



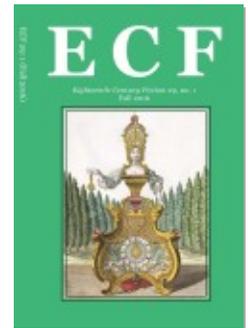
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Sarah Butler's *Irish Tales*, a Jacobite Romance

Lucy Cogan

Sarah Butler's *Irish Tales*, published in 1716, is a romance set against the historical background of Brian Boru's victory against the Vikings in 1014. Given the timing of its publication, a year after the Jacobite rebellion of 1715, the work has been read as an allegorical expression of pro-Jacobite sympathy. Yet the tragic romance dominates the work, complicating this interpretation. This article argues that the combination of fictionalized history and romance found in *Irish Tales* shows the work to be part of a tradition of romance writing by women in support of the royalist or Jacobite cause. Moreover, this article considers how the heroic role played by the female protagonist in these works represents an aesthetic and political response to the failure to restore James II and his issue to the throne.

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Sarah Butler's *Irish Tales* (1716) is a little-known prose romance that tells the story of an Irish princess, Dooneflaith, and her love for Murchoe, the son of a rival king. Set against a carefully edited history of the Viking wars from the ninth to eleventh centuries, the work ends with the triumphant expulsion of the raiders from Ireland after the Battle of Clontarf in 1014. In the preface, the author cites a long list of historical sources that she claims were consulted in the creation of the narrative and that she uses as a pretext for a spirited defence of Gaelic or native Irish culture. This pro-Gaelic, historically grounded approach is strikingly unusual among the few works of Irish prose fiction produced at this time, which tended to depict the native Irish in stereotypical or openly hostile terms in the decades after the Glorious Revolution of 1688.¹ The anonymously authored prose romance *Vertue Rewarded; Or, an Irish Princess* (1693) is perhaps the closest formal comparison to *Irish Tales*. Set during the campaign of the future William III in Ireland, the princess of the title is, however, a member of the contemporary protestant planter class, while the native "wild Irish" are depicted as savages. Other popular works with Irish themes from the period include fictional rogue biographies, such as *Teague O'Divelly; Or, the Irish Rogue* (1690) and *The Wild Irish Captain, or Villainy Display'd Truly and Faithfully Related* (1692), that equate Irishness with criminality, albeit of a comic variety. Far from condemning the Irish as brutes or villains, Butler sets out to correct the dominant narrative concerning her country and its people. She portrays the pre-Norman Gaelic Irish as cultured and sophisticated, an "instructive" example for the readers of her day.

In the introduction to a recent edition of *Irish Tales*, Ian Campbell Ross, Aileen Douglas, and Anne Markey argue that, under the cover of a conventional romance, Butler's narrative contained clear contemporary resonances in 1716, only a year after the failed Jacobite rebellion.² In this context, the choice to set the work during a historical period that featured staunch Irish resistance to foreign invaders and one of the few major military victories in

1 For more on the development of prose fiction in Ireland in this period, see Derek Hand, *A History of the Irish Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 24–33.

2 Ian Campbell Ross, Aileen Douglas, and Anne Markey, introduction to *Irish Tales: or, Instructive Histories for the Happy Conduct of Life*, by Sarah Butler (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), 9–30.

Ireland's long history of defeat and conquest feels undeniably political.³ Yet, as Clóna Ó Gallchoir points out, the primacy of the invented romance, which ends in tragedy, complicates any narrow allegorical reading of the text as Jacobite wish fulfilment.⁴ Since a much greater share of the narrative is devoted to the romance, the reader would be justified in concluding that, however provocative, the historical implications of the setting are of secondary importance. Clearly, the interaction between text and subtext, fact and fiction in this work is less straightforward than it might at first appear. This article will outline the overlapping but distinct national and international contexts of early eighteenth-century Jacobite culture that helped shape this seemingly anomalous work. In this article, I will argue that, rather than working against a Jacobite reading, the romance narrative in *Irish Tales* and the work's politicized historicity represent an innovative redeployment of existing Jacobite modes. Moreover, Butler's distinctive manipulation of the form of the romance shows *Irish Tales* to be part of a strand of Jacobite culture that produced a wealth of work by women during this period.

As a genre, the Jacobite romance shared many features with its historical forerunner, the royalist romance, such as a preoccupation with themes of constancy, sovereignty, and exile. Like its predecessor, the Jacobite romance portrayed aristocratic heroes and heroines of inherently noble character and, regardless of the nominal setting, used a recognizable courtly idiom and aesthetic, though for Jacobites this was increasingly a nostalgic ideal. The romance was also, more generally, a mode through which Jacobites

3 Ireland played little part in the "Fifteen," as Jacobites called the uprising, despite protestant fears in the lead-up to the rebellion, and some historians asserted that Irish Jacobitism ceased to be a significant factor after the Treaty of Limerick in 1691. See, for example, J.G. Simms, *Jacobite Ireland, 1685–91* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969); and S.J. Connolly, *Contested Island: Ireland 1460–1630* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Other cultural historians have been working on a reassessment of this view, with Breandán Ó Buachalla and Éamonn Ó Ciardha, among others, uncovering a wealth of Irish-language Jacobite material from the post-revolution period that shows the continuing political relevance of Jacobitism both within Ireland and among the continental Irish diaspora.

