

British Interventions in Early Modern Ireland

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Aidan Clarke is a formidable and influential scholar of early modern Ireland. His scholarship has always set a high standard: firmly grounded empirically, challenging of received 'truths' and, in its faithfulness to chronology, sensitive to how contemporaries may have perceived events. And while the tools have always been traditional, the questions asked and contexts considered have not. Consequently, his work displays a dazzling range: thematic, geographic and chronological. We are thus indebted to Clarke for helping to lift the historiography of early modern Ireland out of the provinciality for which it has often been derided.

British Interventions in Early Modern Ireland stands as a tribute to the man and his work. It is a rich and important collection worthy of both. The essays are, fittingly, constructed in a 'Clarke-ian' mould: methodologically traditional – largely eschewing theory for a meticulous empiricism – yet asking questions and considering contexts which are either new or excitingly revisionist (in the literal, not ideological, sense of the word). There is no real unifying theme connecting these sixteen essays – which in itself is something of a tribute to Clarke's scholarly breadth – other than the very general one offered by the title. Loose category though it may be, 'British Interventions in Early Modern Ireland' was nevertheless chosen for clear historiographical reasons. For as the editors state in their valuable introduction, the writing of early modern Irish history – particularly that dealing with English-Irish relations – has been dominated by a paradigm of inevitable 'conquest and colonisation' which at best falsely flattens the complexity of the period and at worst anachronistically serves to sustain presentist political agendas. These essays, it is argued, work to break down that simplistic caricature of power relations by offering soundings into the fullness and variety of the British experience in Ireland – the negotiations, compromises and frustrations alongside the more well-known triumphs and powerplays. The collection, then, serves both as tribute and state-of-play in the field.

As such, it introduces us to some of the avant-garde areas of research. One of these is material culture, nicely explored in R. J. Hunter's essay, 'The Bible and the bawn: an Ulster planter inventorised'. The focus here is on one character – the Reverend Edward Hatton – who combined in his person the two main interventionist

strains, i.e. planter and Protestant preacher. Hatton died before the deluge, and thus his life and will offer an interesting window onto settler life in the comparatively peaceful 1630s. In addition to giving us some sense of what it meant to materially live well in Ireland (a subject scandalously under-researched), the study also sheds light on the sort of cross-confessional cooperation and accommodation the breakdown of which would elicit such surprise from the 1641 deponents. One of the very intriguing bits here are the 40 books listed in the inventory – if only we knew the titles.

Education is another neglected subject which gets its due here. The study of education in Ireland in this period is nearly non-existent. One gets the sense that study of its Protestant/colonial iteration has suffered from the same stigma that so long plagued the study of the Reformation in Ireland: namely, that its lack of impact on the locals (be they Anglo-Norman or Gaelic in descent) simply revealed the fact that it was fated to fail, thus rendering research on it silly, even wasteful. Such a position is thankfully debunked by Helga Robinson-Hammerstein's 'The "common good" and the university in the age of confessional conflict'. Robinson-Hammerstein has been one of the few to write intelligently and sympathetically on education in early modern Ireland. The present essay continues that work by situating movements for a university in Ireland within European-wide – and specifically German – visions of the university as a means to promote the 'common good' of the whole society, not merely of a narrow elite.

Brian Jackson's 'The construction of argument: Henry Fitzsimon, John Rider and religious controversy in Dublin, 1599–1614' offers a very different view of education in the Anglo-Irish context. The comparison here is to England, not Germany. In a striking exploration of the use of rhetoric in an Irish context, Jackson shows the disputants' shared connection with Oxford and charts the effects that institution's curricula, academic rituals and general intellectual culture had on religious controversy in Ireland. This piece is also interesting in that it reminds us that no matter how much it dominates the historiography, Tyrone's rebellion was not the only game in town in turn-of-century Ireland: as the 'rebellion' raged and put the government on the back heel, Dublin was still the site of dinner parties and disputations. And Jackson's last line may prove one of the most provocative of the collection, suggesting that the efforts of Wadding and Rothe to silence internal debate and dissent may in large part be responsible for posterity's notion of the Irish Counter-Reformation as a 'heroic national struggle, led and directed as a uniform clerical initiative' (p. 115).

These connections between education, religion and high politics in a 'British' context are further drawn out in Alan Ford's fascinating and important contribution, 'That bugbear Arminianism: Archbishop Laud and Trinity College, Dublin'. Ford cautions that Laud must not be seen as purely an ecclesiastical leader, or, in terms of policy development, as having played second fiddle to Wentworth and Bramhall. Rather, he argues, Laud too was of an activist bent and his educational interventions at Trinity – where he was named Chancellor in 1633 – were meant as models for reform of Oxford. Ford thus reverses the direction of educational influence discussed by Hunter. This, of course, is a new take on the classic line that Caroline Ireland served as a practical lab for policies eventually intended for adoption in England. But it is convincingly done, and thus we see at Trinity a much more interventionist Laud in curricular, disciplinary and faculty matters than we see (at least by Kevin Sharp's telling) at Oxford. Ford has indeed told us something new and important about Laud's overall 'motivation and ideology' (p. 137).

