

Reviews

***Ireland and the Fiction of Improvement*
Helen O'Connell**

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006
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Anyone worried that contemporary Irish Studies is too keen on self-congratulation and 'ethnic uplift' will be greatly reassured by Helen O'Connell's ambitious new study of the discourse of 'improvement' in relation to nineteenth-century Irish literature. Indeed, it would be hard to imagine a critic less enthusiastic about the literary traditions that she surveys than O'Connell, who begins her book with an investigation of some of the improving pamphlets, tracts and stories disseminated in Ireland during the decades of intense agrarian unrest that followed the Rebellion of 1798, the Act of Union and the ending of the Napoleonic Wars.

Initially, improvement was a key theme in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English works concerned mainly with explaining new agricultural methods. In England, improvement discourse was designed to help farmers adjust to the new demands of an expanding commercial economy. But in an associated pamphlet literature, the nostrums of improvement — hard work, sobriety, frugality — were also extended into the realms of the moral and the domestic. Improvement writers depended heavily on the production of didactic fables, which contrasted the fortunes of the blissfully 'improved' with those of their miserably 'unimproved' neighbours. This enabled improvers to give lots of advice in a readily digestible form — although it also involved them in relating lurid and often unintentionally hilarious tales about starvation, drunkenness and unsupervised children being devoured by pigs. In fact, as O'Connell points out, such cautionary stories about debased lifestyles often flew in the face of these writers' supposed commitment to an aesthetic of dreary realism and 'plainness'.

In Ireland, improvement discourse aimed to focus sadly unsettled minds on the practical business of managing crops, animals and households, in order to wean the rural poor away from a

hand-to-mouth existence, which supposedly fostered 'backwardness' and religious or political delusion. Reforming members of the élite class were particularly disturbed by the improvidence, illiteracy and violence of Irish peasants, and fretful about the vulnerability of the rural masses to Jacobinism and anti-Protestant millenarian fantasy. Improvers were also keen to displace an already existing printed popular literature, which was circulated in the form of cheap, mass-produced chapbooks. Indeed, they attempted to imitate the distribution network of this rival form of fiction, often delivering improving pamphlets directly to both landlords and 'peasant' readers. However, as Niall Ó Cíosáin, an authority on the print culture of the period, has noted, improvement literature was never as widely read as its well-meaning authors hoped. Ó Cíosáin's judgement is recorded in *Ireland and the Fiction of Improvement*, but without any reflection on its implications for O'Connell's thesis about the long-term influence of this literary mode. In this regard, more comparative analysis of the fates of improvement discourse in England and Ireland might have been helpful. O'Connell does not sufficiently discuss how fiction that was so imitative of English models was inevitably more politically freighted in an Irish setting.

O'Connell argues that literary historians assume that Irish fiction is predominantly romantic or modernist in form, and that Ireland lacks a realist tradition of stories of 'thriving, stable communities united by a shared rhetoric and frame of reference'. Side-stepping the question of whether or not any such writing could be called 'realistic' in Irish conditions, she proposes that improvement literature represents just such a overlooked Irish realism; O'Connell goes so far as to suggest that it is the most significant of *all* Irish literary discourses in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But although she advances a large claim about this neglected genre of fiction, it is clear that O'Connell is profoundly unimpressed by the productions of such writers as Mary Leadbetter or Martin Doyle. Although she analyses improving narratives of 'cottage life' with an admirable deadpan seriousness, the absurdity of such tales as 'solutions' to intense agrarian

I Such a view is perhaps echoed by those who claim that the amount of time spent on learning Irish in schools in independent Ireland made a more 'practical' education impossible and delayed the economic take-off of the Irish Republic for decades.

and political conflict is clear enough. Moreover, O'Connell is not at all interested in considering any positive interpretations of the ebullience, energy and 'unruliness' of the subordinate culture, which feature in improvement discourse as merely evidence of degeneracy or sedition. There is no attention here to the possibility of autonomous political consciousness or agency on the part of the underclass. That is to say, O'Connell is totally unconcerned with investigating 'history from below' or 'alternative modernities', in the style of current post-colonial criticism in Ireland and elsewhere. In addition, she sees the characteristic attitudes and deficiencies of improvement discourses as permeating virtually all the 'high' or canonical genres of nineteenth-century Irish writing as well. Sternly warning against the 'romanticization' of this literary period, O'Connell claims that neither Anglo-Irish nor Catholic nationalist writers had any real interest in popular culture or in the remnants of Gaelic culture such as the Irish language. Like improvement writers, all the major Irish novelists evidently wished only to create an orderly public sphere, 'governed by the rationality of markets and profits and unburdened by the claims of memory or difference'.

Such an unfashionably negative account of Irish literary history certainly has its appeal. Although many improvement writers were women — Maria Edgeworth foremost among them — any feminist presumption that women's writing is likely to have 'subversive' tendencies is not for O'Connell. She places both Edgeworth and Lady Morgan firmly within a tradition of counter-revolutionary liberalism, and has a rather scathing footnote about Marilyn Butler's recent attempt to bolster Edgeworth's radical credentials in particular (Butler is herself reacting against readings of Edgeworth's colonial politics by Seamus Deane and others). Indeed, O'Connell accuses élite Irish women writers generally of bad faith, in laying claim to 'freedoms' that they sought to deny to the masses. Although she allows William Carleton a certain 'nostalgia' for his hedge-school education, she has no time for any sentimental notion of Carleton as Ireland's first 'authentic' peasant writer. O'Connell

underlines the fact that Carleton's depictions of Irish 'superstition' and of agrarian secret societies such as the Ribbonmen are primarily based, not on first-hand experience, but on prior textual representations of the peasantry in improvement literature and evangelical writing. Important theorists of the English novel, such as Nancy Armstrong, have examined the influence of putatively minor genres, such as the conduct book, on domestic fiction. Here, O'Connell asserts that in Carleton we can see not just the influence of such instructive or didactic writing on fiction, but also the effect of his tales and novels on Irish improvement writers in turn, as they adopt some of his themes and plots in their own work.

The most fascinating and original passages of *Ireland and the Fiction of Improvement* deal with Carleton's representation of the Irish language and of hedge-school education, noting how his stories tend to suppress any evidence of Irish-language literacy and instead treat both Irish and Latin as forms of 'dead' language. Hence, improvers did not share the pride of many nineteenth-century nationalists in the relatively high levels of popular literacy and the widespread familiarity with classical languages and literature in Ireland. These reformers advocated technical and practical instruction alone, in order to keep Irish children on the straight and narrow path to prosperity and salvation.¹ The improvement writers in effect imply that, in certain circumstances, the printed literature disseminated by the hedge schools seemed actually to reinforce an ignorant 'Catholic' orality, rather than displace it.

O'Connell is also acute on how Carleton's Catholic origins (for he was surely the most prominent Irish convert to Protestantism in the entire century) appeared to license a return to an explicitly anti-Catholic polemic in improving fiction, and especially in the early stories that Carleton wrote for the evangelical journal the *Christian Examiner*. Due to the unpopularity of the strident evangelicalism of Hannah More in particular, most later Irish improvement writers were ostensibly non-sectarian or secular in tone.

But Protestant authors of improvement literature were in general unsure of how critical they could be of Irish religious practices such as 'merry wakes', pilgrimages or 'stations', without putting off Catholic readers. Caesar Otway, Carleton's patron and the editor of the *Christian Examiner*, explained that sometimes gentle satire was more effective in weaning the peasantry away from such time-wasting activities. O'Connell records Otway's satisfaction that Carleton's 'quiet and not ill-natured exposure' of stations in one of his later, less sectarian stories had contributed to the rapid passing away of 'some of the follies that are associated with the religion of the people'.

Carleton is central to *Ireland and the Fiction of Improvement* because he arguably represents a 'crossover' of improvement discourse from the Protestant élite to the broader Catholic population (although of course Carleton is not necessarily at all typical of Catholic novelists in this regard). For O'Connell ultimately wants to construct improvement fiction not merely as an episode in the short history of Anglo-Irish reform, but as a key part of the longer historical narrative of the emergence of Irish nationalism and, eventually, of an Irish nation state. To do this, she must assert that improvement discourse was imported almost wholesale by nationalist modernizers. Hence, the cottage idyll of Leadbetter is presented as *identical* to Eamon de Valera's pastoral vision of independent Ireland, although O'Connell states that improvement was even more 'reactionary' in the case of a Catholic nationalist like the Young Irelander Charles Gavan Duffy. This involves her in a number of tendentious arguments. First of all, she implies that all forms of investment in 'improving' the appalling conditions of the Irish poor involved staking one's faith on a homogenizing, culturally empty version of capitalist modernization. This is to foreclose any speculation on the relationship between culture and different versions of modernization — whether, for example, as a whole line of nationalists from Michael Davitt and James Connolly to W. B. Yeats and de Valera believed (or hoped), the 'spiritual' Irish had an different attitude towards material possessions than the 'materialistic' English.