4 Clóna Ó Gallchoir, "Foreign Tyrants and Domestic Tyrants: The Public, the Private and Eighteenth-Century Irish Women's Writing," in *Irish Literature: Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Patricia Coughlan and Tina O'Toole (Dublin: Carystfort Press, 2008), 27–31.

made sense of their changing fortunes. The logic of recurrence that governed the romance helpfully foretold the defeat of their enemies and a return to the natural Stuart order.⁵ However, this desire among Jacobites to restore an idealized, hierarchical age that was embodied in the person of the true sovereign took on a poignant significance as time and distance rendered this restoration less likely. The repeated deferral of the realization of these hopes in the real world introduced a searching, self-reflective quality into the Jacobite romance, which reflected the anguish of abortive typological cycles and the absence of legitimate leadership as much as the hope for its renewal. Nonetheless, the black and white moralism of the romance provided a framework through which Jacobites could interpret the evolving ideological battle they faced in the decades after 1688. Replacing the religious extremism of the Puritans, the accession of William of Orange ushered in a new age of commercialism that would achieve a more lasting social revolution by restructuring British culture around the middle-class values of industry and progress.⁶ This social revolution inevitably revealed Jacobitism to be reactionary or regressive by comparison, at least in Britain. In Ireland, where the fault-lines were more strictly sectarian in nature, Jacobite culture became identified with the disenfranchised Catholic majority, regardless of class. Butler's choice of the elitist genre of the romance therefore sets her apart from the majority of Irish Jacobites.

In a quirk of literary history, the circumstances that inspired the Jacobite nostalgia for the conservative social vision epitomized by the romance also made possible a potentially progressive discourse that treated disenfranchisement not as shameful but as noble or even edifying. The archetypal Jacobite narrative concerned the "prince across the water" and his long-suffering lover (representing the faithful Jacobites), who awaited his return. This metaphor meant that Jacobite culture was centred, paradoxically, on the absence of a strong male hero. Out of these conditions, a female-oriented narrative tradition emerged that focused on the constant lover, with the promised consummation of the romance signifying

5 Murray G.H. Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite Politics in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994), 9–12.

6 See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

the restoration of the true sovereign.⁷ Courtship and marriage, once merely the means to reward the male hero of romance, became the primary field on which the battle of values played out. In this way, the Jacobite embrace of a positive construction of marginality through the figure of the steadfast female lover had the secondary effect of opening up a sympathetic space in which women could explore their experience in society. Writers as diverse as Aphra Behn, Jane Barker, Eliza Haywood, Delarivier Manley, and Mary Astell exploited features of this mode. The prevalence of Jacobite-inflected writing by women in Britain, especially in comparison to their Whig counterparts, has long been recognized as a feature of the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century literary landscape.

For those awake to the implications, the Jacobite tropes and allusions encoded throughout *Irish Tales* signified its roots within a culture that clung on and even flourished in various clandestine forms across Britain and Ireland during this period. In Ireland, although Jacobite culture was concentrated in the Gaelic-speaking Catholic community, traces of the Jacobite idiom have been identified in the works of protestant writers such as Jonathan Swift, George Berkeley, Oliver Goldsmith, and even Edmund Burke in recent years. Published in the major metropolitan hubs of London and Dublin, Butler's work demonstrates how clever positioning could allow Jacobite writing to hide in plain sight. Although Butler herself is a mystery, aside from the fact that she died before her work could be published,⁸ her surname would have triggered an immediate association with the Duke of Ormonde, James Butler, whose name was synonymous with the Jacobite cause.⁹ Further circumstantial evidence surrounding the publication of *Irish Tales* also encourages a Jacobite reading of the text. Butler's publisher, the disreputable Edmund Curll, produced a number of high-profile

7 See Pittock, *Inventing and Resisting Britain: Cultural Identities in Britain and Ireland, 1685–1789* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 86.

8 News of Sarah Butler's death is relayed by Charles Gildon in the dedicatory epistle, which is written in honour of the proudly Hanoverian Earl of Lincoln. This dedication might be considered a strike against a Jacobite reading of this work, but, as Ross et al. note, Gildon demonstrates little familiarity with the work beyond its title (16–17).

9 The Duke of Ormonde, one of the most powerful Irish nobles at the time of the 1715 rebellion, was widely believed to have supported the Jacobites. He was impeached on charges of high treason and fled to France.

Jacobite works during this period, including Barker's romance *Exilius*, which appeared the year before *Irish Tales*. Aware of Curll's cultivation of this niche market, the initiated reader, browsing among his latest offerings, would have opened Butler's slim, duodecimo volume to see a title page that listed among the tales in the volume, "II. The Banish'd PRINCE," "VI. The Constant FAIR-ONE," and "IX. The Depos'd USURPER."¹⁰ For Jacobites, these titles would immediately have signalled the text's political allegiance, as they allude to some of the key thematic touchstones of Jacobitism in the period: exile, loyalty, and sovereign legitimacy. Curiously, the text is not divided into separate tales in this manner, although those titles do map onto the general shape of the narrative. The contents list on the title page therefore appears to be a deliberate choice on the part either of the writer or publisher to frame the narrative, a distillation of its principles designed to establish its affiliation at a glance.¹¹ This careful positioning implies that this work was not designed solely to speak to or for the marginalized Irish Jacobite community but to reach Jacobite audiences across the two islands and perhaps even as far off as those exiled at the court of the "Old Pretender" in France. The fact that it was published first in London and in the form of a prose fiction romance, a genre that had little native appeal in Ireland, indicates Butler's ambition. Notwithstanding these efforts to attract a wider Jacobite audience, *Irish Tales* is also deeply concerned with obscure issues of historical identity that were of little interest beyond the shores of Ireland.

As previously mentioned, in her preface, Butler specifies the wide range of historical material, both British and Irish, she consulted in creating the work, elevating the text's formal relation to history to conspicuous prominence.¹² Despite this show of even-handedness, the text relies heavily on one historical source in

10 Sarah Butler, *Irish Tales: or, Instructive Histories for the Happy Conduct of Life*, ed. Campbell Ross, Douglas, and Markey (1716; Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), 33. References are to this edition.

