

Amongst Empires: A Short History of Ireland and Empire Studies in International Context

This essay begins with a summary overview of emergent intellectual trends that are redefining the study of empire today. It then charts a history of modern Irish scholarship on empire, discussing the achievements and limitations of Atlantic History, Commonwealth History, and postcolonial studies.¹ The piece closes with a discussion of how Empire Studies in Ireland might be reoriented in the future so as to deal not only with Irish responses to the now-vanished British Empire but also to the wider European imperial system and to the American neo-imperialism that emerged in its wake.

EMPIRE STUDIES AND THE CRISES OF AMERICAN IMPERIALISM

Not so long ago the historiography of empire was a sedate enterprise with the air of a somewhat inconsequential intellectual tidy-up operation in which mostly Western historians deliberated the character of European empires gone the way of Nineveh and Tyre. For a time, the very word “imperialism” seemed even to be becoming obsolete due to the collapse of Marxist theory’s intellectual stock

1. These fields obviously do not cover the entire gamut of Irish scholarship on empire. Several other fields might be discussed, including the economic history of empire, scholarship on Northern Ireland, studies of empire in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century contexts, and so on. However, they do represent major concentrations of work and thus represent significant contributions to the development of Empire Studies in Ireland.

after 1989 and to its displacement by newer lexicons like “globalization.” Now, as Giovanni Arrighi has remarked, the “E” and “I” words are very much back in fashion and, what is more, the study of empire and imperialism has lost much its aura of retrospection, its romance of requiem.² And as this has occurred, the center of gravity of Empire Studies has also moved westward from Britain and France to the United States. When contemporary intellectuals debate the economics of imperial expansion, the nature of inter-imperial competition, or the dangers of over-stretch, they do so less as archivists of a disappearing age and more in the manner of auguries hoping to discern the outline of a new world in the entrails of the old.

The current reinvigoration of Empire Studies owes much to scholars who have worked to rehabilitate the idea of empire, not least by arguing that the United States should assume the imperial functions relinquished by Britain and France after World War II. Refurbishing arguments about imperialism as midwife to modernization and enlightenment, this scholarship is also advanced on the “realist” premise that in an inherently war-prone international state system it will always be necessary for some master-state to regulate the world. Hence, unless a twenty-first century *pax Americana* can replicate its nineteenth-century British predecessor, the world is doomed in the century ahead either to long-term chaos or to the prospect that some non-Western power will assume the Augustan mantle the United States was too weak to seize. In sum, this new scholarship’s axioms are essentially “Empire or Anarchy” or “Imperialism or Barbarism.”

These apologists of empire are not just maverick voices; their ideas have found receptive listeners in some administrative echelons of the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union. Moreover, if the positive benefits of empire are now being re-aired, this obviously owes less to the writings of Robert Cooper, Niall Ferguson, or Herfried Münkler than to the expansion of NATO across Eastern Europe and to the post-9/11 invasions of

2. See Giovanni Arrighi, “Hegemony Unravelling—1,” *New Left Review* 32 (March/April 2005): 23–80, 23. See also Arrighi, “Hegemony Unravelling—2,” *New Left Review* 33 (May/June 2005): 83–116.

Afghanistan and Iraq.³ But whatever scholars argue about America as past, *de facto*, or prospective empire, the debate itself is indicative of a significant shift in American public consciousness: as Charles Maier observes, it has recently become possible for the first time since the days of Theodore Roosevelt openly to debate in the American public sphere “whether the United States has become or is becoming an empire in some classical sense.”⁴ American popular culture, however, may signal a different story. If James Cameron’s *Titanic*, Oliver Stone’s *Alexander*, or Mel Gibson’s *Apocolypto* are any index, perhaps the true concern is not whether the United States is about to become an empire but what will happen when its current hegemony begins to shudder and disintegrate.

Alongside the intellectual rehabilitation of empire, the last two decades have also witnessed an efflorescence of loosely left-wing scholarship working to very different agendas. Initially, the impetus for new thinking on empire came mainly from the “softer” disciplines in the humanities such as literary and cultural studies. Powerful statements in their own right, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) became even more influential when absorbed into a wide variety of disciplines across the humanities and social sciences by scholars investigating how centuries of empire had conditioned the production of knowledge in the West and how the modern university remained embedded in that history.⁵ To appreciate the extraordinary impact of Said’s work, it is necessary to understand its reception. Said’s wide-ranging surveys of the intellectual and literary history of empire appeared when Europe and North America were host to increasingly assertive immigrant communities from the “Third World” and at a time when the emergent post-independence intelligentsias in Asia, Africa, and South America

3. Robert Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Grove Press, 2004); Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (London: Penguin, 2004); Herfried Münkler, *Imperien: Die Logik der Weltherrschaft—vom Alten Rom bis zu den Vereinigten Staaten* (Berlin: Rowholt, 2005), reviewed by Benno Teschke, “Imperial Doxa from the Berlin Republic,” *New Left Review* 40 (July/August 2006): 128–40.

4. Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Empire and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 24.

5. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus Ltd., 1993).

were asking why decades, or in some cases even centuries, of independence had done so little to readjust the fundamental balance of global power. Said's works had enormous reach and appeal in this context because they provided synoptic intellectual histories that argued that empire rested not just on economic strength or military capacity but also on civilizational conviction, a national sense of mission, and a drive to intellectual mastery. Said's work, in other words, challenged both Western and non-Western intelligentsias alike to reappraise the role of culture, scholarship, and knowledge more generally in the normalization of Western hegemony.

Postcolonial studies represents one recent strand of anti-imperial Empire Studies, but Marxist or neo-Marxist scholarship on imperialism has also enjoyed a resurgence in the last decade, especially in the works of Giovanni Arrighi, David Harvey, and Immanuel Wallerstein.⁶ Building on traditions of classical Marxist and world-systems theory, these studies have concerned themselves primarily with the relationship between industrial and finance capital, territorial expansion, and international governance. Because of its exceptional historico-geographical sweep and theoretical verve, Arrighi's *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times* (1994) may be the decisive volume here. Arrighi argues that the twinned development of modern capitalism and imperialism must be understood in terms of four diverse cycles, each encompassing a "long" century. The globalizing thrust of modern capitalism, he contends, begins with a Genoese-Iberian cycle, extending from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries; is followed by a Dutch cycle, stretching from the late sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries; then by a British cycle, running from the mid-eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries; this in turn succeeded by a United States cycle, lasting from the late nineteenth century until the cur-

6. Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times* (London: Verso, 1994); David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Decline of American Power: The U.S. in a Chaotic World* (London: New Press, 2003) and "The Curve of American Power," *New Left Review* 40 (July/Aug. 2006): 77–94. See also Arrighi's modification of his thesis in *The Long Twentieth Century*, in Arrighi and Beverly J. Silver, *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) and the extended *New Left Review* articles cited above.

rent phase of financial expansion. Each cycle is defined by the complex of fiscal and state agencies that combined, first, to create a period of relatively stable growth, and then “autumnal” moments of financial expansion that jointly mark the apex and the beginning of the end of that specific international regimen.⁷

Arrighi’s work has been criticized as expressing a circular “return of the same” across history,⁸ but his point is that no new cycle simply repeats what went before but rather *revolutionizes* capitalism’s geographical scale and the modes of governmental and fiscal authority by which it is managed. In his work, the leading capitalist centers (the North Italian city states, Holland, England, the United States) represent a series of “spatial fixes” of ever increasing scale that created the conditions to resolve each preceding crisis of over-accumulation, and thus enabled the take-off of a new phase of economic expansion. None of the agencies that have driven the expansion of modern capitalism correspond, Arrighi argues, to the modular or self-contained national state axiomatic to most political and social theory. Genoa and the United Provinces, capitalist dynamos of the initial cycles, were something less than nation-states; the United Kingdom and the United States were multinational entities that were each something more than nation-states. The overall number of states in the interstate system has grown with every major reorganization of world capitalism, Arrighi suggests, but the actual sovereignty of individual states has nonetheless diminished since the international system as a whole has been successively dominated by more powerful hegemony at its center.