To accept the argument of this important and provocative book in its entirety would mean discounting cultural nationalism, in both its Ascendancy and popular nationalist guises, as ultimately irrelevant to nineteenth-century Ireland. In O'Connell's account, when J. M. Synge declared his wonder at hearing an 'illiterate native of a wet rock in the Atlantic telling a story that is so full of European associations', he strikes an entirely new note. The Revivalism of artists such as Synge or Yeats, she suggests, is the first real challenge to improvement discourse. This seems implausible; Synge's views on the importance of the Irish language, for example, were anticipated by Thomas Davis and many others. In short, O'Connell overlooks the central irony of anti-colonial nationalism: that it is 'traditional' and 'modernizing' at the same time. The latter may win out, but the former cannot simply be ignored. Finally, O'Connell's lucid, mordant accounts of the authors she reads omit much mention of what Brendan Bradshaw refers to as the 'catastrophic dimension' of nineteenth-century Irish history. Most of the works she investigates in detail pre-date the Famine, and she neglects to investigate the kinds of discourse born of that catastrophe — from, for example, John Mitchel's fiery denunciations of British government policy, to the strange Gothic sentimentalism of the novelist Charles Kickham.

The book has almost nothing to say about the Land War, which saw the final transfer of the land — improved or otherwise — away from the landlord class. But above all, O'Connell's book is curiously unsympathetic to almost all the actors in this history. As O'Connell establishes, rather than the Irish being 'improved' out of any remotely enviable 'pre-modern' condition, they urgently needed to be rescued from a particularly harsh form of colonial exploitation. If either the reformers or the nationalists of the nineteenth century had been able to work out how to reap some of the benefits of 'modernization' without subjecting people to the depredations of capitalism (and some did indeed at least try to do this), then they would have been far wiser than the politicians and writers of 'Celtic Tiger' Ireland.

Emer Nolan

**Connemara:
Listening to the Wind
Tim Robinson**
Dublin: Penguin Ireland, 2006
439 pages. ISBN 978-1-844-88065-2

This large, expansive book opens with an extraordinary journey (surely an amalgam of many different expeditions) into Roundstone Bog, a twenty or thirty square mile blanket bog behind the Connemara coastal town that gives it its name. It ends, hundreds of pages later, on Mám Éan, a saddle pass 1,200 feet up in the Mám Tuirc mountain range, the traditional boundary line between Connemara and the Joyce Country. There, by dint of further scrambling, the author finds a vantage point where he can look back over the expanse of land towards his own home in the distance. This Viconian structure allows him to embrace 'the little bit of the world I am only now, after so many years, beginning to know as home'. What is remarkable is the density of the exploration over such a relatively limited territory. And there are two other books to follow as part of a projected trilogy.

This is a walker's book. It is one of the wonders of Tim Robinson's prose style that he incarnates in words the act of walking itself, the physical movements across often difficult, dangerous terrain, the stumbles and splashes, the muscularity of the effort, the breathing spaces when at rest and then the onward rush once again. For the most part, this movement is conducted in isolation, although he is clearly a man who delights in human encounters and there are many delightful ones in the book. His one concession to prudence is possession of a mobile phone.

Robinson's mind brims with knowledge, which he applies to the landscape as an expert reader might con the mysteries of an ancient text. He obviously has a deep knowledge of the earth sciences, but he combines that with a mastery of language and a richly displayed knowledge of folklore and history, philosophy and literature. The physical landscape, ostensibly empty and desolate, comes alive in the 'biotic dance' of vegetation, and in the accounts of the tragicomic

contributions of humans to the habitat over the centuries. Rare heaths, lichens, heathers and gorse jostle with local characters in this splendid and unexpected narrative.

'A bog is its own diary; its mode of being is preservation of its past.' With its hundred lakes and its black blanket, 'the detritus of thirty or forty centuries of plant life compressed', Roundstone Bog is unusual because of its extent of relatively untouched ground. At first Robinson feels that he should approach the subject 'sensibly', drawing upon the reference libraries devoted to the area's topography, hydrography, archaeology, ecology and history. He doesn't do this. Instead he walks it. But there is a sense in which he adopts that first choice as well, because he carries those libraries around in his head and puts them to immediate use out in the open air; with quotation after vivid quotation.

The book is also an account of the education of the author. This includes a session learning how to cut turf manually with the *sleán*, surely one of the most back-breaking activities in human husbandry. But the education, typically, works two ways. Robinson gives a whimsical account of a tutorial that he conducts with his fellow turf-cutters. This leads to the notion that if the depth of a bank of bog is three thousand years old, 'then one end of a sod of turf is five hundred years older than the other'. In turn, this prompts a reflection on magic, the way in which the imagination of the people converts the wonders of scientific fact into a different kind of miracle.

In the tenth chapter, about a third of the way through, the tone of the book changes. There we have its central section, alighting upon 'the historic kernel of Connemara'. The new tone comes from the intimately personal introduction of the home in Roundstone shared by Robinson and his partner (referred to, throughout, as M) for the past twenty years. It is like entering a populated space after a journey though a remote fastness.

Through the islands and the habitations, Robinson enters the recorded history of the area. The centrepiece is a brilliantly concise

account of the Martin family of Ballynahinch Castle, including 'Humanity' Dick Martin, the founder of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The story has all the decayed vitality of an Edgeworth novel, and Maria, indeed, makes her appearance with her account of a journey into this wilderness in 1833 in a highly inappropriate four-horse carriage.

It is characteristic of Robinson that the Martins of Ballynahinch allow him to explore backwards and forwards to other tribes. In this way we get not only the wild O'Flahertys but the more dimly seen Conmaicne people who give the area its name and who reach back into myth. Then it is forward again to 1924 and the arrival of yet another exotic. Ranji, the Indian prince, fitted in without the slightest difficulty as master of the castle, giving the place the kind of colour relished by this writer:

But there are many other individual characters as well, some of them directly engaged by Robinson, some brought to life from his reading. Alexander Nimmo, the whirlwind technocrat and bridge-builder who came on a blitz to the area in the 1820s and is clearly something of a hero to Robinson. The family of Robinsons (no relation) who stand in for all the land agents of the West of Ireland. The Dutch geobotanist Victor Westhoff, with his abnormal sense of smell. Beartla, the Connemara pony breeder, an outlandish, tragic character like a figure out of a Jack B. Yeats painting whose current descendants can still be seen each year at the fair of Maam Cross. This kind of writing, brilliant pen-portraiture, is one of the main pleasures of the book.

Since Robinson's journey hasn't ended, merely reaching a temporary halting place on that sacred pass in the mountains, it would be foolish to seek out its conclusion. Besides, this expert guide and cartographer is a querist. He is filled with a spirit of resistance to all certainties and even to straight lines on a map: 'My favourite mode of walking being not a single-minded goal-bound linear advance but a cross-questioning of an area, or even a deliberate seeking out of the *fóidín mearaí*, the 'stray sod' that is said to put anyone

who treads on it wandering ...' This physical freedom from direction has its counterpoint in the favoured mental state of the writer; a condition of generous scepticism, an intellectual poise between competing versions of the truth: 'The boundary region between established truth and unstable imaginings that is my preferred territory ...'

Robinson takes his place, then, in the current debate between atheists and the religious creeds, between Darwinism and Creationism, but there is no dogmatism in his text. He frequently reminds us of his declared atheism and his detestation of 'Irish Catholic miserabilism'. When he reaches that mountain pass, however, he does so in the company of pilgrims to a place that is considered sacred. He stands aside and observes but there is no dismissal of the people and their faith. Instead, what he offers in this book, in several astonishing passages of vision, is the present landscape set against the millions of years of the earth's existence and the huge forces over time that have created this rock or that continent.

While it offers its readers an encyclopaedic array of information on this beautiful area of the West, the book is also a personal testament. It is filled with reflections and asides with a warm self-mockery. This genial man is capable of grouching, particularly on the subject of despoliation of the countryside and what passes for development, from wind-farms to summer homes. The book, then, does have a conclusion, but at a deeply personal level, a kind of Zen effacement of the self before the laid-out display of nature: 'Sometimes I come back from such a walk with my head so empty it seems not a single thought or observation has passed through it all day and I feel I have truly seen things as they are when I'm not there to see them.'