11 Curll habitually included the full list of "tales" when marketing this work, such as in his catalogue of books printed in 1716 and the catalogue of titles in the back of volume 2 of the *Entertaining Novels of Mrs Jane Barker*, published in 1719, where it is listed under the alternate title *Milesian Tales*.

12 Butler cites historians of the native Irish tradition, such as "Dr Keting" (Seathrún Céitinn or Geoffrey Keating), "Flahertus" (Roderic O'Flaherty), and Peter Walsh, but also historians of the British tradition, including Edmund Spenser and "Hanmor" (Meredith Hanmer), who were hostile towards the native Irish (Ross et al., 17–20).

particular, Geoffrey Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, which existed only in manuscript form until its publication in English translation in 1723 as *The General History of Ireland*. Butler's access to this work places her within the orbit of what remained of the Irish Catholic elite.¹³ Written in the turbulent years of the 1620s and 1630s, *Foras Feasa* is one of the defining works of Irish historiography in which Keating, an Old English Catholic of Norman decent, promotes the idea that true sovereignty and Catholicism were inextricably linked. Keating's influence on Butler's historical vision can be seen in her reference to the Irish as the "Milesian Race" in her preface (39). Curll, presumably recognizing the significance of the phrase among Jacobites, reprinted the work under the title *Milesian Tales* in 1719. The mythic Milesian lineage of the Irish people located the origins of the Irish in the Mediterranean region rather than in Northern Europe, the source of the English. In the late eighteenth century, the myth acquired proto-nationalist importance, but, in the early eighteenth century, it had particular appeal for Jacobites. Keating, as part of his political manoeuvring, granted Charles I "Milesian" heritage by integrating the forebears of the Stuart dynasty into the annals of ancient Irish royalty.¹⁴ As such, the Stuarts became part of the same royal line as Brian Boru, the hero-king of 1014, who appears as Bryan Boriámh in *Irish Tales*. In the Jacobites' cyclical reading of history, Boriámh's victory against the Vikings thus comfortingly prefigured the downfall of Ireland's contemporary, illegitimate conquerors, with the expelled Vikings acting as typological antecedents.¹⁵ Butler's seemingly obscure historical allusion was therefore heavy with political freight for Irish Jacobites.

13 Ross, "One of the Principal Nations of Europe": The Representation of Ireland in Sarah Butler's *Irish Tales*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 7, no. 1 (1994): 6–7, doi: 10.1353/ecf.1994.0011.

14 Bernadette Cunningham, *The World of Geoffrey Keating: History, Myth and Religion in Seventeenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 126.

15 Underlining the political relevance of this myth to Irish Stuart supporters, a Limerick man in exile with the Jacobite court published a Milesian genealogy of the Stuart dynasty, Matthew Kennedy's *A Chronological, Genealogical, and Historical Dissertation of the Royal Family of the Stuarts* (Paris, 1705). Ó Ciardha notes that a Milesian genealogy of the Stuarts, perhaps Kennedy's, was seized in 1713 as seditious material in Mallow, County Cork. Ó Ciardha, *Ireland and the Jacobite Cause: 1685–1766, A Fatal Attachment* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), 126.

Even so, Butler's conspicuous citation of historical sources fails to translate into an accurate reproduction of that history, which is considerably distorted in the narrative.¹⁶ Ross et al. argue that Butler's sleight of hand in shaping the narrative suppresses many instances of internecine violence during the period of the Viking wars, a change designed to strengthen the narrative of Irish defiance.¹⁷ Certainly, Butler simplifies and streamlines the events of an era that was in reality chaotic and full of reversals of fortune. Yet a number of historical instances of intra-Irish conflict are retained and even expanded upon in the latter part of the work, enough to muddy any positive message of national unity and strength. Complicating things further, tyranny is not just the preserve of the foreigners in *Irish Tales*: the Irish themselves display despotic traits. As the work progresses, Dooneflaith and Murchoe's fathers, including the great Boriámh, emerge as the prime obstacles to the lovers' happiness, sacrificing their children's desires in favour of a narrow and ultimately destructive self-interest. For Ó Gallchoir, Butler's restructuring of the historical timeline ultimately serves not a political message but the mechanics of a plot that explores the tension between public duty and private virtue.¹⁸ Interpreting *Irish Tales* as Jacobite propaganda would therefore necessarily seem to involve devaluing the importance of the romance.

Contrary to today's common conception of the romance as a light, feminine form devoid of political import, Butler's choice of genre in the early eighteenth century would have been imbued with distinctly partisan connotations for contemporary readers. Certain developments in the romance in the seventeenth century had helped firmly identify it with the political fortunes of the House of Stuart. Though there was a long and illustrious native tradition of the romance in Britain, in the 1630s, Charles I's wife Henrietta Maria brought with her a new kind of romance from the French court. The *préciosité* style of romance emphasized love over martial adventures and put a contemporary feminine spin on the traditional chivalric values of moral behaviour. In Nigel Smith's words, the fashion, focused around the Queen, "always reeked

16 Apart from the invented romance, Butler combines events from the reigns of two kings named Maolseachelvin (Malachy) who lived more than century apart (Ross et al., 25).

17 Ross et al., 26–27.

18 Ó Gallchoir, 32–35.

of popery and the most effete courtliness."¹⁹ While few British authors wholly adopted the French style,²⁰ it nonetheless exerted considerable influence on the perception of the romance genre in Britain, which became intimately associated with the Frenchified culture of the Stuart court in the public imagination. During the years of the Civil War, the romance acquired a more charged political dimension. As Lois Potter points out, the public attitude towards the Stuarts had become so bound up in the language of romance that, by the mid-seventeenth century, writers both for and against the monarchy identified the tropes of romance as a form of pro-Stuart code.²¹ While the coded genre of the royalist romance was formed to some extent out of political necessity in the crucible of the Civil War years, this merging of the political and the aesthetic came quite naturally, since the moral universe of the romance already reflected the Stuart ethos.²²

The Stuarts of the Restoration era followed Charles's lead by self-consciously aligning their public personas with chivalric symbolism, knitting together history and romance in their dynastic mythology.²³ The literature that embraced this romanticized Stuart mythology operated by exploiting an allusive mode that Annabel Patterson calls the "functional ambiguity" of language to comment on the politics of the day while avoiding any explicit, and therefore dangerous, statement of ideas.²⁴ This mode allowed for the

19 Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640–1660* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 241.