Arrighi’s most decisive point concerns financial capital. The stimulus for our contemporary obsession with “globalization,” he observes, stems from the perception that the past several decades have led to what David Harvey calls an “explosion in new financial instruments and markets, coupled with the rise of highly sophisticated systems of financial coordination on a world scale.”⁹ This

7. For a summary, see Arrighi, “Hegemony Unravelling—2,” 84–104.

8. For this charge, see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 239.

9. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), cited by Arrighi in *The Long Twentieth Century*, 3.

recent ascendancy of finance over manufacturing capital, Arrighi argues, is nothing novel—only the most recent of a number of recurrent moments of that kind; and these have always signaled junctures of both *maturity* and *crisis* in a particular stage of capitalist accumulation. The end of every long cycle of capitalist development, he contends, is triggered whenever there is an overabundance of money in the system, which stimulates a massive shift in investment from production and trade to finance capital. That liquid capital, or excess money that seeks better rates of investment than can be gained from established channels, comes from the regular and substantial profits gained during a period of relatively stable systemic expansion when the hegemony of the dominant world power was essentially secure. During such periods, profits are reinvested in trade and production and generate even more profits, but every cycle of expansion reaches a point when profits then begin to decline as a result of more aggressive competition from rival capitalist agencies. At that point, the capitalists of the dominant power shift their investments to the more mobile world of international high finance.

For Arrighi, these shifts are “a sign of autumn” that indicate that the established structure of the world-system has entered a period of turbulence and transition. In the British case, the autumnal moment occurred during the Edwardian period; the corresponding *belle époque* for the United States was the Reagan era. In World Wars I and II, the United States grew rich and powerful by letting other countries do most of the actual fighting; by supplying them with credit, food, and weapons; and by intervening late in the actual military struggles to ensure outcomes in its own national interest. However, by the end of the Cold War, America had to do most of the fighting itself to uphold the current world order while its less heavily militarized European and East Asian client-regions gathered strength as economic competitors. In this new conjuncture, the US military lost credibility, most notably in Vietnam, and then the gold-dollar standard collapsed. To make matters worse, the United Nations gradually turned into a platform for Third World grievances, eroding the idea of the United States as benign international broker and impelling it to conduct its foreign policy in a more overtly imperial manner than had been the norm when it could still present itself as

defender of international freedom against Soviet aggression.¹⁰ Thus, for Arrighi, the current post-Cold War period represents not a bold new phase of American ascendancy, but rather the beginning of the irreversible disintegration of “the long twentieth century” of the American-led cycle of capitalist development. What the new successor regime will be—China, some new United States/European Union alliance—cannot yet be established; a new global “spatial fix” may take decades, maybe as long as a century, to consolidate itself.¹¹

With its complex theories of accumulation, autumns of finance capital, and algorithms of trade and territorial expansion, Arrighi’s approach may seem at a long remove from Empire Studies as most scholars in the “softer” humanities know them. Works like *The Long Twentieth Century*, Immanuel Wallerstein’s *The Decline of American Power*, or David Harvey’s *The New Imperialism* emerge from different intellectual traditions to those that shaped “classics” of post-colonial studies such as *The Black Jacobins* (1938), *Wretched of the Earth* (1963), *Orientalism*, or *Culture and Imperialism*. The Marxist grand theorists from Lenin to Luxemburg to world systems theory conceive of imperialism largely in terms of the flows of capitalist accumulation, and as such have attended little enough to the cultural or intellectual histories of empire or to these dimensions of the struggles of colonized peoples. Postcolonial studies may be culturalist in emphasis by comparison, but it does attend to the cultural mediations of global politics that Marxist or neo-Marxist economic theories of imperialism have typically bypassed. And though a Said or an Arrighi will approach questions of empire in remarkably different ways, they share a common concern to track the long-range development of modern imperialism from early modern Europe to America today.¹²

The shift of focus in Empire Studies in recent times from Europe to the United States is clearly connected to the remarkable conjuncture of both opportunity and crisis that the post-Cold War period has opened up for American power. But as it has moved

10. Arrighi, “Hegemony Unravelling—2,” 111.

11. *Ibid.*, 113–16.

12. *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* each begin with European writers or intellectuals but conclude with wide-ranging discussions of contemporary American culture and foreign policy.

“westward” Empire Studies has become not just more “Americanized” but also considerably more “globalized” because, to a much greater extent than France, Spain or the United Kingdom, the United States has always been an immigrant society—with long histories of immigration from Europe, Africa, South America, and Asia. As a result, the United States academy is now a strongly multinational one, and thus serves as a *rendevous* or academic clearing-house where many of the livelier strands of Empire Studies come together. There, Middle Eastern scholarship on Islam and Orientalism shares intellectual space with South Asian Subaltern Studies; Latin American studies find an extended readership in this milieu as does scholarship on the crisis of the African state or Caribbean and Black American studies of slavery and transatlantic migration; there, too, East Asian scholarship on premodern or postmodern world trading networks evolves alongside debates between American or European empire-apologists and the cassettes of American decline. What shape a more “Americanized” and “globalized” Empire Studies will ultimately assume will depend as much on political as on scholarly developments, but, whatever eventuates, the already-retitled angles of vision will inevitably affect future European research agendas as well.

EMPIRE STUDIES IN IRELAND; OBSTACLES AND IMPEDIMENTS

Empire studies in Ireland have emerged from a different history to this. Here, the study of empire has been shaped in a cultural context defined largely by Irish nationalist and unionist wars of position fought against the backdrop of the disintegration of the British Empire. How has this history conditioned the modes of writing about empire that have emerged in Ireland to date, and what are the main contributions of Irish scholarship in this area?