Part of what makes this piece worthwhile too is that it takes seriously those projects and possibilities which did not prove successful and uses them to more richly reconstruct the lived reality of early modern Ireland. This is vital to breaking us out of the standard periodisation, built as it is upon seemingly fated 'great moments' of conquest and colonisation. Robert Armstrong's 'Protestant churchmen and the Confederate Wars' is an excellent example of this approach for a later period. He describes the 1640s as the 'lost decade in the history of the Protestant church establishment in early modern Ireland' (p. 230). According to the standard line, the Church of Ireland saw any chance at establishing itself as the church of the majority – however weak it may have been by the 1620s anyway – die an ignominious death during the 1640s. Armstrong cautions that this is a classic example of hindsight's clarity and grossly discounts the energetic efforts of churchmen and lay authorities to protect themselves from the forces that threatened to engulf them. Squeezed between a Catholic right and Covenanting left, establishment Church of Ireland members worked assiduously for the royalist cause. The bishops in particular distinguished themselves by actively working on

the Royalist propaganda campaigns – this in contradistinction to Church of England bishops most of whom fled quietly rather than pick up the pen in defence of the regime.

Micheál Ó Siochrú's 'Catholic Confederates and the constitutional relationship between England and Ireland, 1641–49' offers a further take on the 'what-if' motif. The essay makes the important, if too readily overlooked, point that constitutional questions were as equally divisive of Confederates and Royalists as were religious ones. Two key points of contention in the many attempts at peace talks were Poynings' Law and the increasing interference of Parliament in Irish affairs. On the first of these points, Ó Siochrú shows himself the only contributor willing to take on the man honoured, arguing as insufficient Clarke's depiction of the Confederate attitude to Poynings' Law as a short-term agitation based on a matter of trust, not constitutional principal. He claims instead that the Confederates felt that the constitutional relationship needed serious clarification, and quickly, in light of Parliament's self-assertiveness (p. 208). But it is on this second point where he provides his most provocative contribution, showing how events in England could dramatically alter negotiations in Ireland. Specifically, he demonstrates that once it seemed the Royalist cause was in serious danger of collapsing, Confederates – in working to protect themselves from an avenging Parliament – sought to effect the Irish Parliament's separateness and independence. The English Civil Wars, then, 'fundamentally altered the relationship between the two kingdoms' (p. 229). Not only is this a revision of the accepted notion of Westminster's relationship to Ireland – the 'studied indifference' suggested by Patrick Little (p. 229) – but also, as a result, provides a different origin for the arguments for Irish Parliamentary independence which would dominate Anglo-Irish politics up until the Act of Union. 'Contingency' here is not a historiographical buzzword, but rather a historical reality the effects of which must be taken seriously as we reconsider the character and periodisation of British/Irish relations.

Questions of parliamentary politics and constitutional relationships constitute one of the collection's strongest themes, Ó Siochrú's study of the 1640s falling chronologically between similarly-themed studies by Ciaran Brady and Patrick Kelly. Brady's 'The attainder of Shane O'Neill and the problem of Tudor state-building' offers a major re-evaluation of mid-sixteenth-century constitutional politics, arguing that the crown's postmortem attainder of Shane was done not as a cynical land grab, but rather as a calculated bit of creative history telling done to set out an entirely new 'constitutional' conception of Ireland (p. 33). Brady argues that the attainder's preamble played down the twelfth-century conquest in favor of a myth-history which posited sovereignty originating in the person of King Gurmundus, king of Great Britain, and lord of Bayon in the Spanish province of Biscan. The point to this, it seems, was to establish the crown's claim to the land of Ireland and the loyalty of its inhabitants as arising not from military conquest but from a political fount which could speak both for Britons and Irish Milesians. The drafting of this new origin tale amounted to an effort to effect a 'second constitutional revolution' (p. 46): on the one hand, it attempted to strengthen Gaelic loyalty by showing that the crown's sovereignty was a thing of peaceful consent; on the other it proved the writing on the wall for the English of Ireland whose exalted socio-political status rested upon rights bequeathed to them by their twelfth-century conquering forebears. The attainder, then, was no ham-handed land grab of Gaelic property, but rather a farsighted attempt to trump any historically based challenges to the crown's sovereignty – be they from Gaelic or Anglo-Norman critics.