20 The convoluted romances of Madeleine de Scudéry, one of the most influential of the *précieuses*, reached epic lengths that few in Britain replicated. Smith cites Roger Boyle's six-book romance *Parthenissa* (1651–69) as one of the few attempts (244–46).

21 Lois Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing: Royalist Literature, 1641–1660* (1989; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 72–80.

22 The most prominent royalist romances in this period were all written by men, for example: Percy Herbert, *The Princess Cloria*, published in various forms between 1653 and 1661; Richard Braithwait, *Panthalia* (1659); and George Mackenzie, *Aretina* (1660). For more on the politicization of the romance during and after the Civil War, see Paul Salzman, *English Prose Fiction, 1558–1700: A Critical History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 148–76.

23 For more on the self-conscious use of romance imagery by royalists and Jacobites, see Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England*, rev. ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004); and Pittock, *Material Culture and Sedition, 1688–1760: Treacherous Objects, Secret Places* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013).

24 Patterson, 18.

publication of fictionalized responses to the incendiary events of the period, such as the Exclusion Crisis, the Duke of Monmouth's rebellion, and James II's flight to France in 1688.²⁵ The indirect nature of these commentaries can, however, make them feel frustratingly elusive. Moreover, while Restoration- and Jacobite-era romances were written from within the imagined community of Stuart loyalists and imbued with a shared symbolism, their relationship with the Stuarts themselves was complex, making the decoding of deliberately obscured meaning even more difficult.

As one of the most prominent women writers of the Restoration, Behn's devotion to James II and the Stuarts is well documented, and her work of prose fiction *Oroonoko* (1688) has been interpreted as an indirect commentary on the death of Charles I.²⁶ Richard Kroll instead argues persuasively that it is an urgent typological warning directed at James II, written as it was in the summer of 1668 when the king's position was growing ever more tenuous.²⁷ While *Oroonoko* straddles generic categories, it exhibits features of the royalist romance, relating the trials of an African prince, Oroonoko, who embodies the chivalric values that had come to be identified with the Stuart dynasty. Though this work involves the very real horror of slavery, the narrative structure is built on the age-old foundations of the romance: young love, obstacles to that love, and a heroic prince's need to prove himself. Behn subverts the conventional ending of the romance, however, in favour of grim realism, as Oroonoko dies a horrific death after killing his lover to save her from a similar fate. While the figure of the abused sovereign at the centre of the narrative may be Charles I, Caesar (as Oroonoko is renamed by his masters), or somebody else entirely, its publication in the fateful year of 1688 meant the text was clearly implicated in the crisis of the moment. As with *Irish Tales*, timing is

25 For example, John Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681) is widely read as a response to the events of the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis. See, for example, Richard Lewis Braverman, *Plots and Counterplots: Sexual Politics and the Body Politic in English Literature: 1660–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 168–76.

26 For one of the most influential of these readings, see Laura Brown, *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 55–62.

27 Richard Kroll, "'Tales of Love and Gallantry': The Politics of *Oroonoko*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (2004): 573–605, doi: 10.1525/hlq.2004.67.4.573.

everything. The shocking end to the tale, which lacks any glimmer of hope for the future, anticipates the shift in tone that would come to characterize the romance in the Jacobite era.

Like Butler, Behn made use of historical people and events but moulded them to fit her story.²⁸ To give added force to her narrative, in the opening pages, she insists that she was an eye-witness to the events of the narrative, even though many aspects of the narrative including the central figure of Oroonoko are either heavily modified or wholly invented. This self-aware, flexible attitude towards historical verisimilitude exhibited by both Behn and Butler was one of the markers of the royalist romance during and after the Restoration era, along with a growing tendency to theorize about the genre's claim to historicity. In Patterson's words, these authors "often devoted their prefaces to rather sophisticated discussions of romance as a genre, to fictionality as a means of mediating historical fact."²⁹ The first paragraph of her preface finds Butler doing precisely this, using distinctly gendered imagery to make the bold claim that "although I have cloath'd it in the Dress and Title of a Novel; yet (so far I dare speak on my own behalf, that) I have err'd as little from the Truth of the History, as any perhaps who have undertaken any thing of this Nature" (39). Butler thus presents *Irish Tales* as a kind of fictionalized truth, and, however incoherent that formulation may appear to modern eyes, it had its origins in a decades-old theoretical approach to the romance.

According to the neoclassical theory of *vraisemblance*, popularized by the mid-seventeenth-century French romance author and *précieuse* Madeleine de Scudéry, whose romances had so delighted the Caroline court, the truth conveyed by a romance resided not in its slavish adherence to historical accuracy but in its exemplification of current norms of virtuous behaviour.³⁰ Typically, Scudéry set her romances in the ancient classical world or the Near East with narratives drawn from respected

28 Many studies explore the relation between *Oroonoko* and history; see, for example, Katharine M. Rogers, "Fact and Fiction in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," *Studies in the Novel* 20, no. 1 (1988): 1–15, doi: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29532539>.