Tim Robinson makes a nonsense of nationality. An Englishman who came to the Aran Islands in 1972 and moved to Roundstone in 1984, he has given himself and his great talents to this country in a way that can only leave the native awe-stricken. Perhaps, after all, there is something

- 1 For examples, see Craig Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992); Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, 1988); Harold Mah, 'Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians', *Journal of Modern History*, 72 (2000), 153–82; Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows, eds., *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America 1760–1820* (Cambridge, 2002); T. C. W. Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Régime Europe 1660–1789* (Oxford, 2002).
- 2 Vincent Morley, *Irish Opinion and the American Revolution, 1760–1783* (Cambridge, 2002), 1
- 3 See especially J. G. Simms, *Colonial Nationalism 1698–1776* (Cork, 1976); J. C. Beckett, *The Making of Modern Ireland 1603–1923* (London, 1981); T. W. Moody and W. E. Vaughan, eds., *New History of Ireland Volume 4: Eighteenth-Century Ireland 1691–1800* (Oxford, 1986).
- 4 For example, see Thomas Bartlett, "'A People Made for Copies Rather than Originals': The Anglo-Irish 1760–1800", *International History Review* (1990), 11–25; Jacqueline Hill, *From Patriots to Unionists: Dublin Civic Politics and Irish Protestant Patriotism, 1660–1840* (Oxford, 1997); Joep Leerssen, 'Anglo-Irish Patriotism and Its European Context: Notes towards a Reassessment', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland: Iris an Dá Chultúr*, 3 (1988), 7–24.

of the outsider's freshness in the very detail of his observations. The local, claiming to know everywhere, is often incapable of seeing what is in front of him. Certainly, Robinson is part of the tradition of visiting earth scientists to this country. There is an amusing account towards the beginning of the book of a sodden seminar on the bog in 1935. It is drawn from Robert Lloyd Praeger's *The Way that I Went* (1937). English, Swedish, Danish and Irish scientists engage in heated discussion as they, literally, sink to their knees in the soft surface of the bog. Robinson is of this group, with one important distinction — he has made his home here and is now one of Ireland's finest writers.

Thomas Kilroy

Irish Opinion and the American Revolution, 1760–1783

Vincent Morley

**Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002
x + 366 pages. ISBN 0-521-81386-7**

Washington i gCeannas a Ríochta:

Cogadh Mheiriceá i Litríocht na Gaeilge

Vincent Morley

**Baile Átha Cliath: Coiscéim, 2005
xliii + 124 pages. ISBN: none assigned by
publisher**

The publication in 1989 of an English translation of Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) provoked considerable scholarly interest in 'public opinion' in the eighteenth-century anglophone world. Habermas's argument about the emergence of a space for reasoned debate in the bourgeois public sphere was accepted, nuanced and challenged in a slew of publications on the press and print culture, associational culture and sociability in venues ranging from the theatre to the tavern.¹ In that context, it is surprising that Vincent Morley's *Irish Opinion and the American Revolution, 1760–1783* is the first major study of Irish public opinion in the eighteenth century since R. B. McDowell's *Irish Public Opinion, 1750–1800* appeared in 1944. It is no less surprising

that he does not engage with either Habermas's provocative thesis or indeed probe many of the questions that the resulting work has raised.

Nevertheless, *Irish Opinion and the American Revolution* is an invigorating read. In a polemical Introduction, Morley takes aim at the dominant representations of Irish opinion in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Most especially, he argues, that the notion that society was divided between a politically apathetic Catholic majority, a 'colonial nationalist' Anglican political élite, and a republican Presbyterian community distorts 'the true state of opinion in eighteenth-century Ireland'.² His own starting point is that Irish society in the latter half of the century — and indeed at all times throughout the century — remained divided along religious lines; political attitudes largely mirrored ethnic origins. He claims that the Anglican élite remained locked in the mindset of the colonist, that Presbyterians mostly wished to benefit fully from the political system and not to overturn it, and that Catholic opinion was extremely politically engaged, rejecting the legitimacy of the state.

Earlier generations of historians conceived late eighteenth-century Irish demands for increased control over government spending, free trade and greater legislative independence as colonial nationalism, an opinion that can be traced beyond W. E. H. Lecky to Sir Jonah Barrington's *Rise and Fall of the Irish Nation* (1833).³ As Morley points out, that orthodoxy has been subject to sustained criticism on the grounds that Anglican attitudes did not constitute nationalism at all.⁴ His vision of Anglican opinion acknowledges a striving for greater independence while asserting the continuing grasp of old mentalities on the political élite. Similarly, Morley believes that an obsession with finding antecedents for the democratic republicanism of the United Irishmen has distorted the study of eighteenth-century Presbyterian opinion, resulting in a rather deadening teleology — all roads lead to Cave Hill. Morley denies the existence of any strong body of republican opinion in Irish Presbyterianism before the American Revolution; the majority of Presbyterians, he contends,



A parliamentary reformer represented as a republican. An accompanying verse reads 'Your Petitioner Sheweth / That he Humbly wishes to / Reduce the Church to Gospel Order / By Rapine, Sacrilege and Murther / To Make Presbytery supream / And Kings themselves submit to him / And not content all this to do / He must have Wealth & honor too / Or else with Blood & Desolation / He'll tear out of [sic] th' Heart o' th' Nation'. See *Drawcansir: or, The Mock Reform. An Heroic Poem* (Dublin, 1784). Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

sought not to overturn the constitutional status quo but to be fully included within it. Historians who have related United Irish republicanism to the democratic organization of the Presbyterian Church or to the ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment have simply misread the tea leaves. And apparently, so too did contemporary Anglicans who, remembering the 1640s, were quick to dismiss Dissenters as republicans.

However, Morley's harshest criticism of the historiography concerns its understanding of Catholic opinion. The crux of his argument is that the failure of historians to comprehend the political culture of the majority of the Irish population ... is a predictable consequence

of their inability either to utilise the vernacular sources or to assimilate the findings of scholars who publish in Irish.⁵ Historians, he argues, have ignored the best source for analysing Catholic attitudes — literature in the Irish language. Far from revealing a politically apathetic population, prose and verse in Irish demonstrate the persistence of ideals of loyalty to the rightful crown, Church and country; the hope that military support from abroad — France — would result in a Jacobite and Gaelic restoration was not the delusion of a defeated people but a realistic reflection of Ireland's potential strategic importance in a century defined by warfare. This argument for the importance of Irish-language literature as a source, which received

5 Morley, *Irish Opinion*, 3

6 Morley, *Irish Opinion*, 12–13

7 Morley, *Irish Opinion*, 2

its first major scholarly formulation as far back as Daniel Corkery's *Hidden Ireland* (1925), has implications for a recent debate about the question of the relationship of state and society in eighteenth-century Ireland. Sean Connolly's challenging *Religion, Law and Power: The Making of Protestant Ireland 1660–1760* (1992) argued that eighteenth-century Ireland was characterized not by a confrontation between a brutal colonial class and an oppressed colonized majority, but was rather fundamentally an *ancien régime* European society, with the different classes bound together by patterns of deference and customs. Morley argues that Connolly has mistaken appearance for reality — Ireland looked like an *ancien régime* state but 'this superficially imposing edifice was a hollow façade which lacked an essential feature of normal *ancien régime* states ... a sense of legitimacy grounded on immemorial usage and sanctified by a church commanding the allegiance of the people'.⁶

Morley argues that 'a middle stratum of comfortable tenant farmers, craftsmen, schoolteachers, publicans, shopkeepers and priests' maintained a 'vigorous' oral and manuscript literary tradition in Irish.⁷ He claims that this literature reflected the opinion of the rural masses and revealed that they never accepted the legitimacy of the constitution in church and state. He corroborates this evidence with the comments of often paranoid élite observers on the disloyalty of the masses. On the other hand, Morley notes, by mid-century the Catholic landed gentry, Church hierarchy and some merchants accepted that the state could only be reformed rather than overthrown, and sought to win relief from the Penal Laws through loyalty to the Hanoverian state. This gap in the attitude of Catholics of different classes was vividly illustrated by the killing of three Whiteboys by an association to preserve law and order founded by a Catholic priest and defended by his bishop in Ballyragget, County Kilkenny, in February 1775. Morley's reassertion of the case that Ireland was exceptional in European terms, a colonial society in Western Europe, is an important historiographical contribution in itself.