Given that Ireland’s incorporation within the British Empire was bitterly contested for much of its history, and that Irish settlement across the British colonies was extensive, the Irish contribution to the history and literature of empire is surprisingly thin. True, the country has produced some distinguished modern historians of empire, among whom we might count Thomas Pakenham (Lord Longford), author of popular histories such as *The Boer War* (1979)

and *The Scramble for Africa, 1876–1912* (1991); David Beers Quinn, pioneering historian of early modern English expansion in the Americas; Nicholas Mansergh, distinguished historian of the British Commonwealth; and Nicholas Canny, eminent authority on early modern Atlantic History. Benedict Anderson, descendant of a Waterford-based Anglo-Irish family with imperial connections, and author of *Imagined Communities*, one of the most influential studies of anti-colonial nationalism to appear in recent times, might also be mentioned here, as might Dominic Lieven, of mixed German-Russian and Irish Catholic background, with imperial connections on both sides of the family, and author of an ambitious comparativist history of the European land empires, *The Russian Empire and its Enemies* (2000).¹³ On the whole, though, these are isolated summits on an otherwise flat landscape, and generally speaking the British Empire has not exercised an especially strong grip on the modern Irish scholarly imagination. Why should that be the case?

Firstly, although Irish participation in the British Empire was longstanding and extensive, that participation seems not to have left an enduring impression on modern Irish culture in the same way that it did on those of England or Scotland. Many Irish novels of empire have undoubtedly been lost to literary historical memory, but even so the genres of the imperial adventure tale or novel, for example, seems never to have occupied a prominent place in Irish literary canons in the way that they have done in English or Scottish traditions stretching from Hakluyt or Defoe up to Conan Doyle, Kipling, Haggard, Stevenson, Henty, Buchan, Orwell, or Golding.

13. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991); and Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and its Enemies* (London: John Murray, 2000). Journalists Alexander and Patrick Cockburn come from a similar background to Anderson and should also be included here. Alexander Cockburn has been an incisive commentator on US politics for the American magazine *The Nation*, and Patrick Cockburn, Middle East correspondent for the *Financial Times* and the *Independent*, has emerged as one of the most authoritative commentators on the recent wars in Iraq. See especially Alexander Cockburn, *Corruptions of Empire: Life Studies and the Reagan Era* (London: Verso, 1987); and Patrick and Andrew Cockburn, *Saddam Hussein: An American Obsession* (London: Verso, 2002). Fred Halliday, author of numerous studies on the Cold War and on the Middle East, also deserves mention in this context. Among his many works, see especially *The Making of the Second Cold War* (London: Verso, 1986) and *Nation and Religion in the Middle East* (London: Saqi Books, 2000).

Nor, despite the far-flung Irish settlements across the British Empire, has Ireland produced an internationally distinguished tradition of imperial travel-writing in the manner of modern English authors from Richard Burton or Mary Kingsley up to D.H. Lawrence, Charles Doughty, Evelyn Waugh, or Bruce Chatwin. The works of a few Irish-born or Irish-connected writers—Edmund Spenser's *View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596) and *The Faerie Queen* (1590–96); Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and *A Modest Proposal* (1729); Joyce Cary's *The African Witch* (1936) and *Mister Johnson* (1939); and J.G. Farrell's *Empire Trilogy* [*Troubles* (1970), *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973), and *The Singapore Grip* (1978)]—have secured a place in the received canons of English empire writing. But, for whatever reason, a literature of empire with a strong and distinctly Irish texture seems not to have consolidated.

Missionaries back from Africa, India, China, or South America might once have brought Irish congregations lively oral accounts of their ventures in strange lands and missionary magazines ought certainly to have a place in any history of twentieth-century Irish reading. But while the occasional washed-up missionary, like Father Jack in Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*, may appear now and then in Irish writing, the world of the Irish missionaries across the Empire has never been a staple feature of modern Irish writing either.¹⁴ Any number of Irish military biographies of empire might be recovered from the recesses of British and Irish libraries, and late nineteenth-century English authors such as Kipling or Conan Doyle did their best to glamorize the Irish soldier in imperial service. Nevertheless, Irish soldiering in the armies of empire seems not to have left an enduring literary genre or even a notable corpus of children's literature in its wake.¹⁵

14. A significant recent exception is Brian Moore's *Black Robe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), a tale of French Jesuits living among the Huron people of colonial North America.

15. Some retrospective works of this kind have emerged in recent times, most notably Sebastian Barry's works dealing with Empire-loyalist Catholics in the British military or police system. See his *A Long, Long Way* (London: Faber, 2006), *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* (London: Picador, 1998) and *The Stewart of Christendom* in *The Only True History of Lizzie Finn; The Stewart of Christendom; White Woman Street: Three Plays* (London: Methuen Drama, 1995).

On the whole, then, the long history of Irish participation in empire seems remarkably lacking in durable twentieth-century literary issue; instead, it is the deeds, speeches, jail journals and polemics of Irish victims or critics of Union and Empire that have had the strongest grip on both domestic and international audiences. The epic of empire, in other words, seems to have remained firmly subordinate in the Irish national imagination to the epic of the Irish struggle against England and Empire. History writing does not take place in a cultural vacuum, and thus it is the story of Ireland's quarrels with England, not Irish social or cultural traffic with the wider world of empire, that has most preoccupied Irish literary and historical imaginations alike.

Secondly, until quite recently, British historiography of empire rarely included Ireland in its remit. After 1801 Ireland was constitutionally part of the United Kingdom and not formally treated as a colony though it retained many of the features of such. The semi-detachment of the Irish Free State from the British Empire after 1921 and its exit from the Commonwealth in 1948 compounded this sense of Ireland as "a case apart" or an anomaly of some sort. Even before these events, though, the country had never really fitted comfortably into an official body of imperial writing that had, in the words of one historian, "always extolled at length the constitutional graces of an ordered life passed amid the palms and pines of a grateful globe."¹⁶ The country was perhaps geographically too close to England to be exotic in the manner of India, the Americas, or Egypt, and culturally too stubbornly Catholic, too frequently rebellious, too commonly a byword for misery and failed policy to be regarded as a showcase either for the benefits of the Union or for those of imperial progress. At a time when Irish universities were poorly staffed and resourced, and when many Irish historians learned their trade and were accredited in Britain, British indifference to Ireland's historical place in the empire would undoubtedly have been significant. Even today, therefore, much of the research and publication represents initial-stage groundwork rather than advanced or comprehensive analysis.¹⁷

16. A.P. Thornton, *The Imperial Idea And Its Enemies: A Study in British Power* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1985), vii.

17. For an incisive overview of the development of the discipline of modern Irish history-writing, see Joseph Lee, "Irish History," in N. Buttimer, C. Rynne, and H. Guerin, eds., *The Heritage of Ireland* (Cork: Collins, 2000), 114–36.