If Brady's piece tends to downplay the role of conquest in the constitutional thinking of Tudor 'conquistadors', Patrick Kelly's 'Conquest versus consent in Molyneux's *Case of Ireland*' shows its importance in the thinking of that late-seventeenth-century 'conciliator', William Molyneux. In a very provocative reading of the *Case of Ireland*, Kelly makes two suggestive exegetical moves. The first is to demonstrate that Molyneux – famous for his emphasis on consent as the basis for the emerging ascendancy's legitimacy as Ireland's elites – found the need to fall back on conquest in order to explain both the presence of the Anglo-Irish and the dispossession of those Catholics whose ancestors had submitted consensually to Henry II. The second is more interesting – especially given the bait-and-switch character of the title – in that he argues conquest and consent to have been not necessarily mutually exclusive.

These explorations of constitutional matters are complimented by studies of the practical politics of Parliamentary manoeuvring. Bríd McGrath's 'The Irish elections of 1640–41' not only offers the most detailed nuts-and-bolts description of this very fateful parliamentary 'selection', but also a clear example of

how the best laid plans can go awry. She tells a tale of two halves, one in which a very 'thorough' Lord Deputy gets his wish for a hand-picked parliament, but loses control of it in its second session. In doing so she gives us another example of how Irish politics could throw up very strange marriages of convenience between competing groups and individuals in the face of a common enemy.

It falls to Jane Ohlmeyer, then, to continue this story by exploring the individual tales of those Irish peers involved in that fateful session in the wake of its collapse. It is remarkable how little we know of the Irish peerage in this period, and Professor Ohlmeyer's 'The Irish peers, political power and parliament, 1640–41' goes a long way to mapping their efforts to politically reverse the almost ritual shaming they had received at the hands of the arriviste Wentworth. Of particular interest here is the detailing of the workings of parliament by proxy (since many of those returned did not attend). More generally, the essay rightly places the Irish peerage – ancient and novus – in its larger British contexts. Thus we see the peers not just acting and agitating in Dublin, but at Whitehall and Westminster too in the hope of creating a situation akin to the 1620s when a weak executive was susceptible to (their) aristocratic pressure. They did not succeed in this, of course, but the attempt is significant – a further 'what-if' scenario, the neglect of which facilitates the persistence of a simplistic 'conquest and colonisation' view of this period.

Harold O'Sullivan's 'Dynamics of regional development: processes of assimilation and division in the marchland of south-east Ulster in late medieval and early modern Ireland' quite specifically rejects the paradigm of conflict, conquest and confiscation. Two things make this piece stand out. First, the methodological/theoretical choice of doing a regional study – as a via media between 'global' and 'local' history – helps reorient our spatial awareness of 'British-Irish' cultural contact to accurately reflect a frame important to contemporaries. Secondly, by starting his study in the fifteenth century, O'Sullivan attempts to cross the traditional breakage point of 1534. His conclusion that the collapse of regional characters was largely a result of the collapse of the O'Neill dynasty of Tyrone suggests that perhaps 'region' and 'lordship' may be somewhat coterminous. Be that as it may, close studies of lordships and their interactions with settlers are thin on the ground and this is a welcome contribution in its efforts to analyse the negotiated interactions of settlers with the members of those regions/dynasties.

A stress on negotiation, of course, suggests that those doing the intervening did not constitute a monolithic bloc. And duly there is no 'British' or 'Protestant mind' to be found here. Raymond Gillespie playfully opens his essay on the late-seventeenth century reception of Temple's *The Irish Rebellion* by stating that the 'seventeenth-century Protestant mind was largely dominated by three texts: William King's *State of the Protestants of Ireland*, Molyneux's *The Case of Ireland ... Stated*, and Temple's *The Irish Rebellion*' (pp. 315–16). However, by interrogating how different individuals read their Temple, he is able to demonstrate that the 'Rebellion' was not 'a singular book with one official reading' (p. 324). Rather, he argues, it was 'the raw material by which individual Protestants made sense of their world' (p. 332) – material the interpretation of which was as dependent upon changing political circumstances as it was upon individual predilection.

Toby Barnard, the most eloquent and prolific voice on seventeenth-century Protestant Ireland, reminds us that even the Protestant mind in one head was prone to change. His study of the 'fanatic zeal and irregular ambition' of Richard Lawrence charts how one man's advocacy for transplanting the defeated Irish west of the Shannon morphed into intense championing of the interests of the locals. And even though Barnard claims that Lawrence's intellectual trajectory was probably representative of a journey taken by numerous settlers, and thus of intellectual reaction to dramatic changes in Dublin in the 1650s, he still shows that the end product of that evolution was up to the individual mind: thus Lawrence's rather original notion that luxury, as well as poverty, exerted an 'enervating' influence on the Irish economy (p. 314).

