said it was not Conall Mhícheáil who sold the *Bearnán*, but a family who had 'got it on loan in the hope that it would cure a sick child'.³⁰ But sold it was, and the deal may well have been bound up with clerical strictures on the *turas*: the parish priest, Con O'Boyle, was close to the Nesbitts—they had his portrait hanging in Woodhill—and the disposal of the relic that dislodged the Breslins from their centuries-held place in popular devotion consolidated his authority in matters spiritual and, indeed, as a community leader.³¹ Strictures on pilgrimages were common in these years.³² From the last decades of the eighteenth century, priests across Ireland had been deploring the 'disorder' that attended them—and the disorder, of course, owed much to a surge, from mid-century, in the consumption of spirits, and then, in the 1780s and 1790s, when ill-conceived legislation precipitated the collapse of legal distilleries, an extraordinary expansion in the distillation of *poitín*. Later, in the 1810s and 1820s, when priests found themselves contending with evangelical societies, they became more concerned with asserting their responsibility for their flocks. That concern heightened in the 1830s, when the Constabulary (established in 1822 and radically reorganized in 1836) started to police public assemblies, enforce the licensing laws, and make arrests for drunkenness and rioting; in many communities, the priest now took it on himself to get 'his' people to behave. And much as the expansion of the state degraded the landed élite—the Constabulary made it clear to John Barrett, rector of Inishkeel, that they would not be collecting his tithes, ended the Nesbitts' extra-legal collection of tolls from people trading at the Ardara fair, and, in time, prosecuted Galbraith Hamilton of Eden, the local big house, for illicit distillation—the increasingly assertive posture of Catholic clergymen eroded the residual authority of the lineal descendants of the Gaelic élite.³³ In 1802, the parish priest of Inishkeel, Henry

²⁹ Ardara, 18 Oct. 1835, O'Donovan to Larcom, in *OS Letters*, 97–9.

³⁰ McGill, *Ardara*, 18 n. 1.

³¹ Maguire, *Raphoe*, i. 280–1, discusses O'Boyle's 'cordial friendship' with the Nesbitts; on the portrait, see McGill, *Conall's Footsteps*, 244.

³² S. J. Connolly, *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland, 1780–1845* (Dublin, 1982), 135–74, esp. 143–4.

³³ On Barrett's attempt to have the police collect tithes in 1822, see NAI, SOC II Box 170, Narin, 15 Apr. 1822, John Barrett to —, and on the authorities' resistance to collecting tolls in Ardara, see, inter alia, NAI, OP 1839/7/9, 182 Glenties, 30 Oct. 1839, Hill to Morpeth. Hamilton was fined £75 for possession of 13 gallons of *poitín* in 1867: see NAI, IPSCR Ardara: 12 Nov. 1867; *LJ*, 16 Nov. 1867.

McCullough, remembered as *an Sagart Bán*, the white-haired priest, defied the O'Donnells of Glashagh, who prided themselves on their lineage, and shifted mass from a *scáthlán* at Stranagappog, which inconvenienced that family, to a place easily accessible to a greater number of people, and in the 1820s or 1830s, the bishop ceased to meet with the diocesan clergy at the O'Donnells' house after the family objected to mass starting before they were seated.³⁴

Priests were also then involved in settling disputes between neighbours—in the 1840s, they would do so in courts of arbitration³⁵—not least the kin-based faction fights, sometimes involving many hundreds of stick-men on either side, that were a feature of fairs and markets. Boyles and Gallaghers fought in Ardara and Glenties and at Magheramore, a plain west of Sandfield where a great cattle fair was held over several days in October, while Boyles, O'Donnells, and Campbells were the key protagonists in the Rosses.³⁶ Constabulary officers were typically grateful for the priests' efforts on these occasions, commending individual clergymen in reports to Dublin Castle. However, at the May fair in Dungloe in 1835, James McDevitt, the parish priest, in endeavouring to get a man who had stripped to fight to go home came himself into conflict with the police. McDevitt, who had been drinking earlier in 'the room' of a public house with the rector of Lettermacaward, was dragged scuffling into the barracks, and accused of rescuing a man whom the Constabulary had arrested. An officer quickly released the priest, popularly *an Sagart Rua*, the redheaded priest, lest the warring factions sink their differences and storm the barracks. Foolishly, a sergeant proceeded to outrage the crowd by calling McDevitt a 'drunken hog' or 'drunken dog' or 'drunken ——' as he flung him out the door, and in the ensuing riot—accounts of which varied—the Constabulary fired, killing a man on the street. A sergeant and four constables stood trial for murder; the sergeant was convicted of manslaughter, and the priest—the son of the Glenties innkeeper—was exonerated of any wrongdoing.³⁷