Thirdly, as a consequence of the country's independence struggle, Irish historiography in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries itself acquired a robustly national frame. In the decades between 1921 and 1948, both Cumann na nGaedhael and Fianna Fáil statesmen operated innovatively within the arena of the British Commonwealth. But while the southern state in this period had a principled foreign policy and a positive profile in the decolonizing world, its public intellectuals and literary writers wrote (with few exceptions) mainly in a fairly introverted way on Irish matters, and their engagements with either international or imperial politics lacked distinction. Moreover, a combination of domestic popular hostility to empire in the south, and official embarrassment on the part of all the nationalist political parties that the Sinn Féin thirty-two county republic had never been realized, meant that Irish activities within the British Empire or Commonwealth were not much trumpeted in public life.¹⁸ And after 1948 the country's search for new international roles via the United Nations and the European Union preoccupied Irish political élites much more than did either the imperial past or the last days of what was by then a fast-unraveling British Empire.¹⁹

When Irish revisionism came to the fore after the 1960s against this backdrop of accelerated modernization and European integration, it set out to challenge what it saw as the narrowly self-regarding insularity and self-congratulatory righteousness of nationalist history. But because the revisionists wanted to take the "heat" out of Irish history writing, to emphasize (contra-nationalism) the more constructive aspects of British policy in Ireland, and to show (contra-

18. Those such as Sean O'Faolain and Frank O'Connor who complained most bitterly about the miseries of Irish provincialism wrote little enough of any distinction—beyond literary criticism—on the wider world of international affairs. *The Bell* carried articles on European and sometimes on imperial events. But the major Irish fiction of the mid-century period is resolutely introspective in focus despite its critique of Irish introspection. Conor Cruise O'Brien's short but groundbreaking study of Camus in colonial context is an example of an Irish work with a much wider international consciousness. See Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Albert Camus* (New York: Viking, 1970).

19. The major resource for the study of Irish foreign policy in the post-independence period is *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy*, 5 Vols., 1919–39 (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1998–2006).

republicanism) that revolutionary republicanism had delivered nothing that might not have been achieved less painfully by gradualist constitutional means, the difficult subject of empire was never going to be grist to the revisionist mill. Roy Foster's *Modern Ireland, 1600–1972* (1988), commonly regarded as one of contemporary revisionism's finer accomplishments, does not have a single index entry for "Empire" or "imperialism," and even the Commonwealth is accorded only a few glancing references.²⁰ There are exceptions, such as the work of the Canadian Donald Harmon Akenson, but for the most part Irish revisionist historiography has remained just as wedded to a narrowly nationalized or Irish-English frame of reference as the most insular kinds of nationalist historiography that it denounced.²¹ And though it is now commonly said that Irish history writing has moved beyond old nationalist-revisionist polemics, when empire is at issue nationalist-leaning histories will still commonly accent only Irish oppositions to empire whereas revisionist-leaning ones will insist, with equal predictability, on Irish collusions in or contributions to empire. These rigidly dichotomized mindsets remain one of the strongest obstacles to the development of some more sophisticated materialist analysis of the issues concerned.

Finally, the fact that Ireland was never until recently a destination for inward migrations from the former colonies in the way that Britain or the United States were was also a factor. Empire Studies has prospered best in countries where scholars from different backgrounds, and with different experiences of empire, have enlivened debate. The depressingly Anglocentric and Anglophonic nature of the modern Irish education system has compounded matters in this respect. A country that failed to revive Irish as a language of normal or even scholarly life, and with a very poor record in cultivating other European languages let alone those of other continents, inevitably limited its intellectual horizons. Lacking command of Irish-language sources, cut off from regular ongoing traffic with non-Anglophone European scholarship, most Irish historians—

20. Roy F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600–1972* (London: Penguin, 1988).

21. See Donald Harmon Akenson, *An History of Irish Civilization* (London: Granta, 2005), *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel and Ulster* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), and *If the Irish Ran the World: Montserrat, 1630–1730* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997).

political, social, or literary—found that whatever intellectual communication they had with the wider world would necessarily be mediated almost entirely through the journals and academies of England and the United States. And before the radical social and intellectual upheavals of the 1960s, or the advances in global communications in recent decades, that inevitably meant dependence on largely empire-friendly and Eurocentric regimens of knowledge. If Irish scholarship on empire has been narrow in reach and ambition, one reason for this is that the country's academics have mostly lacked both the language skills and the material research resources necessary to situate the Irish experience of imperialism in some more generous global context.

It would clearly be wrong, though, to suggest that Irish history-writing has simply restricted its gaze to “the British Isles” and ignored the world beyond. Distinguished Irish historians of Empire may be relatively few in number, but this is partly at least because Irish history overseas has been written not under the rubric of Empire History but under that of Migration or Diaspora Studies or in terms of the labor histories of the societies of settlement. There are now extensive and growing archives of scholarship on all of the major regions where Irish peoples have settled, and some of the work to issue from these fields is of a higher calibre than anything to emerge from Empire Studies more strictly defined.²² Has any work by a twentieth-century historian of Ireland and Empire captured the contemporary intellectual imagination in a way, say, that the Irish-Australian Robert Hughes's *The Fatal Shore* (1986) or American-

22. The scholarship here is too extended to summarize. Some of the more comprehensive recent studies include Donald Harmon Akenson, *The Irish Diaspora: A Primer* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, The Queen's University Press, 1993); Andy Bielenberg, ed., *The Irish Diaspora* (Harlow: Longman, 2000); David Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration, 1801–1921* (Dublin, Economic and Social History Society of Ireland, 1984) and *Oceans of Consolation: Personal Accounts of Irish Migration to Australia* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994). Useful surveys of the field, with extended bibliography, include Kevin Kenny, “The Irish in the Empire,” in Kevin Kenny, ed., *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 90–122; Kevin Kenny, “Diaspora and Comparison: The Global Irish as a Case Study,” *The Journal of American History* 90:1 (2003), 134–62; and Mary J. Hickman, “Migration and Diaspora,” in Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 117–36.

labor historian David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness* (1991) have done?²³ Dealing respectively with the fates of the emigrant Irish in nineteenth-century Australia and the United States, these works have transformed the scholarship in their respective areas.

Yet while the historiography of Irish migration or diaspora intersects with that of Empire Studies, the two ought not to be collapsed. Most of the history of Irish migration is society-specific and not as such concerned with the wider international politics, economics, or culture of empire at large. Migration/Diaspora Studies and Empire Studies are both globalizing or transnationalist and comparativist in tendency, but the issues pressed into the foreground by each remain in some respects distinctive, and, while recognizing overlap, it is with the latter field that this essay is chiefly concerned.

ATLANTIC HISTORY AND EMPIRE

Of the three fields of Irish scholarship on empire mentioned at the outset—Atlantic History, Commonwealth History, and postcolonial studies—the one with the widest recognition internationally is the version of early modern Atlantic History associated with David Beers Quinn and Nicholas Canny. Quinn (1909–2002), of Protestant background, born in Dublin and brought up in Clara, Co. Offaly, was unusual among Irish historians of his day in being a committed Marxist (initially as a Trotskyist and Communist; later an activist in the British Labour Party). He spent his career principally in Liverpool, and was a founding member of the left-leaning Past and Present Society. At a time when standard British history still treated early modern expansion in a highly celebratory manner, and still relied heavily on the promotional writings of Richard Hakluyt as a prime source for the period, Quinn wrote about English explorers such as Humphrey Gilbert, Thomas Harriott, and Walter Raleigh in a much more searching manner than was then conventional. He saw his function essentially as a recoverer of original sources, and he first made his reputation with works such *The Voyages and Colonising*

23. Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: The Epic of Australia's Founding* (New York: Vintage, 1986) and David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991).

