

Political Ideology in Ireland 1541-1641

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Hiram Morgan

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John McGurk

This collection of ten essays and historiographical overview by the editor by way of introduction began life in the Folger Institute Center for the Study of British Political Thought, founded in 1983, and based in the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington D.C. The editor acknowledges the inspiration of Professor John Pococks *The Varieties of British 1500-1800* (Cambridge, 1993) for the resulting three seminars on ideology in Ireland 1500-1800 but as is evident from the terminal dating of the present work it was not possible to cover three centuries in a single volume. Should another team of 17th and 18th century specialists be encouraged to extend the themes giving similar indepth analysis of the periods Irish writings up to the 19th century? Yes, if we want a survey or a textbook of political thought over these centuries. The book under review is neither, but as Hiram Morgan assures the reader in more positive tones, (it is) a diverse series of essays covering ideology in the turbulent period of Irish history in depth and breadth That very useful qualitative phrase aspects of the ideology might better reflect the overall content; nevertheless, Morgans, definition of the book is a modest one for here we are given *multo in parvo*, a rich variety of analysed authors and texts and a excellently compressed historiographical introduction in twelve pages of political ideas in early modern Ireland.

Mercifully, the reader is not deluged by the fruits of the Edmund Spenser industry. It would however be an affectation to ignore him in any work on early modern Ireland, hence it is refreshing to have an essay from Nicholas Canny on Poetry as politics: a view of the present state of the *Faerie Queene* which convincingly argues (at least to this reader) that Spensers prose work, *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, which every schoolboy and girl must now know was not allowed publication until 1633 though penned in 1596, was consistent in theme and doctrine but not in method to Spensers subsequently poetic masterpiece *The Faerie Queene*, and in especially Book V. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Spensers glorification of violence stemmed from the grim realities of his life in Munster in the 1590s. In his perceptive analysis of the *Faerie Queene* and close and scholarly reading of the *View* Professor Cannys provides us with clear insights into Spensers motives for writing, not least, helping us to reconcile the beauty of the poets lyricism with the brutalities of the polemist in the *View*. After Professor Cannys labours we can no longer treat Spensers

creative and polemical writings as discreet entities. The reader would then do well to continue with the following essay by Dr David Edwards on Ideology and experience: Spensers *View* and martial law in Ireland which neatly complements Nicholas Cannys and by placing the writer and his treatise firmly within the circumstances and events of his day reaffirms Spensers authorship of the *View*. (See footnote 2 , p.127).

In Dr Edwards trenchant article we see Spenser as a soldiers man, the aggressive proponent of state terrorism, indeed, an early advocate of ethnic cleansing. As introductory background we are given an excellent summary of the rise of martial law and its use in Spenser's Ireland. Elizabeth hated martial law as a slur on herself and her royal ancestors that it was so freely used in Ireland instead of the common law and had it stopped in October 1591. It was, Spensers contention that common law was useless in Ireland; that juries of Gaelic Irish and Anglo-Irish - Edwards uses the latter instead of Old English - would never return guilty verdicts except against New Englishmen ; that martial law and its provost marshal were the guardians of the common law and its precursor in a land of irewhere reforms by common law cannot be effective without the force of terror which the abandonment of martial law had patently proved. Edwards scotches the argument that the *View* was suppressed by the government because it was repugantly draconian claiming that such treatises do not have to be printed to be effective and that this historiographical side issue only distracts from the task of examining the *View* in its proper historical context. The proper task is clinically achieved here and in fine style. Though Spenser was not a professional soldier his treatise does remind one of those bad-tempered outbursts from the so many literate and choleric captains that spatter their letters and tracts in the State papers Ireland. It would however be naively mistaken to interpret such statements as government policy at the time. Nevertheless, and it is well argued by Dr Edwards, what Essex and his successor Lord Mountjoy militarily carried out in the final Elizabethan conquest of Ireland especially their renewed and more vigorous recourse to martial law commissions (more of them than in the 1570s) and the scorched earth tactics of the final years 1600-1603 is a near match of performance with the prescriptions of Irenius, the militarist, (traditionally identified with Spenser) in his debate with Eudoxus, the pacifist, of Spensers *View*. Did Spenser read Giraldus Cambrensis Irish books, the *Topographia Hiberniae* and his *Expugnatio Hibernica*?