The arguments sketched above frame Morley's analysis of Irish opinion on the American Revolution. Drawing on parliamentary speeches, newspapers, pamphlets and sermons, as well as Irish-language literature almost exclusively in manuscript, he presents a chronological account of the development of opinion to the war. Actions matter as well as words: he discusses recruitment to the British army, attacks on soldiers by civilians and the activities of Irish privateers who served Britain's enemies. Before 1776, he argues, the American crisis was very much secondary to domestic concerns for all sections of Irish society: pro-American sentiment was confined to an extreme Patriot minority in a loyal political nation; popular Catholic consciousness was unaffected until the outbreak of war. Morley argues that once the war broke out, Protestant opinion divided. Most Protestants feared that a British victory in America would see a jubilant and arrogant London government infringe on Irish rights. However, they feared that an American victory would result in the break-up of the Empire. The Patriot opposition expressed strong support for the rebel American colonists, but this support ebbed as British defeats threatened the Empire. Irish Protestants, including the Patriots initially at least, remained suspicious of Catholics, a suspicion heightened as war with France became inevitable. The Volunteer units that sprang up from 1778 aimed to defend against French invasion and Catholic rebellion. As such, Morley says, they began as expressions of support for the war effort, though not necessarily for the administration in London.

How then does he account for the fact that by 1779 a placard inscribed 'Free Trade or This' appeared mounted on a Volunteer cannon at a parade outside parliament? Rather than taking inspiration from American ideas, he says the campaign for free trade and the disastrous economic effects of the war politicized the Volunteers, and wider opinion. English difficulties encouraged Protestants to seek support from their Catholic brethren, a significant breach

in traditional politics. One radical pamphlet, *Moderation Unmasked* (1780), anticipated Wolfe Tone by more than a decade: 'Why should we recollect that we have different appellations — Protestants, Roman Catholics, Dissenters? Let them be forgotten, and they are forgotten — We remember only that we have the common one of Irishmen.'⁸ Simultaneously, the free trade campaign encouraged the growth of separatist sentiment among Ulster Presbyterians, exemplified by Joseph Pollock's *Letters of Owen Roe O'Nial*, which in 1779 called for an independent Ireland under French protection. Morley contends that such sentiments were clearly influenced by America, but were shared by only a small radical minority of Presbyterians; most Protestant opinion continued to support the British connection, albeit on altered terms, and despite some Catholic relief measures, it continued to reject Catholic participation in politics. What then of the Catholic majority? Morley continues to differentiate Catholics on class lines. The élite remained loyal to the government, even seeking to raise troops; the middle and lower classes remained alienated from the state, though attitudes towards Protestant Patriots began to soften as the campaigns for free trade and legislative independence gathered steam.



Morley develops his analysis of the politics of literature in Irish — one of the most welcome aspects of his *Irish Opinion and the American Revolution* — in his *Washington i gCeannas a Ríochta: Cogadh Mheiriceá i Litríocht na Gaeilge*, an annotated anthology of poems and songs on the American war by various Irish-language poets, most notably Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin of County Kerry, Séamus Ó Dálaigh of County Limerick, and Tomás Ó Míocháin of County Clare. The verse proved an adaptable medium, expressing not only the political but also the social and economic discontents of the people. Again, Morley argues that the poetry reflects not the voice of the very poor but rather that of the lower middle classes and clergy, later

the backbone of nineteenth-century Catholic nationalism. The items reproduced in the anthology show that, while happy to see England in trouble, the poets initially viewed the conflict as a war between two sets of foreign Protestants; in other words, the earliest poems make little reference to the constitutional issues at stake. However, once France and then Spain became involved attitudes changed. Military intervention in Ireland seemed imminent. The poets now spoke of a French-backed Stuart restoration, but, in a development mirroring the Protestant Patriot appeal for Catholic support, they began to praise the Volunteers and Protestant Patriot political leaders such as Henry Grattan and Henry Flood, as well as Protestant American heroes like Washington. In Morley's opinion, then, the ideas of the American Revolution, and subsequent events in Ireland, began altering the views of the Irish-speaking lower orders on politics, meaning that when the Protestant republican United Irishman James Napper Tandy sought an alliance with the Defenders in the 1790s, 'the path had been cleared for him by George Washington'.⁹



Morley's books are important contributions to the study of eighteenth-century Ireland on several levels. They restore a necessary sense of chronology and nuance to the impact of the American Revolution, provocatively arguing that it did not redefine Irish politics but rather provided the stimulus for longer-term tensions to be released. As such, Morley's work — and that of Jimmy Kelly, Breandán Mac Suibhne and Danny Mansergh — provide a better perspective for the 1790s than assuming that the origins of the revolutionary decade can be found in 1789 or 1791.¹⁰ Likewise, Morley's work — like that of Breandán Ó Buachalla, Éamonn Ó Ciardha, Cornelius Buttimer and Louis Cullen — has demonstrated that the rich seam of Irish-language material can be usefully mined by historians of society and culture and, consequently, students of popular politics and public opinion.¹¹ In particular, Morley, by making

8 Morley, *Irish Opinion*, 241

9 Vincent Morley, *Washington i gCeannas a Ríochta: Cogadh Mheiriceá i Litríocht na Gaeilge* (Baile Átha Cliath, 2005), xxxviii

10 See James Kelly, *Prelude to Union: Anglo-Irish Politics in the 1780s* (Cork, 1992), and 'Conservative Protestant Political Thought in Late Eighteenth-Century Ireland', in S. J. Connolly, ed., *Political Ideas in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), 185–220; Breandán Mac Suibhne, 'Politicization and Paramilitarism: North-west and South-west Ulster, c. 1772–98', in Thomas Bartlett, David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan, eds., *1798: A Bicentenary Perspective* (Dublin, 2003), 243–78; Danny Mansergh, *Grattan's Failure: Parliamentary Opposition and the People in Ireland 1779–1800* (Dublin, 2005).

- 11 Breandán Ó Buachalla, *Aisling Ghéar: Na Stiobhartaigh agus an tAos Léinn, 1603–1788* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1996); Éamonn Ó Ciardha, *Ireland and the Jacobite Cause, 1685–1776: A Fatal Attachment* (Dublin, 2002); C. G. Buttimer, 'Cogagh Sagsana Nuadh Sonn: Reporting the American Revolution', *Studia Hibernica*, 28 (1994), 63–101; L. M. Cullen, *The Hidden Ireland: Reassessment of a Concept* (Gigginstown, 1988)
- 12 See, *inter alia*, the discussion of sociability threaded through Martyn J. Powell, *The Politics of Consumption in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Houndmills, 2005).

texts available in an accessible form, has done a great service to his fellow-historians.

But many of Morley's key arguments are open to challenge. His division of public opinion along denominational lines is problematic. Political divisions cut across denominational lines, and were further complicated by other factors such as class and geography; indeed, Morley's own abandonment of rigid denominational categories at key points in his argument — for example, in his accounts of the free trade campaigns and constitutional demands where he describes the opinions of loyalists, that is, of a political rather than a denominational section of opinion — underline the danger of the rigid categorization he at times appears to promote. The model presupposes divisions within public opinion not always evident at the time. His emphasis on inherited divisions in society can obscure developments that were drawing many people closer together. For example, although he discusses the influence of John Locke and Scottish philosophy, there is little discussion of the impact of Enlightened ideas of toleration on Irish political culture nor is there much sense of the growth in sociability that saw people of different classes and religious backgrounds come together on both informal and formal occasions, in theatres, coffee houses, learned societies, or even in attending charity sermons.¹²

The use Morley makes of Irish-language sources is also problematic. He makes a convincing case that the poems and songs express popular social and economic discontent, even if they represent the middling classes primarily. However, the extent to which they represent genuine political opinion remains a vexed question. For instance, Morley insists that the Jacobite sentiment in much Irish-language literature was a realistic political programme in the context of international relations, yet even before the middle of the century the Stuarts were a beaten docket and, from 1766, the papacy and the French had decided not to back them in another race: were the poets, who Morley demonstrates to be well aware of international developments, ignorant on this point or were they following a

script in their poems, delivering to their audience expected themes not necessarily reflective of real-life politics? Discontent with the status quo does not automatically translate into believing its destruction imminent or achievable. It is highly unlikely that all those singing or listening to Jacobite songs intended to act on their sentiments — certainly in more recent times the singing of a rebel song signified little about practical political opinions and intentions, and certainly not among the delegates at a recent Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis drunkenly singing 'Seán South of Garryowen'. The extent to which Irish-language poems and songs were performance pieces within traditional literary tropes, and the question of how that may have affected the political language within them has not been adequately addressed.

Morley's work represents a major contribution to the historiography of eighteenth-century Ireland. His polemics, his nuanced account of the impact of the American Revolution, and his scholarship on underused and Irish-language sources demand serious consideration. However, contemporaries, as he himself shows, felt themselves to be an integral part of Europe. An analysis less focused on traditional divisions in a rapidly changing society and more responsive to the implications of the increasing interaction between people of different denominations within Ireland's flourishing public sphere would have allowed a greater insight into how far Ireland partook of shared European political, social, intellectual and cultural developments on the cusp of the modern era.