Enterprises of Sir Humphrey Gilbert (2 volumes, 1940), *The Roanoke Voyages, 1584–1590: Documents to Illustrate the English Voyages to North America under the Patent Granted Walter Raleigh in 1584* (2 volumes, 1955), *The American Drawings of John White* (1964), and, later, *The English New England Voyages, 1602–08* (1983).²⁴ His work on Gilbert, Raleigh, White, and other English adventurers was path-breaking and prepared the way for new evaluations of English voyaging and settlement in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²⁵ But though his major contribution was to the history of early European exploration of North America, Quinn never forgot that many of the Englishmen most committed to ventures in the Americas had already been involved with the plantations in Ireland. America remained a chief focus of research, but he returned to Ireland across his career in works such as *The Elizabethans and the Irish* (1966), a volume that laid the foundations for the fuller development of the Irish version of Atlantic History, and *Ireland and America: Their Early Associations, 1500–1640* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1991).

The merging of the histories of English settlement in Ireland and in “the westward enterprise” to North America which Quinn initiated has received its fullest development in Nicholas Canny’s work between the 1970s and the present. Born in County Clare, and with some family connections to the British imperial service, Canny was educated in Galway and in the United States, at the University of Pennsylvania.²⁶ Unlike Quinn, his politics were never left wing, but some of his later writings suggest that he viewed the project of the

24. See David Beers Quinn, *The Voyages and Colonising Enterprises of Sir Humphrey Gilbert*, 2 vols., (London: Hakluyt Society, 1940); *The Roanoke Voyages, 1584–1590: Documents to Illustrate the English Voyages to North America under the Patent Granted Walter Raleigh in 1584*, 2 vols. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1955); Paul Hulton and David Beers Quinn, *The American Drawings of John White* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), and, with Alison M. Quinn, *The English New England Voyages, 1602–08* (London: Hakluyt, 1983).

25. My account of Quinn here is indebted to Nicholas Canny’s appraisal in his “Writing Early Modern History: Ireland, Britain, and the Wider World,” *The Historical Journal* 46 (2003): 723–47, 728–29. See also the “Preface” to K.R. Andrews, N.P. Canny, and P.E.H. Hair, eds., *The Westward Enterprise: English Activities in Ireland, the Atlantic, and America, 1480–1650* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1978).

26. For Canny’s discussion of family involvements in the British imperial service, see his “Foreword” to Kenny, ed., *Ireland and the British Empire*, ix–xviii.

mostly Cambridge-educated leading revisionist historians of his generation with skepticism.²⁷ In Canny's view, revisionism had privileged a foreshortened perspective that took the nineteenth-century as the pivot of modern Irish history, treating earlier periods as interesting only to the degree that they might throw light on the "origins" of those issues deemed central to Ireland post-1800. He has also argued that both Irish revisionism and the New British History are rather insular enterprises, compared to which Atlantic History "is necessarily comparative history."²⁸ For him, the emergence of an increasingly hardline British policy of conquest, plantation and Anglicization in early modern Ireland should be understood along two axes: the religious wars and interimperial rivalries of continental Europe and the opening up of British trade and migration routes westward to Ireland and the Americas. Only an Atlantic and not a narrowly archipelagic British Isles framework, he has argued, can offer any really comprehensive grasp of Irish society in this period.

Quinn's research on Ireland was largely supplementary to his work on the Americas; Canny's shifted the emphasis to Ireland, drawing on Irish-language sources, and not just on the available archives in English. Quinn achieved a great deal by recovering the documents of early English travel and migration, but Canny's work has been more attentive to domestic literary sources, particularly to the work of Edmund Spenser, whose writings occupy a central role in his conception of British policy of settlement and plantation in Ireland.²⁹

27. See, for instance, "Revising the Revisionist," *Irish Historical Studies* 40 (1996), 242–54.

28. Canny, "Writing Early Modern History: Ireland, Britain, and the Wider World," 724–27, 739. See also "Atlantic History: What and Why?" in *European Review* 9 (2001): 399–411 and "Writing Early Modern History: Ireland, Britain and the Wider World," *The Historical Journal* 46 (2003): 723–47.

29. See, for example, "Edmund Spenser and the Development of an Anglo-Irish Identity," *Yearbook of English Studies* 13 (1983): 1–19; "Reviewing *A View of the Present State of Ireland*," in Anne Fogarty, ed., *Irish University Review* 26:2 (autumn/winter 1996): 252–67; and *Making Ireland British, 1580–1650* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Chapter 1. Other important volumes on Spenser include Patricia Coughlan, ed., *Spenser and Ireland: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1989); Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser's Irish Experience: Wilde Fruit and Salvage Soyl* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); and Willy Maley, *Salvaging Spenser: Colonialism, Culture and Identity* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

So, what are Canny's specific intellectual achievements? Firstly, he has built on Quinn's foundations to have the history of English settlement in Ireland recognized by an international community of scholars as an intrinsic part of the wider history of early modern European expansion. As Canny himself has remarked, the fact that English historians of early modern empire have typically been fascinated with the Americas but uninterested in Ireland is remarkable

considering that altogether more people from Britain (England, Scotland, and Wales combined) migrated to Ireland than to North America from the late sixteenth to the close of the seventeenth century, and that more concerted efforts were made there, than in any American location, to re-constitute English society in a consciously experimental mode.³⁰

Thanks to the efforts of Quinn and Canny, for a younger generation of Atlantic historians, prominently among them David Armitage and Jane Ohlmeyer, there is now nothing remarkable in locating Ireland in the wider narrative of English and European expansion. A comparison of the Cambridge and Oxford *Histories of the British Empire*, two of the most ambitious projects of scholarly synthesis on the subject to be published in the twentieth century, provides a useful index of the progress accomplished here. When the four-volume *Cambridge History of the British Empire* was published in 1929, the initial volume, "The Old Empire from the Beginnings to 1783," contained less than a page on the early modern English plantations in Ireland and beyond that Ireland appeared only by way a few minor references to the Navigation Laws.³¹ By contrast, when the five-volume *The Oxford History of the British Empire* appeared in 1998, the opening volume, "The Origins of Empire," was not only edited and introduced by Canny, but contained three chapters that dealt extensively with Ireland.³² Today, Atlantic History is a thriving area of Irish research activity, to which not only historians but also literary

30. Canny, "Writing Early Modern History: Ireland, Britain, and the Wider World," 734.

31. See J. Holland Rose, A.P. Newton, E.A. Benians, eds., *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, 3 vols., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929).

32. See Wm. Roger Louis, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, 5 vols., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 1999); and Nicholas Canny, ed., *The Origins of Empire*, vol. 1 (1998).

critics and geographers contribute. John J. Mannion's *The Peopling of New Foundland* (1977) and William Smyth's *Map-making, Landscapes and Memory: A Geography of Colonial and Early Modern Ireland, 1530–1750* (1996) represent particularly impressive contributions from the latter discipline.³³

Secondly, Canny has disputed the tendency of contemporary historians of Ireland to view the early modern English plantations as a series of ad hoc responses to the latest crisis of governance. In his view, English attitudes to Ireland perceptibly hardened over the Tudor and Reformation periods; and in the works of Edmund Spenser—and in the class of “New English” civil servants, soldiers, and officials whose mentality he articulated—a ruthless and systemic policy of Irish displacement, English settlement, and coercive Anglicization was consolidated. In *Making Ireland British, 1580–1650* (2001), Canny ascribes a central role to Spenser's *View of the Present State of Ireland* and *The Faerie Queene*, arguing at length that these texts transformed English thinking on Ireland, sketching a template for systemic colonization that was eventually put into practice in the Cromwellian settlement. Whether or not such a “grand ambition” can indeed be discerned in English policy remains a topic of controversy, but Canny's achievement is to have consistently set the agenda for debate in the period.