The re-publication of these twelfth century tracts in the early modern period gave a wide currency to Geraldian ideas and provided an arsenal of weapons for the New English who wrote so prolifically on the bad state of Ireland and the Irish in which as would-be colonists they had a vested interest. It is proper that the editors contribution on Giraldus Cambrensis and the Tudor conquest of Ireland lays the foundations for the subsequent essays. Dr Morgan gives us an excursus through the writings of Gerald of Wales which also proves a tour de force on their reception and transmission in the debates caused by their use and abuse. There is evident enjoyment in his tracking down of Giraldian sentiments among a veritable roll-call of Elizabethan literati- John Leland, John Bale, Abraham Ortelius (and in not just his maps) both the Sidneys, Edmund Campion, Hooker, Holinshed, Hanmer, William Herbert and the monumental William Camden who translated the *Expugnatio Hibernica* for John Stow and not to speak of the influence the Irish content of his *Britannia* had on Fynes Moryson and Sir John Davies. We are also given, and at the risk of ruffling the feathers of the purists , neatly drawn analogies and comparisons between the Anglo-Norman world and the contemporary early modern, which is, of course, exactly what the Elizabethan conquistadores had in mind. However in the sharp focus on Giraldus influence on them it is easy to forget that they were also reading Spanish accounts of their conquests and colonisation in the Americas. Would it not after all be an affectation to forget that Raleigh (and I note a tendency here to go back to the spelling, Raleigh), Drake, Frobisher, Gilbert, and Grenville, all had military and naval service in Ireland *en route*, as it were, to the Americas. The native Gaelic Irish demolition of Giraldus Cambrensis by such apologists for Ireland and her peoples as Peter White, Philip OSullivan Beare and John Lynch (For a list of their books see footnote 127 on p.144) Dr Morgan leaves to the other contributors.

The Gaelic reaction to conquest and colonization and to concomitant Geraldian views is best followed here by Profesoistory of Florence, but not to the purposes of Beacon and the others who were more concerned with the lessons to be drawn from his *Il Principe* in engaging with Ireland. As for Beacons *Solon*, his contemporaries well versed in the classics could easily decode the text to find the writers true purpose, a

critique of political and administrative corruption and the impending fall of English rule in Ireland under the lord deputyship of Sir William Fitzwilliam. Vincent Careys Irish face of Machiavelli is an excellent portrait but ,as he hints, we need more painters.

The final two essays dealing with political ideological texts provide further insights; Eugene Flanagans *The anatomy of Jacobean Ireland: Captain Barnaby Rich, Sir John Davies and the failure of reform, 1609-1622* and Alan Fords, *James Ussher and the Godly Prince in early seventeenth century Ireland*. These two important contributions cover an equally distinctive Protestant Irish ethos emerging , but in the polity of the new state, they show the inevitable gaps between theory and practice demonstrated in the mis-match between what Sir John Davies claimed for reforms and what in fact was the reality throughout the country.

Barnaby Rich, rich in name and nature, soldier, informer, writer, theologian, misogynist, and a foul-penned hardliner whose remedies for Ireland make Spensers appear meek and mild, had well-nigh forty years experience in Ireland, first with Walter Devereux ,Earl of Esses in 1573 and last heard of in 1617. Dr Flanagan helps to bring him out of the shades in a particularly incisive essay the footnotes of which, like so many in this volume, are comprehensive of the historiography and bibliography of the subject, a gift to the busy lecturer or researcher. Though of no great literary or ideological merit Richs *A looking glass for Her Majesty wherein to view Ireland. 1599 in the State Papers Ireland* could have been given some notice as the probable genesis of his later and better known *Anothomy of Ireland*.The essay has an acute analysis of the differing aims of Rich and of Sir John Davies on their experience of the first decade of Stuart government in Ireland.

Professor Alan Fords on the more important political and theological work of James Ussher ably demonstrates the centrality of monarchy in the political thinking of Irish Protestants, self-evident in his fine treatment of Usshers *The power communicated by God to the prince and the obedience required of the subject* Many of the commonplace Protestant anti-Catholic prejudices usually found in New English writings are re-iterated in Ussher: Catholicism was both Antichristian and treasonable, papists were idolators and infidels, and in that time-honoured exegesis of selective parts of the Old Testament, the Church of Rome was the whore of Babylon, decked out in finery concealing the filthiness of her fornications. King James however was beginning to come to some accommodation with Catholicism in the 1620, that, and the efforts of Charles to marry the Spanish Infanta drove Ussher out of the theological study into the political arena using scripture, patristics and history to remind the Godly Prince of his responsibilities to extirpate heresy. Alan Fords excellent contribution is a salutary reminder of the inexorable union of politics and religion in this era.

The editor and his team and the publisher are to be lauded for this much needed book of essays on early modern texts and authors on Ireland that will take its readership beyond Spenser.Perhaps a future paperback edition will eliminate the topographical errors and some blemishes that have spoiled some of the footnotes, for example, f.25, p.28, f.45, p.31, date of publication in f.24, p.185; f.70, p.146 (Lindsay not Leslie); f.6, p.231.

The author declined to respond on this occasion.

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