29 Patterson mentions *Panthalia* and *The Princess Cloria* as the most explicit examples of this phenomenon (168).

30 For more on the historical and social context surrounding Scudéry's conception of *vraisemblance*, see Anne E. Duggan, *Salonnieres, Furies, and Fairies* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 52–55.

historical sources such as Plutarch or Livy, but populated her works with characters that behaved like moral paragons of her own age and situated them within a recognizable seventeenth-century courtly milieu.³¹ This form of fictionalized history proved enduringly popular with readers, even as it earned her the disdain of academicians such as Nicholas Boileau. In particular, Boileau objected to her insertion of feminized love stories and excessively romantic language into historical narratives that had traditionally been male-dominated celebrations of martial heroism.³² This artful juxtaposition of contemporary mores and distant historical events pioneered by Scudéry was the perfect vehicle to express otherwise dangerous political sentiments. Royalists and later Jacobites in Britain exploited this feature of the historical romance in order to mount a covert defence of their distinct vision of society. The structure of *Irish Tales*, with its invented romance grafted on top of real historical events, exemplifies the Scudérian provenance of the royalist romance, as does Barker's Roman-era romance *Exilius*. Contemporary readers would have recognized in Butler's claim that she had not "foisted" on her readers "anything which might be injurious to the Truth" (41), a well-established, politically inflected approach to romance narrative.

The rarefied social milieu that is the focus of *Irish Tales* reflects the French-influenced mores of the royalist romance in Britain. The narrative of *Irish Tales* all but ignores the existence of anyone beyond the royal court, with the people outside it appearing only in the unflattering description of a "shouting throng of the Vulgar" (73). Conversely, popular Jacobitism in Ireland, in the form of Gaelic-language poetry and song, celebrated the Stuarts as messianic liberators of the common people.³³ Furthermore, in a jarringly anachronistic touch for Viking-age Ireland, the assignations between the lovers in *Irish Tales* take place in the seclusion of a formal garden or arbour of a kind to be found in the grounds of a contemporary palace or country house. Barker's

31 See, for example, Scudéry's popular Roman-era romance, *Clélie, Histoire Romaine* (Paris, 1654–60).

32 Duggan, 122–30.

33 For examples of Irish Jacobite poetry, see Breandán Ó Buachalla, *Aisling Ghéar: Na Stiobhartaigh agus an tAos Léinn, 1603–1788* (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clochomhar, 1996); and for more on the social context of Irish Jacobitism, see Ó Ciardha.

1715 romance *Exilius*, ostensibly set in the Roman era, includes an equally incongruous formal garden that she spends several pages describing in detail, and her first work, the anonymously published *The Amours of Bosvil and Galesia* (1713), is narrated from within "St. Germain's Garden." The palace at Saint-Germain-en-Laye was home to the Jacobite court where Barker had lived for more than a decade after the Glorious Revolution. These depictions of a romanticized courtly world would have appealed to Jacobites among the gentry and upper classes, the kind of "Gentlemen and Ladies" that Curll wished to attract to his Tunbridge Wells shop, mentioned in an advertisement appended to the 1719 edition of *Milesian Tales*.³⁴ The reality was that, in the decades after the Glorious Revolution, the Jacobite elite in Britain and Ireland continued to lose ground socially, politically, and economically, even as the country thrived. In these difficult circumstances, Jacobites clung to the belief that, since only a Stuart could rule as the rightful sovereign, Britain's material progress masked a deeper malaise.

Allusions to a distinctly Jacobite iteration of Stuart ideology can be discerned in the representation of the Viking conquerors' rule in *Irish Tales*. In the opening pages, the narrator states that the Danes had subdued "all but a few who knew not how to bow their Necks in subjugation to any but a lawful Prince, or stoop to any thing but their free Liberties, and Obedience to their own Kings" (43). The phrase "a lawful Prince" recalls the common Jacobite accusation that William of Orange had usurped the lawful king of Britain and Ireland, a claim that gained renewed currency in the wake of the Hanoverian succession in 1714. This focus on the legality of kingship is, according to Howard Erskine-Hill, "the characteristic emphasis of almost all the Jacobite pamphlets."³⁵ The reference to "their own Kings," on the other hand, evokes the notion that the Stuarts were the rightful native kings of Britain (and Ireland, following Keating's Milesian genealogy), casting William of Orange and the Hanoverians as foreign opportunists. Jacobites warned that the danger posed by

34 Kathryn R. King, "The Novel before Novels," *Eighteenth-Century Genre and Culture*, ed. Denis Todd and Cynthia Hall (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001), 43.

35 Howard Erskine-Hill, "Literature and the Jacobite Cause," *Modern Language Studies* 9, no. 3 (1979): 17, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3194277>.

such unlawful kingship was not simply political, but moral. By disrupting the natural order, the illegitimate king degraded the social and moral fabric of society from the top down, allowing all manner of depravities to develop, as Butler demonstrates in *Irish Tales* through the character of Turgesius.

In Butler's narrative, Turgesius, the Danish king of Ireland, is presented as a crude "Letcher" (66) given over to luxury and lust, a familiar picture of illegitimate rule. He views the crown merely as another valuable possession, revealing an acquisitiveness that marks him out as unfit for kingship by the moral codes of the romance. This mercantilist outlook also shapes his attitude towards Dooneflaith, whom he covets as just another object that will bring him wealth and power, saying at one point, "Love only shall be the currant Coin, and that I'll lavish to acquire my Ends" (51). Jacobites would have recognized in this king's anachronistic sentiment an allusion to the commercialism associated with the Whig faction in their time.³⁶ High Tories and Jacobites expressed particular outrage that this mercantilist attitude had infiltrated the social and private realms. In *Reflections upon Marriage* (1700), Mary Astell warns women that marriages based solely on the man's economic interests corrupt the institution and produce unhappy unions. And, in a politically charged analogy that deploys the tropes of romantic Jacobitism, she likens the marriage contract between man and wife to the sacred and unbreakable bond between the sovereign and the people. Significantly, however, she grants women, who must otherwise show complete obedience to their husbands and parents, the freedom to refuse an unsuitable match since a husband is a "Monarch for Life."³⁷ Dooneflaith's treatment by Turgesius and her father reduces her to the status of chattel to be exchanged and haggled over, debasing the relationship between husband and wife, father and child, and sovereign and people, representing in microcosm the damage inflicted by Turgesius's reign. In the face of this humiliation, Dooneflaith rejects the material symbols of Turgesius's corrupt rule, asserting that, in the grand tradition of the heroine of romance, her love alone is the arbiter of genuine

36 Twenty years later, Eliza Haywood would invoke the same tropes in her anti-Walpole romance *Adventures of Eovaai* (London, 1736), in which the tyrannical Ochihatou (Walpole) is characterized by boundless lust, ambition, and avarice.