The version of Atlantic History advanced by Quinn and Canny has made a major contribution to Irish Studies and Empire Studies, but it has its shortcomings. Its whole focus is on the British Atlantic world, and scholars in the field have conventionally displayed little interest in the contemporaneous Spanish and Portuguese settlement in the Americas, or with how these Iberian ventures intersected with their French, Dutch, or British counterparts. Anthony Pagden's *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France, c. 1500–1800* (1995) or J.H. Elliott's magisterial *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492–1830* (2006) have recently pushed scholarship toward a much less Anglocentric comparativism

33. See John J. Mannion, ed., *The Peopling of Newfoundland: Essays in Historical Geography* (St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1977); and William Smyth, *Map-making, Landscapes and Memory: A Geography of Colonial and Early Modern Ireland, c. 1530–1750* (Cork: Cork University Press in association with Field Day, 2006).

than has hitherto been conventional.³⁴ But these works display a synoptic drive and a level of ambition that no Irish historian seems likely to match anytime soon. Indeed, the only two monographs on early modern Ireland that deal with Spanish as well as British ventures in the Americas—Clare Carroll’s *Circe’s Cup: Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Ireland* (2001) and Patricia Palmer’s *Language and Conquest in Early Modern Ireland: English Renaissance Literature and Elizabethan Imperial Expansion* (2001)—are by literary critics and not historians.³⁵

Furthermore, because Quinn and Canny have stressed the importance of extensive archival work their historiography has inevitably tended to privilege the worlds of the settler and, to a lesser extent, native élites. Yet, unlike those élites, the communities that suffered most in the age of early modern colonization—slaves, maroons, indentured workers, common sailors, rapparees, and other evicted communities—left few written archives behind. Historians who give preeminent place to written archives are not always the best equipped to write the histories of such communities, and anthropologists or ethnographers have generally contributed more in this area. That Canny should have edited the first of the five-volume *The Oxford History of the British Empire* is fitting tribute to a historian who has done so much to remap the history of England’s “westward enterprise.” However, the volume contained not a single chapter on American Indian resistance to the new world settlements, on slave or maroon revolts in the West Indies, or on Irish uprisings against the plantations—a comment surely on the extent to which Atlantic History continues to privilege the lifeworlds of the empire-builders and colonial settlers rather than those of the colonized.³⁶

34. Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France, c. 1500–c. 1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); J.H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492–1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

35. See Clare Carroll, *Circe’s Cup: Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press in association with Field Day, 2001); and Patricia Palmer, *Language and Conquest in Early Modern Ireland: English Renaissance Literature and Elizabethan Imperial Expansion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

36. Canny’s overall verdict in *Making Ireland British* is that the attempt to make the Irish people British had “in every respect proven, a costly failure,” 578. Never-

COMMONWEALTH HISTORY

Commonwealth History has never had a high profile in what is now called Irish Studies, and it is still the preserve of a small number of specialists. But here, too, Irish historians have made a genuine contribution. Tipperary-born Nicholas Mansergh (1910–91) was, like David Beers Quinn, and indeed like many of Ireland's most distinguished historians of empire, of Irish Protestant background.³⁷ Like Quinn, he spent his professional life in England, eventually becoming the first Smuts Professor of the History of the British Commonwealth, Cambridge (1953–70), and Master of St John's College at Cambridge. A prolific author on both Irish and imperial matters, his *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs 1931–39* (1952), *Documents and Speeches on Commonwealth Affairs 1952–62* (1963, three volumes), and especially his remarkable two-volume synthesis *The Commonwealth Experience* (1969) established Mansergh as one of Britain's leading late-twentieth-century authorities on the Commonwealth. In 1967, he also became editor-in-chief of the India Office records and as such supervised the publication of *Constitutional Relations between Britain and India: The Transfer of Power 1942–47* (1970–83). His combined interests in Ireland and India were to issue in his *The*

theless, his work generally stresses Irish accommodation to British colonization and empire and is remarkably devoid of interest in resistance. See, for example, his "Foreword" to Kenny, ed., *Ireland and the British Empire*, and his "Irish Resistance to Empire?: 1640, 1690, 1798," in Lawrence Stone, ed., *An Imperial State at War* (London: Routledge, 1994), 288–321.

37. The fact that many of the most ambitious Irish historians of empire have been of Anglo-Irish or Northern Protestant background cannot be unconnected to the fact that the higher command posts available to the Irish in the imperial army and bureaucracy were most commonly staffed by people from these backgrounds. Most of the historians in question have been sympathetic to Irish nationalism (as were the Pakenhams, Andersons, and Manserghs) and/or to a left-wing politics (Anderson, Quinn, Halliday, the Cockburns). It would be wrong to assume that Irish attitudes to empire divided neatly along a Catholic nationalist/Protestant unionist axis. This would elide a long history of Catholic investment in empire, most obviously that of the Catholic hierarchy, and overlook a strong tradition of opposition to empire among the more radical sections of Irish Protestantism. That latter lineage is a variegated one that arguably extends from Swift through Tone to Davis and Mitchel and from thence to figures such as Maud Gonne, Constance Markiewicz, Roger Casement, W.B. Yeats, Alice Stopford Green, and many others, including the historians and other intellectuals mentioned in this essay.

Prelude to Partition: Concepts and Aims in Ireland and India (1978), a short study (discussed by Antoine Mioche in this issue) that remains one of the most provocative reflections by an Irish historian on the division of the island. Like Quinn's, Mansergh's interest in empire was never divorced from his interest in Ireland. Both volumes of *The Commonwealth Experience* have chapters on Ireland, and his account of the dismantling of the 1921 Treaty settlement in *The Unresolved Question: The Anglo-Irish Settlement and its Undoing 1912–72* (1991) ably situated Irish developments in broader Commonwealth perspective.³⁸

Mansergh's basic temperament seems to have been liberal and conciliatory, and Commonwealth history is by its nature a sub-department of constitutional "high history" not known for methodological or political radicalism. But his elegant prose style and coolly authoritative tones still packed a punch, and his work is quite different in tone to that of previous luminaries of Dominion historiography such as Richard Jebb or Australian W.K. Hancock, Britain's leading interwar imperial historian. For instance, in his *Argument of Empire* (1943), Hancock wrote of the Commonwealth in glowing terms as a guarantor of steady progress where "Monarchy grows into democracy, Empire grows into Commonwealth, the tradition of a splendid past grows into an adventurous future." Writing as fascism was sweeping across Europe, he painted the Commonwealth as an organic family of mutually interdependent peoples that represented a sane alternative to an otherwise "sundered world of snarling nationalisms."³⁹

38. Nicholas Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs: Problems of External Policy, 1931–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952); *Documents and Speeches on British Commonwealth Affairs, 1931–1952*, 2 Vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953); *The Commonwealth Experience* (London: Macmillan, 1982 [1969]); *Constitutional Relations Between Britain and India: The Transfer of Power, 1942–47*, Vol. 1 (1970)–Vol. 12 (1983) (London: HMSO, 1983); *The Prelude to Partition: Concepts and Aims in Ireland and India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); *The Unresolved Question: The Anglo-Irish Settlement and its Undoing, 1912–72* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

39. W.K. Hancock, *Arguments of Empire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1945), 12. Cited in Stuart Ward, "Transcending the Nation: A Global Imperial History?" in Antoinette Burton, ed., *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 44–56.