Ultán Gillen

War, State and Society in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland

Stephen Conway

**Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006
x + 346 pages. ISBN 978-0-19-925375-3**

The history of war has changed in the last two decades. The subject was once the preserve of historians of strategy and diplomacy, but now social and cultural historians probe the

experience of war (and military service) for combatants and civilians, while political historians produce increasingly sophisticated analyses of the impact of war and the threat of war on the relationship of state and society. Stephen Conway is the author of the well-received study *The British Isles and the American War of Independence*, published in 2000, in which he presented the most comprehensive assessment to date of the impact of that conflict on Britain and Ireland. In that volume he argued that the experience of conflict served to hasten administrative and organizational changes that reinforced what John Brewer has termed the 'fiscal-military state' and intensified the sense of national identity that Linda Colley influentially described in *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (1992). In *War, State and Society in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland*, Conway is concerned with the same general issue but the focus is the sequence of wars fought in the middle decades of the eighteenth century; that is, from the quirkily named War of Jenkins's Ear, which began in 1739, through to the conclusion, in 1763, of the (by comparison) unimaginatively titled Seven Years War.

Ireland features less prominently here than in his earlier book; this is not surprising since the wars of the mid-eighteenth century had less impact upon the course of domestic and Anglo-Irish politics and on the Irish economy and society. Still, Conway has trawled more deeply than most non-Irish specialists in the Irish archival record. His account of the impact of war on Cork city — one of his three regional case studies — captures the ambivalent sentiments of that city's population as they sought to reconcile their irritation at the augmented military presence, their joy at the successes of the king's army, and their determination to ensure that nothing interrupted the business of making money or threatened the city's place as one of Europe's major trading centres. The involvement of some of the city's major families and office-holders in smuggling seems to confirm that the people of Cork were at heart more interested in profit than supporting the war effort. Yet the

declarations of loyalty and support for the crown were as warm and enthusiastic there as they were in Berkshire. They were, perhaps, less effusive than those emanating from Edinburgh, but then Cork had less to prove than the Scottish capital in the wake of the '45.

Conway also offers a useful analysis of Irish service in the military in these years. Many thousands of men from all parts of Ireland and from the main religious groups served in what were becoming ethnically and religiously more diverse armed forces. The attempt made in 1762 by Lords Kenmare and Kingsland to establish a 'Roman Legion' of seven regiments of Irish Catholics foundered on the rock of Irish Protestant intransigence and the intensified anti-Catholicism generated by the Seven Years War. In practice, however, Irish Catholics served in the army in large numbers, particularly in North America. Irishmen constituted 27.5 per cent of the military rank and file in the American colonies, as against a modest 4.1 per cent (overwhelmingly Ulster Protestants) of those serving in Britain. Identity, Conway's analysis suggests, was more flexible and layered in the mid-eighteenth century than it was to become with the emergence of modern nationalism. In this context, his brief assessments of the impact of the threat of invasion on public consciousness, of the inspiration provided by heroes, and of the fear of external enemies, are both engaging and insightful. It is telling from an Irish perspective to note the praise lavished on General William Blakeney of County Galway for his role in defending Minorca in 1756, and the rapturous celebration of Admiral Edward Vernon's capture of Porto Bello from the Spanish in 1739, but while Conway refers, frequently, to these events, he understates their import for Irish Protestants and their genuine pleasure at British military success. As a result, he underestimates the strength of pan-British Protestantism, and the significance of the Irish and, to a lesser extent, of the American colonial contribution to Britain's emergence out of the Seven Years War with the largest global empire.

- 1 Stephen Conway, *War, State and Society in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2006), 306
- 2 Conway, *War, State and Society*, 54

This notwithstanding, Conway qualifies Colley's influential conclusion as to the centrality of war (particular war with France) as a factor in promoting the growth of British identity in the eighteenth century. In so doing, he demonstrates his commitment not only to employ but also to modify, when appropriate, the interpretative paradigms of Brewer, Colley and others. At its most general, his thesis is that 'everywhere war acted as a dynamic force', and to this end he assesses the impact of a generation of war on the state, armed forces, economy, society, politics, religion, 'the nation' and the regions in a sequence of thematic chapters.¹ Saliently, he endorses Brewer's argument that Britain prevailed in this prolonged struggle with France because its fiscal-military state gave it an advantage over its rivals that facilitated its emergence in the course of the long eighteenth century as the dominant global power. Having argued previously that the American War of Independence hastened important advances in that direction, it is notable that the evidence he adduces in respect of the conflicts of the 1740s and 1750s elicits a more cautious conclusion.

In contrast to Conway's earlier book, this volume includes a highly informative analysis of the circumstances of Britain's continental rivals, illustrating how war also caused them to embrace organizational and administrative reform and reminding the reader of the obvious — that the outcome of the prolonged power struggle between Britain and France was never a foregone conclusion. In explaining Britain's ultimate success, he places great emphasis on 'a highly productive partnership between government and private effort' that enabled London to marshal the men and materials required for war.² Private interests were not only involved in supplying provisions but also ordnance, shipping, sailors and military recruits. For Conway, this demonstrates that, despite the enduring attachment to clan and region, the Protestant population was united behind the war effort. The British state may have been able to raise more revenue than its opponents, but the energy of Protestantism was no less important in overcoming internal dissent (Jacobitism, most

notably) and estrangement (in the shape of the Catholic population of Ireland) and, ultimately, winning wars.

Like its predecessor, this book is a fine example of a 'Three Kingdoms' or 'Four Nations' approach to history, the starting point of which is that since histories of Britain and Ireland are inextricably intertwined, it makes sense to consider them together. That approach is useful to a point. And yet it is apparent from this, and Conway's previous study, that while the ill-named 'New British History' can do much to illuminate the shared history of Britain and Ireland, not least geopolitical aspects of Anglo-Irish relations, it can also elide regional difference. This study makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the importance of war in the mid-eighteenth century to the evolution of the British fiscal-military state. Conway's account of that evolution also lends strength to his contention that demands of fighting the Seven Years War represented a significant break with the past and a step forward to the more all-consuming conflicts that became the norm of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. It is an important book and one that historians of Ireland will find informative and rewarding.

James Kelly

Religion and Reformation in the Tudor Diocese of Meath
Brendan Scott

Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006
174 pages. ISBN 1-85182-995-4

The Earldom of Desmond, 1463–1583: The Decline and Crisis of a Feudal Lordship
Anthony McCormack

Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005
224 pages. ISBN 1-85182-882-6

The student of English history faces a bewilderingly large literature. Exploration of any large-scale thematic topic requires delving into a massive bibliography of local studies — county, parish, family, and so on. And that bibliography

just keeps getting bigger. But the Irish case is different; there is no analogous profusion of local histories. Even the great earldoms and bishoprics have only recently, if at all, attracted serious study.

This imbalance is partly the result of historiographical trends. Debate over the origins and character of the English Civil War and its role, or lack thereof, in various teleological accounts of England's past, Whiggish, Marxist or modernization, was largely responsible for the profusion of English local studies since the 1970s. In this environment such histories were not antiquarian exercises but rather model-testing case studies. Irish historiography lacked similar controversy, its primary concern being not an internal struggle for self-definition but rather a series of hegemonic moves by a colonizing neighbour. As such, its issues were chiefly 'national' or 'confessional' in focus and often considered in express comparison with British and English constitutional and ecclesiastical developments. Within the small, but growing, cohort of professional Irish historians there was limited push toward the local.

A curious effect of this can be seen in some of the major works of the last thirty years or so. Studies such as Nicholas Canny's *Elizabethan Conquest* (1976), Brendan Bradshaw's *Irish Constitutional Revolution* (1979), Ciaran Brady's *Chief Governors* (1994), and even Steven Ellis's survey, *Tudor Ireland* (1985), all tackled major questions and/or covered large swaths of time. Yet none of them had a substantial secondary literature to engage. As a result, they read as much as exercises in method and source use as they do historiographical interventions; there just simply was not a sufficient body of local studies to which these authors could appeal when constructing their narratives.

This is beginning to change. Early modern Irish history is going through its own localist moment: in the last few years important books have appeared on such diverse topics as Gaelic lordship in Leinster; the life and career of the 'Wizard' earl of Kildare; Tyrone's rebellion, and society and politics in Sligo.¹ In part this is due

to dynamics internal to Irish historical studies itself, not least a deeper engagement with theory, increased attention to Irish-language sources, and a sense of the limits of both nationalist and revisionist narratives. External influences have played a role too. The emergence of the so-called 'New British History' had the perhaps curious effect of increasing the attention paid to Irish localities. For if the magisterial matters of early modern Britain were indeed to have had genealogical branches arising from the 'Celtic fringe', then it became incumbent upon researchers to dig up more of what was really going on in Irish (and Welsh and Scottish) soil. In short, Irish local studies came to have a new importance.