37 Mary Astell, *Reflections upon Marriage*, 3rd ed. (London, 1706), 31.

sovereignty. She vows to Murchoe that, regardless of Turgesius's power over her, "not all the Diadems in the World, not all the Monarchs on the Earth shall put you from my Heart; there you, and none but you shall Reign" (54). She will remain constant to her true sovereign regardless of who wears the crown—the image of steadfast Jacobite loyalty to the Stuarts.

Despite Dooneflaith's unswerving loyalty to Murchoe, it becomes apparent over the course of the work that, like the Jacobites of Ireland and Britain, she cannot rely on her prince to protect her and must act as her own advocate and defender. In the face of Turgesius's coercive power (and the collusion of her father), Dooneflaith repeatedly deflects Turgesius's advances, thereby proving herself to be politically astute and independent-minded. Ó Gallchoir stresses the unusual degree of agency Dooneflaith exhibits in the narrative, noting the power afforded her "virtuous eloquence" by the plot, which she uses to persuade Turgesius to act in her interests rather than his own.³⁸ In *Exilius*, Barker explores similar terrain and shows how women can define themselves positively within the patriarchal power structure of the chivalric romance by constructing feminine virtue as a source of inner strength. In books 4 and 5 of *Exilius*, the sensible and resourceful character of Scipiana must balance the competing demands of her virtue, her obligation to her lover Exilius, and the lustful attention of the Egyptian king in order to convince the king to spare Exilius's life.³⁹ Like Dooneflaith, she shows her moral strength by remaining true to the values of modesty and virtue even under duress.

While Dooneflaith is in many ways a typically refined and feminine heroine of romance, she also exceeds the paradigm at crucial moments, proving herself not merely unwaveringly virtuous and constant, but also physically courageous.⁴⁰ When Turgesius surprises the lovers as they console one another in Dooneflaith's chambers, she physically intervenes to protect Murchoe from the

38 Ó Gallchoir, 30.

39 Jane Barker, *Exilius, or The Banish'd Roman* (London, 1715).

40 Dooneflaith's bravery links her to the figure of the *femme forte* or heroic woman, which British royalists in exile during the Civil War adopted from French romance and which re-emerged with the accession of Queen Anne. See Carol Barash, *English Women's Poetry, 1649–1714: Politics, Community, and Linguistic Authority* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 32–34.

king's wrath, even though Turgesius wields a sword: "Dooneflaith fearing the loss of her lov'd Murchoe, catches hold of Turgesius's Arms, by which means she gave Murchoe opportunity to get within him, and disarm him" (56). Murchoe's churlish response is to chide her for robbing him of the chance to free Ireland from tyranny by killing Turgesius and taking the crown for himself, declaring "how inglorious have you made my Name!" (56). The implication is that her display of bravery has emasculated him, spoiling his chance to prove his martial prowess as the hero of romance should. Yet, if Dooneflaith exceeds her role as a romantic heroine, Murchoe, despite his protestations, shows himself to be something less than the stalwart masculine hero.⁴¹ Twice in the work, he dons women's clothing, once to woo Dooneflaith in secret and a second time as one of a troop of cross-dressing Irish soldiers who disguise themselves in order to launch a surprise attack on Turgesius and his men. Male cross-dressing is a common enough trope in romance, but Murchoe is also prone to displays of excessive emotion that were usually coded as feminine in the literature of the period. These histrionics reach comical proportions when, believing Dooneflaith has forsaken him, he throws himself melodramatically onto his bed "where he pour'd out such Tears, such Sighs, and Complaints, that he drew moisture from the Eyes of all who look'd in at the Keyhole of the Door to see what he did" (78).

Although Murchoe's failure to live up to the traditional role of hero is presented in a lighthearted way for the most part, this depiction would also have brought up some uncomfortable parallels for Irish Jacobites. After his confrontation with Turgesius, Murchoe flees into voluntary exile, in a development that recalls James II's escape to France. The idea of exile was central to Jacobite literature, so much so that Barker makes it the dominant theme of her romance *Exilius*, a choice undoubtedly influenced by her experience living with the Jacobite court in France. In her narrative, all of the many couples suffer through separation, and

41 Butler's fluid representation of gender in *Irish Tales* may owe something to the notoriously unconventional treatment of gender in the writing of seventeenth-century royalist Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle. For more on Cavendish's unusual representation of gender, see Sophie Tomlinson, "'My Brain the Stage': Margaret Cavendish and the Fantasy of Female Performance," in *Women, Texts and Histories: 1575-1760*, ed. Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss (London: Routledge, 1992), 134-63.

exile is generally the result either of unjust persecution or some tragic misunderstanding. Butler's treatment of exile is rather different. Instead of following Murchoe, the supposed hero, into exile, the focus remains on Dooneflaith, the woman he left behind unprotected. It is hard to avoid the impression that he has temporarily abandoned his role as hero-prince, leaving his lover at Turgesius's mercy just as James abandoned Ireland to Williamite wrath after his defeat at the Battle of the Boyne in 1691.⁴²