The opening chapter of Mansergh's *The Commonwealth Experience* takes issue with this benevolent teleology, reminding readers that the empire and later the Commonwealth were commonly presented in a highly sanitized manner as though "to show that through the British Empire one increasing purpose ran. That purpose was the enlargement of freedom and independence under the British flag, leading onward and upward to a Commonwealth of free nations." In Mansergh's view, those British statesmen whose views supported this whiggish conception of things—he mentions "Burke and Durham, Elgin and Grey, Campbell-Bannerman, Balfour, Attlee with the Indian Independence Act and Macmillan with the African wind of change"—were apt to figure large in such anthologies of empire whereas more frankly rapacious imperialists, such as Cecil Rhodes, or even luminaries, such as Lord Curzon, who assumed that the non-white peoples would never manage democracy along the white colonial model were typically either toned down or edited out.⁴⁰

Mansergh allowed that there was a great distance between those like Thomas Babington Macaulay, who hoped that Indians would vindicate the empire by acquiring English institutions and achieving better government, and hardliners like Curzon who scorned that notion. But, he continued:

Such contrasts are by no means confined to India. While Gladstone is assured of an honoured place in anthologies of Commonwealth, not least by reason of his peroration on Home Rule, and while Lloyd George may slip in, a trifle fortunately, with his speech on the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the voices of statesmen who with Curzon believed in Empire as a British *imperium* over subject peoples are rarely recorded. There are unlikely to be extracts of Disraeli's Crystal Palace speech of June 1872 on imperialism, or from that eloquent passage in the House of Lords on 8 April 1878 in which he spoke of all the communities that were agreed in recognising 'the commanding spirit of these Islands that has formed and fashioned . . . so great a portion of the globe' and exulted of a dominion of a very remarkable character, without example known to him in ancient or modern history and more peculiar than that over which a 'Caesar or Charle-

40. Nicholas Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience*, Vol. 1, *The Durham Report to the Anglo-Irish Treaty*, revised edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press [1969], 1982), 4–5.

magne ever presided.' Neither will there appear Salisbury's caustic allusions to the unfitness of the Irish, Hottentots and even Hindus for self-government, nor any utterances of Joseph Chamberlain tinged with race superiority, nor yet Balfour's outraged reactions on the restoration of self-government to the Boers. Where is Winston Churchill on the Government of India Bill? These men may qualify on other occasions but not on these.⁴¹

Commonwealth historians might well delude themselves as the empire was wound down that liberal self-government for the erstwhile subject peoples had always been the intended outcome. To assume this, Mansergh asserts, was not only to whitewash all of the more illiberal dimensions of imperial rule, but also to "put too much emphasis on the 'idealist' element in liberal solutions" since the latter were commonly conceded only as last ditch fixes to troublesome imperial problems rather than out of any consistent commitment to liberal values.⁴²

Having subjected Commonwealth History's self-congratulatory whiggishness to some caustic commentary, Mansergh goes on to insist that even if the Commonwealth had been created to mitigate the excesses of an empire founded on conquest it had still inherited the baggage of conquest, and that Commonwealth historians needed to face up to this:

The Commonwealth came into being in revulsion against Empire, but historically it could not escape being, among other things, heir to Empire. It was not alone among the heirs of the privileged and wealthy in sensing that not all the riches it enjoyed were 'well gotten.' In the capital of the former metropolitan power it was easy to gloss over or even forget how dominion was acquired or extended; it was not so easy in Delhi or Dublin, Rangoon or Pretoria, Lusaka or Lagos. Therein lay the principal liability of Empire for Commonwealth.

The bearing of past experiences of conquest and subjection upon the emergence or revival of national sentiments is variable and debatable. At times it is exaggerated to the point of suggesting that colonial nationalisms were derivative and in essence no more than negative reactions to imperial rule. But on any assessment, defeat or experience

41. *Ibid.*, 5–6.

42. *Ibid.*, 7.

of subjection—especially when possessing an element of actual or imagined humiliation—were in nearly all cases corrosive and explosive in their long-term effects. This was something that the imperial power, both its agents at the time and subsequently even its historians, found hard to comprehend.⁴³

It was, he noted, not only in Asia and Africa that countries had come into the Commonwealth bringing with them the cultural legacies of conquest: “The Irish, the French-Canadians, the Boers, each in turn and likewise, at one time and another were subdued in war.”⁴⁴

Written decades before postcolonial studies would begin to popularize such themes, these passages are alert to the consequences of historical trauma and to the politics of cultural memory in ways unusual to British Commonwealth historiography of the time. What Mansergh calls “complacent constitutional commentators, diligently marking progress Report by Report, Act by Act, along the road to independence”⁴⁵ might view matters one way, but the guardians of historical memory working at the center of empire were always apt to ignore “that things looked and are remembered differently on the other side of the hill.” And if we recall that this volume appeared in 1969 when Northern Ireland was erupting into warfare then it is clear that the thrust of the work is equally at odds with the revisionist historiography then about to come to the fore in Ireland. Reacting against what they saw as the nationalistic excesses of the 1966 commemorations of Easter 1916, many revisionists came to believe that to insist on the violence of empire in this way, or to have any truck with sentiments about how “defeat or experience of subjection...were nearly all corrosive and explosive in their long term effects,” was only to succour republican paramilitarism. Even today many revisionists insist that Ireland was never a colony, or that if it was its integration into the British Empire was so idiosyncratic as to disable comparativist analysis.⁴⁶ In contrast, Mansergh’s synoptic

43. Ibid., 15–16.

44. Ibid., 14.

45. Ibid., 17.

46. See, for example, Liam Kennedy, *Colonialism, Religion and Nationalism in Ireland* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queen’s University of Belfast, 1996). For an equally skeptical and revisionist-inclining overview of the wider field of Irish

surveys never treat Ireland as “a place apart”; moreover, his analyses are typically as vigilant to the connections between Irish and Indian nationalists as to those between Ireland and the “white colonies” of Canada, Australia, or New Zealand.