If priests' role in maintaining order and acting as interlocutors between young men and the Constabulary made them more important to the people, there were limits to their authority: after all, there were major faction fights in Glenties in the 1820s and the Campbell versus Boyle and

³⁴ Maguire, *Raphoe*, i. 480–1; J. C. T. MacDonagh, 'Heirs to the O'Donnell Chieftaincy (Part II a): The O'Donnells of Glassagh', *Donegal Annual*, 4/2 (1959), 146–55.

³⁵ See Ch. 6 in this volume.

³⁶ McGill, *Ardara*, 66–73.

³⁷ *LJ*, 4 Aug. 1835. On factions in the Rosses, see NAI, SOC I 2,882/16 Outrages in the County of Donegal... Nov. 1828; NAI, OP 1835/7/42 Guidore, 5 Dec. 1835, Rodden to Stovin; 1836/7/4 Dungloe, 4 Jan. 1836, Taylor to Stovin, and Devyr, *Odd Book* [Irish and British Section], 92–3.

O'Donnell versus Campbell feuds raged in the Rosses through the 1830s, with houses ransacked in some of the most serious battles. Policing and prosecutions—Ardara and Glenties had Constabulary barracks from 1822–3 and Dungloe from 1824—were more important than clerical exhortations in ending the great stick-fights.³⁸ Moreover, low mass attendance highlights the priests' struggle, in a period of rapid demographic expansion, to get their putative 'hearers' to adopt canonical belief and practice, and it was only with the Famine and the decline of population thereafter that the balance tipped decidedly in their favour. New chapels reduced the distance that people had to travel to Sunday mass, existing chapels were enlarged or replaced, and, while the population fell, there was a sharp increase in the number of priests. For example, in the parishes of Ardara and Inishkeel, where the Catholic population dropped by over one-quarter in the latter half of the century—from 13,219 Catholics in the mid-1830s (religion was not recorded in the 1841 Census) down (26.7 per cent) to 9,701 in 1901—the number of priests roughly doubled from three to four in the decade before the Famine to no fewer than seven in the early twentieth century, changing the priest-to-people ratio from, at best, 1:3,304 in 1841 to 1:1,385 in 1901.³⁹

In addition to demographic decline, priests' control of most state-funded elementary schools attended by Catholic children helped to advance their 'civilizing offensive'. Those 'national schools', established here from the late 1830s, greatly augmented the influence of priests, for they hired the masters, and they now had unprecedented access to the young. Children studied catechism in school and, from the early 1850s, the master prepared them for the long-neglected sacraments of confession, communion, and confirmation.⁴⁰ Such was the priests' confidence in the first generation to pass through the schools that, having suppressed the drinking and amusement at Inishkeel and displaced the Breslins, they were content for the *turas* that their predecessors had deplored to continue. In the early 1870s, a priest was pleased to report that the island was 'much frequented' by pilgrims.⁴¹ And in 1887, the future cardinal Patrick O'Donnell (1856–1927), who himself belonged to the first generation educated in the national system, could compare the 'devotion and faith' of the 'crowds' who thronged to

³⁸ SOC I 2,622/31 Enniskillen, 31 July 1824, Joyce to D'Arcy. On the Constabulary and faction fighting, see Stanley Palmer, *Police and Protest in England and Ireland, 1780–1850* (Cambridge, 1988), 366–7.

³⁹ *Irish Catholic Directory* (1920), 175–7. In County Donegal, the Census returned fifty-five Catholic clergymen in 1841 and ninety-eight in 1901.

⁴⁰ See Ch. 7 in this volume.

⁴¹ James Stephens, *Illustrated Handbook of the Scenery and Antiquities of Southwest Donegal* (Dublin, 1872), 7.

Inishkeel to the piety of the 'first believers in Christianity'. The pilgrims, according to O'Donnell, were 'possessed of the genuine spirit of Gospel Christians'. And he robustly defended these 'simple, faithful souls' from the charge of 'superstitious observance'.⁴² The *turas* was now an acceptable diversion in summer, and one that reinforced the Church's own narrative of endurance; but the real deal was at chapel every Sunday.