Irish historians' 'provincial turn' is not, however, a mirror image of that undertaken by their English counterparts. A significant distinguishing feature is the greater attention paid by Irish historians to larger European contexts. The New British History may have prodded English historians to take more seriously events in the Stuarts' other kingdoms, but in doing so, as many of its critics pointed out, it left the archipelago oddly disconnected from the Continent. By contrast, the best recent work on Ireland has been attentive to wider contexts. We seem to be witnessing, therefore, the simultaneous making of Irish history, British and European.

Brendan Scott's *Religion and Reformation in the Tudor Diocese of Meath* and Anthony McCormack's *The Earldom of Desmond, 1463–1583: The Decline and Crisis of a Feudal Lordship* take their place in this growing body of tightly defined local studies capable of shedding new light on broad historiographical issues. Scott's exploration of one diocese in the 'long' Tudor period (a sizeable portion of the discussion addresses conditions after the death of the last Tudor monarch, Elizabeth I, in 1603) charts the opportunities for reform, and the impediments to the same, in Ireland in the wake of Henry VIII's break with Rome in 1534. The fate of reform in this diocese would serve as bellwether for efforts beyond the Pale. Understanding in detail what happened here — an area in which

¹ Chris Maginn, *Civilizing Gaelic Leinster: The Extension of Tudor Rule in the O'Byrne and O'Toole Lordships* (Dublin, 2005); Vincent Carey, *Surviving the Tudors: The 'Wizard' Earl of Kildare and English Rule in Ireland* (Dublin, 2002); Hiram Morgan, *Tyrone's Rebellion: The Outbreak of the Nine Years War in Tudor Ireland* (Dublin, 1993); Mary O'Dowd, *Power, Politics and Land: Early Modern Sligo, 1568–1688* (Dublin, 1991)

the crown might have had some realistic hope of reforming success — contributes much to our understanding of the politics of religion in sixteenth-century Ireland. In spite of the title, there is not much religion in this book. Rather, this is a structural account, a study of institutions, of material and educational constraints, and of the élite politics that were so much a part of the fortunes of reform and resistance.

Scott organizes the book into five thematic chapters covering the pre-Reformation Church, the early attempts at reform, matters of finance and state of the clergy, religious houses and dissolution, and the emergence of recusancy. Richly detailed and well-researched, this account of the mechanics of reform draws out carefully the very real possibilities that existed for an Irish (Gaelic and Hiberno-Norman) break with Rome and the circumstances that led to its rejection and resistance. It also raises points of comparison and contrast with contemporary English trends: his picture of the strength of the late medieval Church suggests similarities with the Catholic Church in England; his discussion of the heavy secular duties, to the detriment of religious duties, occasioned by Meath's 'frontier' characteristics suggests the very real differences in the roles of Irish and English bishops.

If Scott tackles the great ecclesiastical issue in early modern Anglo-Irish relations, McCormack addresses the great secular one: the eclipse of the native élite in the wake of Tudor reform. Organized chronologically, it traces the rise and fall of Fitzgerald authority in the Munster earldom of Desmond from the eighth earl's appointment as lord deputy in 1463, through the troubles that followed Henry's split with Rome, and ending with the rebellions of 1569–73 and 1579–83. McCormack's account of the earldom's sophisticated administrative structure in the early 1500s is a significant contribution to a growing body of work that challenges the notion that Irish élite politics was merely might-makes-right warlordism.

The bulk of the text, however, concerns the period post-1534. Of particular significance

is McCormack's provocative rereading of contemporary power relations in this era of direct rule from London. The primary conflict determining Fitzgerald authority, it is argued, was not with an aggrandizing, centralizing crown but rather with an age-old, local rival — the Butler earls of Ormond. Violence is thus attributed not to Gaelic barbarism or English colonial excess but to local instability bequeathed by the unfinished nature of the Norman invasion; foreign intrigues are driven, not by competing claims to sovereignty — Hiberno-Norman aristocratic versus Anglo monarchic — but by the exigencies of the running conflict with the Butlers.

Both of these books are empirical works of a very high order. Their close contact with the sources, however, is not matched by a similarly intimate engagement with the historiography. Beneath these seemingly straightforward empirical accounts are certain historiographical assumptions worth greater interrogation. Most conspicuously, both authors are influenced by the current zeitgeist of cultural negotiation. There is no place in either for conflictual models of cultural contact, and ideology has largely been replaced by considerations of power politics amongst competing élites in a developing multiple monarchy. Scott's main thesis is that religious reform was not doomed to failure and might very well have worked had sufficient financial means and administrative attention been devoted to it. Recusancy, thus, emerges as an unintended consequence of the estrangement of Meath's gentry and nobility from the corridors of power in Dublin. He pits this argument against what he says is a 'Catholic nationalist line', but it is unclear who currently totes it. Nor must one subscribe to such a confessionally charged position to feel there may have been more than administrative causes behind Protestantism's still birth in Ireland and that perhaps there were those with an interest in seeing the Church of Ireland constructed as the preserve of a persecuted minority.

Likewise, McCormack paints a compelling picture in which co-operation between crown and native élites may have been possible. Here

interpersonal rivalries and factional politics spanning both kingdoms conspire to doom Fitzgerald authority in Desmond. The rule-proving exception is Fitzmaurice's performance of rebellion as Counter-Reformation freedom-fight. In McCormack's account, Fitzmaurice stands alone in his religious fervour and Desmond was a reluctant participant in his own rebellion, preferring instead to negotiate a settlement with a crown that Fitzmaurice would have deemed heretical. Various Fitzgerald earls, thus, may have test-driven the revolutionary rhetoric of faith and fatherland but they did so without conviction; this would be the preserve of the Baltinglasses and Tyrones of the world.

Conspicuously missing from both of these pictures, then, is a role for ideology. Indeed, events are taken to drive ideas and not the other way around. This may have been the case — and it is a position compellingly argued — but it is not an opinion universally shared. McCormack's dismissal in a footnote of the view that the dark side of Renaissance thought had an influential part to play in the distancing of native and newcomer; crown and nobility, is not sufficient. A greater engagement with the richness of debate on early modern Anglo-Irish relations would have made these excellent studies richer still.

One of the great questions raised by Scott's and McCormack's studies is what to do with the classic chronology of English ascendancy and Hiberno-Norman (to use McCormack's preferred term) and Gaelic decline. They both tell tales of contingency and negotiation, but they do little to disturb the place of dates like 1534 and 1583 in a seemingly deterministic logic of English domination and Irish resistance. Was there really no chance for Protestant reform in Meath by the 1580s? Does 'why the Reformation failed in Ireland' thus stand, after all, as *une question bien posée*? For that matter, was the final 'decline' of the Desmond earldom really settled in 1583 with the fifteenth earl's beheading? In his conclusion McCormack writes off both the crown's efforts to install a compliant Fitzgerald earl as a means to calm Munster during the Nine Years War and its concerns over local support of the *súgán* earl,

James fitz Thomas Fitzgerald. But this was a major subplot of the conflict. Moreover, the collapse of Fitzgerald authority in the earldom did not equal that of the earldom itself. It remained quite important, as James I's installation of Richard Preston — Scottish courtier and husband of Elizabeth Butler, daughter of Thomas, tenth earl of Ormond — to the title in 1619 makes clear. Thus while these may not be nationalist tales of English treachery and Irish defiance, their choice of chronological framing nevertheless leaves a similar impression of ideological hardening and political distancing occurring by the middle of Elizabeth's reign.

Is this really the extent of the revision offered by Irish historiography's provincial turn? I suspect it is not. But we will not know until we see considerably more local studies of the empirical rigour and careful contextualization of McCormack's and Scott's. Only then may we start to look for lines of continuity across dates and events still taken as signposts of tectonic change in the Irish historical landscape.

Brendan Kane

***The Irish in the San Francisco Bay Area:
Essays on Good Fortune*
Edited by Donald Jordan and Timothy J.
O'Keefe**

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Oro en Paz, Fierro en Guerra (Gold in Peace, Iron in War) is the motto of San Francisco. In the early gold-rush days the Irish came with thousands of others to this remote port. Those who came from within North America travelled by three routes: they trekked across country usually via Missouri, departing once the grass had grown enough to feed the teams of oxen; or they came by sea, around Cape Horn or else to Panama, crossing the isthmus by riverboat and mule before waiting in Panama City for another steamer up the coast. By the isthmus was fastest. Initially this way took at least six weeks, then

I J. S. Holliday, *Rush for Riches: Gold Fever and the Making of California*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1999), 94

three with the advent of faster transportation and improved roads. It was also the most expensive and disease-ridden journey. The 14,000 mile trip round the hazardous waters of Cape Horn took between five and eight months.¹ Most people travelled across country, but that too was onerous, dangerous and slow. It was primarily young, able people with some means, like the forty-niners, or Argonauts, as they were known, who made it to San Francisco.