The consequences of Murchoe's flight play out in passages where in Butler deliberately evokes the bleak contemporary reality for Irish supporters of the Stuarts. Furious that Murchoe has escaped, the pagan king vents his wrath on the Catholic Church because he believes that institution may offer Murchoe refuge. Butler makes it plain that the violence committed by Turgesius's men should be read in religious terms as sacrilege, describing how they "put to Death all [the Catholic] Priests, and plac'd Heathen Lay-Abbots in every Cloister" (58). To compound the insult, the wealth seized from the churches and monasteries by "those Sacrilegious Danish Heathens" (68) is used to redecorate Turgesius's gaudy palace. The details of the attacks on the church are drawn from Keating's grisly account of the Viking raids in *Foras Feasa*, and Butler does not flinch in her representation despite the danger that her words could be read not merely as historical description but as a critical comment on contemporary conditions in the country. For hovering over these descriptions is the reality of the effects of the Penal Laws in the Ireland of her time, a glaringly obvious point of connection that only the fictional dress of the work serves to avert.⁴³ Daringly, Butler allows Dooneflaith to give voice to the outrage of the Irish people, past and present, when she responds to attempts to coerce her into marriage to Turgesius by exclaiming, "What, Wed a Tyrant! one whose wicked Hands have ransacked our Holy Temples, demolish'd all our Altars!" (63). Dooneflaith

42 The Glorious Revolution was far from bloodless in Ireland, where many thousands fought and died for James's right to the throne. The perceived cowardice of James's flight was particularly difficult for his Irish followers to accept (Ó Ciardha, 82–84).

43 The reviled Penal Laws institutionalized Roman Catholic disenfranchisement. The laws were inconsistently enforced in Ireland through the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but during periods of unrest or protestant unease, as in the wake of a Jacobite rebellion, they were applied with renewed vigour (Ó Ciardha, 27–30).

explicitly couches the plundering of the church and her own forced marriage in the same terms: as rape.

Erskine-Hill identifies the use of rape symbolically to represent William's accession as a theme that resonated through all forms of Jacobite literature in the decades after the revolution.⁴⁴ In Gaelic-language *Aisling* poetry from later in the century, the female embodiment of Ireland was habitually portrayed, like Dooneflaith, as the victim or potential victim of sexual violence at the hands of Ireland's enemies. Butler emphasizes the aggressive, predatory nature of Turgesius's passion for Dooneflaith, which becomes "so fierce and unruly in his Breast, that nothing but the enjoyment of Dooneflaith could allay it, or give him one moment of ease; he resolv'd in himself, nothing should impede his Desires" (58). But, if the threat of violence in this description is explicit, Dooneflaith is equally ferocious in her defence of her sexual virtue. She shows herself to be much more than the passive symbol of Ireland's suffering, expressing herself in strikingly robust and violent terms: "I'll Pierce my Heart and spurt the reaking stream full in his hated Face" (61). In the strength and determination she draws from her virtue, Dooneflaith disrupts the usual dichotomy between female power and moral purity common in eighteenth-century literature, including Jacobite writing.

Dooneflaith's dramatic claim that she will defend her virtue even to the point of death recalls the actions of a much older symbol of virtuous, violated womanhood: the Roman matron Lucretia. Lucretia commits suicide by stabbing herself in the chest after she is raped by a member of the tyrannical Tarquin dynasty. In allegorical terms, the rape of Lucretia symbolically corresponds to the Tarquins' usurpation of her country, with sexual violence functioning as a signifier for political misrule. Lucretia's dignity in the face of this violation sets off a chain of events that ultimately results in the expulsion of the Tarquins from Rome and the foundation of the Roman Republic.⁴⁵ By alluding to this story, Butler implies

⁴⁴ Erskine-Hill, 15–16.

⁴⁵ Though the Lucretia myth may seem an odd choice for a Jacobite, given its association with republicanism, both royalists and Whigs made use of the myth during the seventeenth century. Dryden alluded to it in his anti-Dutch, pro-Stuart play of 1672–73, *Amboyna, or the Cruelties of the Dutch to the English Merchants*, which casts the republican Dutch in the role of the corrupt Tarquins. Additionally, in the Irish context, the reflexive British habit of equating Catholicism with tyrannical absolutism would not have applied because Catholics were the disenfranchised majority in the country.

that Dooneflaith's stubborn refusal to surrender her chastity has significance beyond the private realm of virtue; it is symbolic of Ireland's moral rejection of the Danes' illegitimate rule, a message that exemplifies the Jacobite ethos.

Nevertheless, while the expulsion of the Danes superficially mirrors that of the Tarquin dynasty, the dénouement of *Irish Tales* strikingly lacks the sense that the moral order of the universe has been restored. Turgesius's reign ends ignominiously at the hands of the cross-dressing Irish forces slightly more than halfway through the work, resolving the central conflict of the first phase of the narrative. It would appear at this point that Dooneflaith's trials are at an end, but no sooner is Turgesius dispatched than a new impediment to the young lovers' happy ending arises, and, for the remainder of the narrative, the consummation of their relationship is deferred repeatedly. It is no longer the foreign Dane Turgesius who stands in their way, but Dooneflaith's and Murchoe's own fathers. The emphasis shifts from a national conflict to a generational one that threatens the future stability of the Irish monarchy. This shift in the focus of the conflict may have been conceived, as Kathryn King speculates regarding Barker's *Exilius*, as a response to the succession crisis precipitated by the death of Queen Anne in 1714.⁴⁶ Significantly, whereas Jacobites would have regarded Dooneflaith's defiance of the illegitimate authority of a usurper as heroic, their strictly hierarchical ideology meant resisting parental authority could not be justified in the same manner.