The schools that played such a vital role in orienting the people to chapel—and in quietly transforming notions of time and discipline, manners and obedience—were themselves part of an increase in the administrative and coercive capacity of the state in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. By the time of the Famine, the district not only had schoolmasters but also constables, revenue policemen, postmasters, post-boys, coastguards, petty sessions clerks, rate collectors, and process servers, all living on wages paid by state agencies. Indeed, O'Donovan, when he anticipated the coming of an era of infidelity, was working on the Ordnance Survey of Ireland, an ambitious project that had commenced in the 1820s and that, here, in west Donegal, was completed in 1835. The new maps conferred official status on particular English spellings of place-names and, while many, if not most, of the approved forms were already in use—some can be found in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century records—others were inventions or errors of the surveyors.⁴³ For instance, in Beagh—a townland that is central to this book—the name of an ancient road, *Bealach an Ghabhail*, the Road of the Branch or Fork,⁴⁴ somehow got transferred to a river which, on maps, is marked Bellanagoal River; the

⁴² Patrick O'Donnell, 'Inniskeel', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 8 (1887), 781–94, 785.

⁴³ The representation of the OS in Friel's *Translations* (1980) caused controversy. J. H. Andrews, author of *A Paper Landscape: The Ordnance Survey in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Oxford, 1975), catalogued errors: see his 'Notes for a Future Edition of Brian Friel's *Translations*', *Irish Review*, 13 (1992–3), 93–106, and his contribution to J. H. Andrews, Brian Friel, and Kevin Barry, '*Translations* and *A Paper Landscape*: Between Fiction and History', *Crane Bag*, 7/2 (1983), 118–24. Seán Connolly, 'Dreaming History: Brian Friel's *Translations*', *Theatre Ireland*, 13 (1987), 42–4, criticized other aspects of the play, notably its depiction of hedge schools; also see idem, 'Translating History: Brian Friel and the Irish Past', in Alan J. Peacock, ed., *The Achievement of Brian Friel* (Gerrards Cross, 1993), 149–63.

⁴⁴ The road is rendered *Bealach na gCúl*, 'the road of the backs', in the transcription, by 13-year-old Mary Theresa Gallagher of Narin, of a story told in 1938 by 81-year-old Mary Harkin (b. 1857) of Summy; see NFCS 1,048 (Kilclooney): 253–4. A river forks at Beagh Bridge and some streams join it further west, and McGill, *Connall's Footsteps*, 187, interprets the last particle of *Bellanagoal* as *an Ghabhail*, of the fork. The road originally cut north-west across Beagh and travellers had to ford the river. After the bridge was built east of the ford in the mid-1700s, the road was rerouted and people travelling to Rosbeg would go through Sandfield and across the Warren. The road's name, however, became associated with the bridge; see the presentment, in 1773, for repairing the road 'between Naran Church and Ballynagole Bridge' in DCA, GJ/1/3. D. O'Donnell, the OS's undependable local guide, suggested the spelling Bellinanoil, but O'Donovan, assuming the original name

name never caught on and the river is today the Beagh River. Likewise, the neighbouring townlands of Ranny and Carn—established divisions in estate and grand jury records—became subdivisions of a townland that the map-makers called Derryness, an archaic name for a place that had long since been divided into two.⁴⁵ Children still have to go to school to learn that they live in Derryness, a name used only in official and business correspondence and one that has never appeared on a gravestone in Ardara.⁴⁶

Names were the least of the bruises inflicted by the Ordnance Survey on society. Crucially, the Survey spelled the end of vernacular measurement systems: people who had hitherto looked at land in terms of ‘cow’s grass’—the grass that would keep a cow—would, in time, come to deal in the imperial statute acre. And the maps facilitated the radical reorganization of estates, with landlords quick to use them to replace communal systems of land use that made occupiers, both tenants and subtenants, difficult to control. They also helped constables to complete the first detailed census in 1841, and then, from the mid-1840s, those same constables annually went around making returns of the size of holdings, the acreage under particular crops, and the numbers of cattle, sheep, and fowl in each townland. Most importantly, however, the maps allowed the production of a comprehensive cadastral survey, Griffith’s Valuation, here undertaken in 1855–7, that identified all people holding land or buildings and put a value on every acre, rood, and perch, house, barn, and byre. The ideal of individuals paying rates on property—rather than headmen representing groups of land- and householders—could now be realized.⁴⁷

With those mid-century maps, the British state had taken a decisive step towards conquering the opacity of the Irish countryside; all was

was *Béal Átha na nGual*, mouth of the ford of the coals, settled on Bellanagoal. NAI, OSFNB, Inishkeel, vi. 242.