Most of the Irish Argonauts were under thirty years of age, male and Catholic. But unlike the vast majority of the new arrivals, not all the Irish began their journey from elsewhere within the United States. In the early 1850s a significant number came from Australia and thus had already some experience in making their way in a foreign and sometimes unfriendly land. Significantly, there were many family groups in the Australian contingent. So while the white population of California was reportedly 90 per cent male in 1850, as were the Irish who travelled from the eastern states, because of the more mixed Australian-Irish component, the Irish element overall was just over two-thirds male.

Some of the Irish had experience and skills that could be immediately put to profitable use: running guest houses and restaurants, mining, teaching, construction and shopkeeping. They were often urbanized, English-speaking, and well aware of how the anarcho-capitalist system of the gold-rush period worked. However, many were unlettered and consequently assigned to a lower rung of the social ladder than their literate European competitors. There was a pronounced tendency towards endogamy amongst the first- and second-generation Irish, which seems to have been driven by religion as much as ethnicity. Despite this, they were not ghettoized, but spread geographically throughout the city, marbled through various economic strata. The nativism, hostility and exclusion experienced by the Irish in the eastern states were not replicated to anything like the same extent in San Francisco.

The boom in the city's population was astonishing: it rose from 459 in 1847 to over

30,000 by the end of 1849 and close to 60,000 by 1860. Lawlessness was widespread. In 1851 a Committee of Vigilance was formed after a series of arson attacks had destroyed swathes of the city, and again in 1856 to counter political corruption. Of 1,200 murders committed in San Francisco between 1850 and 1853, it is claimed that the official legal system managed to sentence and convict only one defendant. Justice, however, was brutal, with floggings, brandings, ear clippings, and the like, meted out for non-capital crimes and with the lynch mob ever ready to swing into action. Confidence in the police and politicians was thin and more than once prisoners were seized from jails and hanged to prevent their escaping or receiving an official pardon. This militia violence reached a zenith in 1856, when twenty-nine people were hanged, imprisoned or exiled by the Committee of Vigilance.

The Irish largely voted for the Democratic Party; Irish-born candidates were elected to city and state positions in San Francisco long before this became possible on the East Coast. Amongst these was David C. Broderick, a second-generation East Coast Irish-American who later became a US senator for California, serving in the Washington DC building his father had worked on as a stonemason. By 1856 Broderick's Democratic Party had been running elements of the San Francisco public sector for several years. Allegations of corruption were widespread; the Committee of Vigilance intervened in that year when one James P. Casey, a former Sing Sing inmate as well as a member of the Board of Supervisors, an inspector of elections and deputy county treasurer, shot the oddly named James King of William, an editor of a muckraking newspaper. When King died six days later, Casey and another man, Charles Cora, were hanged. All twenty-nine people targeted by this committee were Catholic; many were Irish or Irish-Australian and largely Democrats and supporters of Broderick, who himself died violently three years later in a duel at Lake Merced just outside San Francisco.

The mercantile class who formed the committee had widespread support, but generally not from

the Irish establishment, although the Catholic clergy did not speak out against it. Yet several Irish men who were to experience spectacular political, economic and social success accepted the committee's justifications of its violent practices. Perhaps the display of quasi-military force was more persuasive than its arguments, but these Irish may also have truly believed that society was in peril. Or they may have believed that they themselves would not fall foul of the militia. But aside from these brief episodes of organized violence directed at them as political rather than as religious opponents, the Irish generally settled in quickly and remuneratively in the boom town.

Some Irish had already settled in California before it was ceded to the United States and prior to the discovery of gold. No other non-native ethnic groups, with the exception of the sparse Hispanic *Californios*, were present in this Spanish territory when the Irish arrived. As Timothy O'Keefe writes in his Introduction to *The Irish in the San Francisco Bay Area*:

Unlike the immigrant experience in East Coast cities, there was no dominant and exclusive propertied elite ... A social and economic hierarchy would soon be created through hard work, talent, thrift, cleverness, and good fortune, but it was not a birthright. The playing field was relatively level and, with one notorious exception, open to all comers.²

The notorious exception was the Chinese immigrant population, to whom there was widespread opposition among the Irish. This flared most fiercely when the economic boom weakened; once the initial spectacular and easier placed mining finds (gold from panning gravel deposits by hand or simply picked up from the ground) had tapered off, there was sudden underemployment and popular discontent. At first this had fixed upon Mexicans, Chileans and French, and these 'foreigners' were so punitively taxed for a brief period that many of them departed. Attention then turned to the Chinese, who had initially been welcomed for their

willingness to take menial and unrewarding work, but soon bore the brunt of the xenophobic white reaction to any economic downturn. All white California was predominantly anti-Asian in outlook, but the Irish, then the largest white ethnic immigrant group and therefore the chief competitors to the Chinese, were loudest in their hostility.

Foremost among the supporters of the job-anxious workingmen was Denis Kearney, a Cork-born drayman and demagogue, who began his career with tirades against super-rich capitalists, and who, it has been claimed, initially defended the rights of Chinese workers. The best known of the millionaire moguls targeted by Kearney were the railroad's Big Four: Leland Stanford, Mark Hopkins, Collis P. Huntington and Charles Crocker. Some years earlier, in the early 1860s, these four obscure Sacramento merchants had combined to build the Central Pacific Railroad and became fabulously wealthy in the process. They were also, not coincidentally, responsible for the flood of Chinese workers in San Francisco, as they had laid off thousands once the railroad reached the city and track-laying was complete. In the midst of a labour glut that depressed wages, three of these nabobs were simultaneously building sumptuous mansions atop Nob Hill.

Kearney combined virulent opposition to Chinese labour and immigration with pro-worker rhetoric. The Workingmen's Trade and Labor Union, which he helped to found, backed by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, literally and figuratively took up the cudgels against the Chinese. The upshot was a raft of anti-Asian legislation. Daniel Meissner, in his analysis of Irish and Chinese labour in mid-nineteenth century San Francisco argues that the Chinese were 'denied the right of naturalization, barred from specific fields of employment, physically and legally harassed in urban occupations, and refused access to open housing and public schools'.³ The Irish were determined not to be consigned to the life of an underclass similar to the kind of existence many of them had endured in the east. They realized that the Chinese presence actually assisted Irish

- 2 Timothy J. O'Keefe, 'Introduction', in Donald Jordan and Timothy J. O'Keefe, eds., *The Irish in the San Francisco Bay Area: Essays on Good Fortune* (San Francisco, 2005), 2
- 3 Daniel Meissner, 'California Clash: Irish and Chinese Labor in San Francisco, 1850–1870', in Jordan and O'Keefe, *The Irish in the San Francisco Bay Area*, 76

- 4 Meissner, 'California Clash', 76
- 5 Janet Nolan, 'Pioneers in the Classroom', in Jordan and O'Keefe, *The Irish in the San Francisco Bay Area*, 171
- 6 Holliday, *Rush for Riches*, 240

assimilation, because the difference between the Irish and the Anglo-Americans paled, if that is the word, against the much more vivid contrast between Chinese and white cultures. In any event, as Meissner concludes, 'competing for limited resources and opportunities in a dynamic but finite economic market, Irish and Chinese laborers in San Francisco were destined to clash. Inevitably, only one side would prevail.'⁴

Irish women were remarkably successful, with one in four holding down a skilled blue-collar or white-collar job by 1880. As Janet Nolan points out in her essay 'Pioneers in the Classroom' 'these women entered professional work in numbers unrivalled by any other second-generation immigrant women in San Francisco at the time'.⁵ Nolan shows the obstacles overcome and achievements attained by Irish women teachers, which included equal pay and rights of advancement. These were fought for and won at a time when universal suffrage was not yet secured. But education was a highly politicized arena. In many American cities the question of public schools versus Catholic schools was a vexed one, especially in relation to the funding of private schools by public money. Initially, both public and private schools were publicly funded. This did not last. In the mid-1850s a brokered compromise emerged whereby a number of Catholic teachers were awarded posts in public schools and others passed school board examinations; these, whilst remaining in parochial schools, were paid from the public purse. This compromise left the majority of the Irish Catholics faced with a choice between the secular public elementary school, which was (and is) free, and the parochial school, which was (and remains) relatively expensive. By and large, they voted with their pockets, despite strong exhortations from the pulpits. Those who chose to travel the religious education route did so, not only because of their Catholic convictions but also because they could afford to. The classes were less crowded and, perhaps crucially, they accepted children at a younger age. O'Keefe begins the story of men's Catholic colleges the Bay Area by telling how Bishop Joseph Sadoc Alemany of Monterey diocese, whose flock

included the Catholics of Babylon by the Bay, visited Ireland and wrote to Cardinal Paul Cullen, Archbishop of Dublin, imploring him to send teachers. Alemany (who later visited James Casey before he was hanged) was satisfactorily answered.