The stress on negotiation and demographic complexity, however, should not blind us to the very real power differentials present between newcomer and native. Sarah Barber's 'Settlement, transplantation and expulsion: a comparative study of the placement of peoples' is a powerful reminder of this. Concerned with borders and state formation, Barber looks at 'the identities imposed on the Irish and the Moriscos by the English and the Spanish during the first half of the seventeenth century' and 'uses the perception of delinquent behaviour, allied with the concept of place, in order to discuss the comparative marginalization of

peoples' (p. 280) The argument that the presence of 'uncivilized others' created internal boundaries which hindered socio-political unity in Spain and England offers both a new way for understanding how the 'cultural conquest of Ireland' was conceptualised by contemporaries and further evidence that ideological trends in Anglo-Irish relations were part of larger European ones.

The final nail in the coffin of Irish exceptionalism, then, is hammered home by Geoffrey Parker's piece on the General Crisis of the seventeenth century. While this is a topic dear to both Parker and Clarke, Parker vastly expands the scope of enquiry: the 'crisis' discussed here is not European, but global. Befitting the scale of the effects, the cause Parker explores is vast and impersonal: the sudden onset of radical environmental change. A fascinating survey of social, political and economic consequences of nature's fickleness, this may be the piece with the clearest application to the present.

Having commented briefly on the individual essays, it remains to ask what of the sum of the parts? This is a difficult question to answer in that these pieces came out of a conference and thus were not commissioned with a mind to providing detailed coverage. Nevertheless, there are some omissions worth noting. The lack of attention paid the Scots is surprising – not to mention that it is simply odd that a book entitled 'British Interventions in Early Modern Ireland' would begin with an introduction entitled 'Making good: new perspectives on the English in early modern Ireland'. Moreover, one could get to the end of this book and have no sense that the British were intervening in a place where another language was spoken. Language was one of the great limiting factors in the settler/governing experience, and thus it would have been nice to see some discussion of how the language barrier affected and mitigated that experience. This is merely an effect, however, of the most striking omission: the Irish themselves. Yes, this is a book about the British in Ireland, but what made their experience there fraught with difficulty was their interactions with those already on the ground. 'Negotiation' was less with the land than with its inhabitants, and yet there is precious little discussion of them.

While acknowledging that it is perhaps unfair to speak of what is not there to the neglect of what is, I nevertheless think it is worth ruminating a bit on some potential historiographical implications of the natives' muted presence, if not complete absence. On the one hand this is a non-issue: our knowledge of the settler experience is woefully under-researched, and the pieces gathered here go a long way to reconstructing the various worlds – mental and material – in which these men and women moved. But on the other, it can facilitate a certain 'insecurity of empire' reading of the material which in its sympathies for the struggles, frustrations and compromises facing those British men and women who came to work and govern the island overlooks the tragedy and often gross disparity of power in their relations with those they encountered. This is surely not the editors' intention and thus it seems preferable to see this strong focus on the newcomers alone as suggestive of two powerful possibilities for the study of British/Irish comparative history. The first is that we may thankfully be in a moment when the present-centered political usefulness demanded of the Irish past has faded a bit into the background – a moment when a focus solely on the English needs no prefatory defence and in which we can stop thinking of the Protestants/English as a monolithic bloc and instead explore their individual and small-group dynamics. The second is that the obvious analogue of British problems, failures and compromises is Irish possibilities, successes and agency. These essays have certainly succeeded in problematising the caricature of a British colonial juggernaut; hopefully they will inspire further research debunking equally two-dimensional depictions of the collapse of the Gaelic (and Old English) worlds.

A more nuanced picture of British-Irish interactions, however, a new periodisation does not make. The introduction holds out the possibility that this collection will break us out of a rigid and received chronology of Irish/British history built upon a paradigm of inevitable conquest and colonisation. If such an effect is detectable, it must come from the reader's own meditation on the collection in toto and arrived at almost in spite of the message of the individual essays. For while they certainly lower the temperature of the interactions between native and newcomer, most (if not all) of them nevertheless hold to the notion that there were discernible moments after which the fundamental character of those interactions were altered.

The reason for this, of course, is that the story of *British Interventions in Early Modern Ireland* is in the end

one of political domination and, as Barber writes, of 'cultural conquest'. The volume's great success, then, is to investigate the messy reality of conquest while simultaneously critiquing the *paradigm* of conquest, in all of its schematic simplicity and teleological totality. This requires subtle and patient work of empirical rigour, work capable of demonstrating the contingencies, possibilities and paths not taken which were so meaningful to contemporaries yet largely lost to posterity. That is to say, it requires the sort of work a career's worth of which has earned Aidan Clarke a festschrift conference and collection. The volume thus makes a fitting tribute.

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The editors are happy to accept this review and do not wish to comment further.

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