⁴⁵ In the 1810s, the Conyngham estate identified Ranny and Carn as distinct townlands, and made no mention of Derryness; this practice continued through the 1850s. See NLI, Conyngham Papers 35,394 (1) Boylagh: Arrears, May 1817; MS 35,394 (2) Rental of . . . Boylagh Estate, for the Year Ending the 1st of May 1856; 35,394 (2) Boylagh Rental for May 1860. Carn, not Derryness, is marked on the grand jury map of 1801, GJ/2/19. An island named Derryness Island by the OS is known locally as ‘Dernish’.

⁴⁶ O’Donovan understood Derryness, which he encountered in seventeenth-century documents, to be derived from *Doire* an Easa, ‘oakwood of the cataract or waterfall’, despite there being no waterfall in the area. Conversely, O’Donnell suggested *Doire-inis*, lit. oakwood-island, which, bizarrely, he translated as ‘the pasture by oaks’. Many derivations suggested by O’Donnell are improbable, and some are preposterous; see his suggestions for Beagh, Sandfield, and Summy in OSFNB, Inishkeel, iii. 100–2, 108; viii. 377–9; xi. 21. Tomás Ó Canann, ‘Notes on Some Donegal Placenames’, *Ainm*, 4 (1989–90), 107–24, 107–13, makes a compelling case for Sandfield having originally been Baile Uí Chanann, later Ballycannon.

⁴⁷ On cadastral surveys, see James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed* (New Haven, 1998), 46–52.

becoming clearer just as there began to be fewer people to see. Births, deaths, and marriages were recorded from 1864, dogs licensed from 1865, and, at the opening of the new century, the state seemed to see everything: in 1851, there had been 317 Constabulary officers and men (not including 250 revenue officers and police and 128 coastguards) in County Donegal, giving a police-to-people ratio of 1:805—a significant change from 1:2,190 in 1831 (132 officers and men) and 1:1,256 in 1841 (236)—and in 1861 there were 627, giving a ratio of 1:379; by 1901, the Constabulary force had fallen back to 452, but with the continued decline in population, it still produced a similar ratio, 1:385.⁴⁸ The Catholic poor themselves, abandoning the old and particular and adopting the new, becoming English-speaking and literate, and keeping holy the Sabbath day, now appeared less exotic to their rulers and capable of further ‘improvement’, while, paradoxically, the blurring of cultural differences within the broader Catholic community—not least by the removal of the poorest of the poor—had allowed the smallholders of the west of Ireland to stand front and centre in a national opposition that having effectively dispensed with the landlords now aimed to semi-extract the country from the United Kingdom.

THE POLITICS OF POST-FAMINE ADJUSTMENT

In the time of this book, or, more correctly, in the middle third of the nineteenth century, when the key incidents probed in it took place, the ‘era of infidelity’ anticipated by John O’Donovan was imminent. And central to this book is an act of betrayal, the selfish ploy of a self-serving man, a schoolmaster, Patrick McGlynn, who, in 1856, turned informer on the Molly Maguires, a secret political combination, also known as the Ribbon Society, that from the time of the Famine had been responsible for a wave of offences classified by the state as ‘outrages’. Here, a history of his informing, backlit from points over the previous two decades, sheds light on that wave of activity, its origins and outcomes, the meaning and the memory of it. More specifically, it illuminates the *end* of ‘outrage’, that is, the shifting objectives of those who engaged in it, and also how, after hunger faded and disease abated, tensions emerged in the Molly Maguires when one element sought to curtail such activity, while another sought, unsuccessfully, to expand it. And in that contention, when the opportunities of post-Famine society were coming into view, one glimpses the end,

⁴⁸ Numbers of police taken from *Return of the Constabulary Police of Ireland...*, HC 1829 (131), xxii. 425, and the Table of Occupation in the 1841–1901 Censuses.