In the wake of Turgesius's death, Dooneflaith's father begins plotting his path to the high kingship and forbids her from marrying Murchoe, who is the son of his rival. In response, Murchoe's father Boriambh, beloved hero of Irish history, exhorts his heartbroken son to forget Dooneflaith and focus instead on the family's royal ambitions, saying "Think on a Crown, think of a Monarch's Power, and see how poorly Love will shew to these" (83), which are hardly sentiments suitable for a heroic romance. Murchoe reluctantly submits to filial duty and, due to a misunderstanding, publicly disavows his love for Dooneflaith. Dooneflaith, on the other hand, obeys her father's wishes, but remains ever faithful to Murchoe in her heart. By turning his back on Dooneflaith, even

46 For a discussion of *Exilius* in the context of the succession crisis and Jacobite politics more generally, see King, *Jane Barker, Exile: A Literary Career 1675–1725* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 150–54.

temporarily, Murchoe cedes the moral authority to a fractious older generation. In the final battle, while he acquits himself well, he dies anticlimactically of “an unlucky accidental Arrow” (92), without ever taking up the mantle of future king.⁴⁷ Dooneflaith herself expires at the news of Murchoe’s death, constant to her lover until her last breath, and the hopes for Ireland’s future die with her. Boriámh is killed, and Dooneflaith’s ambitious, opportunistic father retakes the throne. With no heir to inherit the high kingship, the Irish may have won the war, but there is a sense that the opportunity to restore order to the country and bring about a lasting peace has been squandered.

The thwarted consummation of the central romantic pairing in *Irish Tales* can be read as a symbolic analogue to the dashed hopes of a restoration of the Stuart monarchy in the wake of the failed Jacobite rebellion. In the later parts of her semi-autobiographical *Galesia* trilogy, published in 1723 and 1726, Barker similarly dispenses with the conventional romantic ending. Her central character chooses to remain a spinster, reframing it as a positive state of virginal independence. In her political biography of Barker, King argues that if in the symbolic language of Jacobitism legitimate consummation of marriage is the positive counterpart to the illegitimate usurpation that is rape, then Barker’s unconventional ending might be viewed as an exploration of what happens when that happy resolution no longer remains an option.⁴⁸ Other female writers, however, chose deliberately not to seek a positive resolution to this faltering dynamic. Rachel Carnell reads Delarivier Manley’s tragedy *The Royal Mischief* (1696) as a critique of the royalist problem of James’s weakness as a monarch, remarking that “Manley’s decision to end *The Royal Mischief* with no obvious heir ... suggests that she saw no heroic saviour for her country either in the exiled James II or in his son.”⁴⁹ The ending of *Irish Tales*, written twenty years later, seems to come to the same bleak conclusion.

47 Unlike the nationalist renderings of Boriámh’s victory that came to the fore later in the eighteenth century, Butler’s narrative does not erase the less than heroic reality that the army defeated by Irish forces at the Battle of Clontarf included not only Danes but also Irishmen.

48 King, 161–62.

49 Rachel K. Carnell, *A Political Biography of Delarivier Manley* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), 104.

Yet Butler's portrayal of the Irish kings as selfish, unworthy of the office, and constantly squabbling among themselves implies a more pointed critique of the country's political prospects. In her willingness to present a sceptical vision of medieval Ireland's system of elected kingship, Butler anticipates a question that would divide antiquarians later in the century.⁵⁰ Did the unstable nature of the electoral kingship leave Ireland chronically divided and too weak to mount a united defence against the Norman Conquest a century later, thereby setting up centuries of colonial subjugation? For Keating, the desire to claim Boriámh as a national hero meant minimizing this potential line of interpretation,⁵¹ but on this divisive issue Butler breaks with him. The choice may in part reflect Butler's embrace of Jacobite values in this instance over those of Irish proto-nationalism. For the Jacobites, the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings, which lay at the heart of their ideology, opposed any form of conditional or elected kingship as a gross violation of a sacred institution whose authority derived from God alone. The alternative to a divinely ordained king was not a government imbued with authority by the people but a system which, in Paul Monod's words, "would prevent the establishment of any sort of ultimate authority; the result must be party strife, an endless struggle for domination."⁵² The principal example of elected kingship in this period was of course William of Orange, who rose to the position of Stadtholder after an election by delegates of the states and provinces of the Netherlands in 1672 and was invited to take the British throne by the British parliament in 1688. Thus, although it ends with a declaration that the Irish had defeated their "mortal Enemy" the Danes, at the close of *Irish Tales*, the reader is left with a lingering feeling that, in an independent Ireland with an elected king, any peace will be fleeting. Perhaps, in Butler's view, only a divinely ordained king, a Stuart king, could permanently stem the country's regional rivalries and bring its competing interests into a state of peaceful coexistence? But, if the text is open to this

50 See Clare O'Halloran, "The Triumph of 'Virtuous Liberty': Representations of the Vikings and Brian Boru in Eighteenth-Century Histories," *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* 22 (2007): 151–63, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30071495>.

51 O'Halloran, 157–58.

52 Paul Kléber Monod, *Jacobitism and the English People: 1688–1788* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 20.

reading, it provides little hope that such a prospect is imminent or even likely.

With the ambivalent tone of the final pages, it is clear that Butler's purpose is not simply to add to the stock of Jacobite propaganda. Instead, *Irish Tales* reflects, somewhat fatalistically, on the vagaries of Irish history within the framework of a recognizably Jacobite typology. If *Irish Tales* demonstrates the importance of the chivalric values of duty, loyalty, and obligation, it also concedes how rarely even those of royal blood live up to those values. Only Dooneflaith consistently embodies these heroic ideals. By placing Dooneflaith at the centre of the moral order of her romance, Butler reorients the heroic romance around a feminized model of heroism. The relocation of power within the sphere of women's social and cultural milieu provided one avenue through which Jacobite women could respond to the gradual decline of the military hopes of the Stuarts while also claiming for themselves a measure of subjective autonomy.