While gold mining was obviously an early attraction, the most famous Irish mining millionaires were the Silver Kings: James G. Fair, James C. Flood, John W. Mackay and William S. O'Brien. Flood and O'Brien ran a public house that dispensed a famous free 'auction lunch'; its stew was especially toothsome. They also dispensed stockbroking advice. Mackay and Fair were mine superintendents. Reputedly, Mackay could almost smell silver. The four formed a partnership in 1867. Between them they surveyed and gradually bought up stock in certain unsuccessful mines on the fabled Comstock lode in Nevada. Then they began sinking shafts to find the silver they believed must be there. In 1874 their tunnels struck a concentration of gold and silver almost 400 feet wide. Their partnership had paid around \$100,000 for the Bonanza mine that within a few years produced some \$105,000,000 in gold and silver.⁶

Mining had, of course, other consequences. The relatively unintrusive hand panning had quickly been succeeded by damming and flume building and then by hydraulic mining, which directed streams of pressurized water at river banks and beds. This led to the massive and ongoing despoliation of the natural environment and was banned by the California Supreme Court in 1884. The disembowelling of the mountains continued, however. So much timber had been used in the mining that as early as 1876 the Comstock was known as the 'Tomb of the forests of the Sierras'. There were also ecological penalties to be paid for the provision of water to the city, which was often unclean and always expensive. In the mid-nineteenth century the Spring Valley Water Company began buying up farms in the San Andreas Valley to acquire the watershed. The company built dams, but by the 1860s engineers realized that the supply would have to come from the water-rich high

Sierras, more than a hundred miles from the city. William Bourn, who was of Irish ancestry, left New York in 1850 for gold-rush California and successfully mined the miners as a store-owner, banker and investor. But five years after gaining control of the fabulous Empire Mine (largest of the California gold mines) in 1869, he mysteriously shot himself to death in his San Francisco mansion. In 1879 his son and successor, also William Bourn, set about buying up and consolidating San Francisco utilities. He eventually became president of Pacific Gas and Electric and of the Spring Valley Water Company. (The younger Bourn bought Muckross Park Estate in Killarney for his daughter as a wedding present; it is now in the hands of the Irish state, bequeathed in 1931 by Arthur Vincent, Bourn's son-in-law.) The Spring Valley Water Company was highly unpopular and notoriously greedy. Even after, perhaps because of, elaborate litigation in 1880, there was an annual squabble between the company and the Board of Supervisors concerning the price of water. Civic leaders wanted municipal control of an assured water source.

James Duval Phelan was the son of an Irish-born forty-niner, who had come to San Francisco from New York, set up as a merchant and made a fortune in real estate. Born in the city in 1861, Phelan was thus financially secure. He became well travelled and well educated and made a career in politics. James P. Walsh comments that Phelan 'presided over California's conversion from a wealthy frontier outpost to a regional culture that he helped engrave on the popular imagination of America — indeed of the World'.⁷ Walsh explains that Phelan's exemplary success sprang from the country's 'abundance, novelty and remoteness' and the fact that the Irish who came to California were 'better prepared to exploit the enhanced experiences' on offer.⁸ Phelan's accomplishments were manifold; he became a successful mayor and later a US senator. He was ambitious for San Francisco and sought to win for the city a reputation for refinement in art, for culture and for striking public spaces, like the Civic Center. He knew that making San Francisco beautiful was in the city's long-term interest, as it would draw and hold a

desirable population and attract visitors. On the debit side, his political platform was vehemently anti-Asian.

In 1901 Mayor Phelan, as a private citizen, filed for the water rights on the Tuolumne River and drew up the controversial Hetch Hetchy plan to build a publicly owned reservoir in Yosemite National Park. He signed these rights over to the city in 1903. He and his supporters were determined, especially in the aftermath of the 1906 earthquake, to secure a reliable water supply. So a city, seven miles square, sought to claim for itself 652 square miles of watershed over 160 miles away in a nationally protected park. Hetch Hetchy Valley very similar to the renowned Yosemite Valley and outraged environmentalist John Muir considered that damming it was a sacrilege: 'Dam Hetch Hetchy! As well dam for water-tanks the people's cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man.'⁴ The conservationists were joined in opposition by farmers in Modesto and Turlock, concerned that their water and energy were being given away. Further opposition came from William Bourn's Spring Valley Water Company and from Pacific Gas and Electric. Like Phelan, Bourn was interested in the cultivation of the city and Bay Area; after the 1906 earthquake, he inaugurated a policy of public service by the famously rapacious Spring Valley company. Public works, including architect Willis Polk's exquisite Sunol Water Temple, were commissioned. Bourn was not, however, about to allow his Spring Valley business leak away from him and he fought the Hetch Hetchy plan strenuously. Several US Senate hearings held between 1909 and 1913 culminated in the Raker Act, passed with the support of the publishing empire of William Randolph Hearst, and San Francisco was granted the right to dam the Tuolumne River in Hetch Hetchy Valley. All but the conservationists, who wanted to exploit the valley for a form of eco-tourism, were placated by clauses protecting their interests.

Michael Maurice O'Shaughnessy, an Irish man educated at the old Royal University of Dublin who had come around the Horn to San

7 James P. Walsh, 'The Evolution of the Thesis', in Jordan and O'Keefe, *The Irish in the San Francisco Bay Area*, 273

8 Walsh, 'The Evolution of the Thesis', 274

Francisco in 1885, was appointed San Francisco city engineer in 1912. O'Shaughnessy built or completed important tunnels in the city — the Stockton Street tunnel, and the Twin Peaks and Sunset railway tunnels. But it is for his Hetch Hetchy dam, begun in 1914, that he is mostly remembered. It took ten years to complete the dam and twenty years before the water reached San Francisco. On 24 October 1934, the first Hetch Hetchy water flowed into the Bay Area. But the man who had done so much to make it happen did not get to taste a drop; M. M. O'Shaughnessy died twelve days earlier at the age of seventy-two. In the final stages of the project he had been shunted aside politically; indeed as the costs mounted, it was dismissively said that his initials stood for 'more money'.

Today the 167-mile-long system of pipes and tunnels brings to San Francisco water of such high quality that it does not require filtering, perhaps the best-tasting water of any city in the world. However, the system remains controversial, not only for the affront to nature of the dam and reservoir, but also because of the diversion of its hydro-electric profits to meet current municipal liabilities and for the failure to maintain it adequately. This failure, in particular, endangers the water supply not only to San Francisco but also to many of the municipalities and districts of the South Bay.

In 'Diplomatic Snapshots' Dermot Keogh reviews the correspondence from the Irish Consulate in San Francisco from 1933, when the consulate was established, until 1947, when the 'founding' consul, Matthew Murphy, departed. Keogh shows how Murphy attempted, with some difficulty, to explain Irish neutrality during the Second World War to an uncomprehending and often

unsympathetic audience whose more immediate concern was the war against Japan. He was also somewhat hindered in his task by the nationality of his wife, who was German. Murphy was also hampered by a paucity of funds, but he had an entrée to San Simeon, William Randolph Hearst's famous mansion. Hearst was a capricious and complex character. Because of his parents' Irish ancestry and his childhood experiences travelling in Ireland with his mother, he was sympathetic to Ireland's political stance on neutrality. It complemented his own view that wars between European countries were counterproductive. Hearst had met and liked Eamon de Valera (not to mention Adolf Hitler) and had often been at loggerheads with the British establishment and press. When Ireland's refusal to allow its ports to be used by the Allies came under fire, Murphy was glad of the support of the *San Francisco Examiner*, a Hearst paper:

Born in the gold rush, almost destroyed by the earthquake of 1906, shaken by earlier quakes in the 1860s and by the recent convulsion of 1989, San Francisco has become one of the most stylish and self-consciously beautiful of American cities. In his address to the opening of the United Nations Conference in San Francisco in April 1945, US Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius Jr. inevitably gave in to the spirit of the place. 'San Francisco', he said, 'is a symbol in our history. To us the West has always meant the future.' To the pioneers, it was 'the promised land'; since their arrival, he declared, San Francisco has been regarded 'as a place where all hopes came true, where all purposes could be accomplished'. No matter how blowsy the rhetoric, there is still, in the city and its history, that faint dusting of gold.

David Owens