David W. Harkness’s *The Restless Dominion: The Irish Free State and the British Commonwealth of Nations, 1921–31* (1969) and Deirdre McMahon’s *Republicans and Imperialists: Anglo-Irish Relations in the 1930s* (1984) lack the broad comparativist canvas of Mansergh’s major studies, but each adds substantially to the latter’s accounts of Ireland’s role within the Commonwealth.⁴⁷ Harkness offers a lucidly authoritative account of how the Cumann na nGaedhael government worked in the first decade of independence to expand the definition of Dominion status accorded by the 1921 Treaty. His main thesis is that Irish statesmen such as Desmond Fitzgerald, Kevin O’Higgins, or Patrick McGilligan contributed more to developing the Commonwealth toward a free and equal partnership of nations than did their better known contemporaries such as Mackenzie King of Canada or General Herzog of South Africa. McMahon explores similar themes with reference to the new Fianna Fáil government of the 1930s, offering an incisive overview of de Valera’s attempts to reconcile commitments to loosening Commonwealth ties (negatively associated in Irish nationalist culture with the subjection of Empire and the coerced settlement of 1921) with attempts to leverage that body where possible to help reunify the island. T.G. Fraser’s *Partition in Ireland, India and Palestine* (1984) belongs to the same field of constitutional “high” politics and synthesizes the existing scholarship on Ireland, South Asia, and the

scholarship on these issues, see also Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

47. D.W. Harkness, *The Restless Dominion: The Irish Free State and the Commonwealth of Nations, 1921–31* (London: Macmillan, 1969); and Deirdre McMahon, *Republicans and Imperialists: Anglo-Irish Relations in the 1930s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984). See also David Harkness, “Ireland” in Robin W. Winks, ed., *Historiography*, Vol. 5, in Louis, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, 114–33; Deirdre McMahon, “Ireland and the Empire-Commonwealth,” in Judith M. Brown and Wm. Roger Louis, eds., *The Twentieth Century*, Vol. IV, in Louis, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, 138–62; and McMahon, “Ireland, the Empire, and the Commonwealth,” in Kenny, ed., *Ireland and the British Empire*, 182–219.

Middle East in a useful overview of some key episodes leading up to these three partitions.⁴⁸

Collectively, these works represent a major contribution to the understanding of twentieth-century Ireland's constitutional development in the closing phases of the British Empire. Constitutional and diplomatic history is by definition focused on policy makers and ruling élites and the understanding of the period developed in these works could usefully be deepened by social and cultural history. Any more comprehensive account of how various sections of twentieth-century Irish society (unionists, nationalists, and others) responded to the British Empire and the Commonwealth will need to look beyond the worlds of politicians and civil servants to examine how attitudes to imperial matters were cultivated in newspapers and other media, in the writings of academics and intellectuals in specialist journals, in the archives of the various churches, or in those of political movements that remained on the margins of the state (as Caolfhionn Ní Bheachain does in her essay in this issue). They would also need to examine how matters of this kind were woven into the social fabric of everyday popular culture by way of education, children's history and literature, sport, cinema, and other popular activities. The analysis of the popular culture of empire is now well advanced in British Studies, but in Irish Studies Keith Jeffery's edited collection *'An Irish Empire?': Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (1996) is the only major initiative in this regard.⁴⁹ Oddly, despite valuable recent work by Alvin Jackson, Northern Unionist involvements with the Commonwealth have not been nearly so closely studied as those of their nationalist contemporaries.⁵⁰

One of the defining achievements of the Irish Commonwealth historians is to have added a whole new chapter to our understand-

48. T.G. Fraser, *Partition in Ireland, India and Palestine: Theory and Practice* (London: Macmillan, 1984).

49. See Keith Jeffery, "The Irish Military Tradition and the British Empire," in Keith Jeffery, ed., *'An Irish Empire?': Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 94–122. Jeffery's Irish military histories constitute virtually a distinct sub-department of Irish studies of empire.

50. See Alvin Jackson, "Ireland, the Union, and the Empire, 1890–1960" in Kenny, ed., *Ireland and the British Empire*, 123–53, and Jackson, "Irish Unionists and the Empire, 1880–1920: Classes and Masses," in Jeffery, ed., *'An Irish Empire?'*, 123–48.

ing of how the British Empire was liberalized in its final phases. In the standard British histories, opposition to empire within the United Kingdom is still identified exclusively with enlightened English radical, liberal, and socialist intelligentsias—that is, with honorable traditions within English society that stretch from Richard Cobden or Karl Marx to John Bright or from the Bloomsbury circle to the Round Table federalists to the Fabians.⁵¹ Such accounts invariably overlook the fact that in the period between the nineteenth-century Home Rule crises and the withdrawal of the Free State from the Commonwealth in 1948 the most politically consequential opposition to the British Empire “in these islands” came not from these English intelligentsias but from Irish nationalists, especially Irish republicans. Collectively, the work of Mansergh, Harkness, and MacMahon, as well as the growing body of scholarship on the earlier Home Rulers and empire (represented here by Paul Townend’s discussion of Justin McCarthy and by Jill Bender’s essay on the Home Rulers’ response to famine in India) demonstrates how frequently Irish nationalists of various stripes either gave a lead to radical challenges to empire or engineered new routes to the decentralization of the Commonwealth. English anti-imperialists of various stripes produced the most widely read intellectual critiques of imperialism, but Irish Commonwealth History suggests that the Irish consistently led the way in transforming the structures of imperial rule by providing the sustained political pressure, the strategic resources of a “Greater Ireland” across the various Dominions, and the diplomatic *nous* to bring about real change. Any comprehensive account of the reform and liberalization of the British Empire in this period ought surely to rate the Irish Home Rulers’ contributions to the deliberations on imperial federation, Sinn Féin’s commitment to republican sovereignty, and the strategic efforts of a long line of figures as various as Frank Hugh O’Donnell, Michael Davitt, Roger Casement, Erskine Childers, Patrick McGilligan, Frank Aiken, Eamon de Valera, or Séan Lester (to

51. See, for example, Nicholas Owen, “Critics of Empire in Britain,” in *The Twentieth Century*, Vol. IV, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, 188–211. Owen’s survey covers the period 1900–1950s without ever referring to Irish struggles, North or South, during this period.

mention but a few) alongside the accomplishments of their more illustrious English contemporaries.

POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES

Irish postcolonial studies is a more protean mode of scholarship than those already discussed, and its contribution to the study of interactions between Ireland and empire is thus the more difficult to assess. In contrast to Commonwealth or Atlantic History, postcolonial studies is anchored neither within a specific historical period nor within a specific discipline. More than in other countries, it is identified in Ireland mainly with literary and cultural analysis, but it still reaches into fields as varied as urban or film studies and into debates about cinema and the visual arts, nationalism, race, modernization and Diaspora Studies. Like Atlantic or Commonwealth History, the field has its tutelary figures—Seamus Deane, Declan Kiberd, David Lloyd, Luke Gibbons, C.L. Innes, Kevin Whelan, Shaun Richards, Colin Graham, and Marjorie Howes are all significant influences. These are all experts in various departments of Irish literature or cultural history, yet scarcely any would claim to be a specialist on the cultural or intellectual history of empire, on the literature of empire, on theories of imperialism, or on the comparative history of colonization—none has devoted a single volume to any of these subjects.⁵² This begs the question as to what extent the domains of Empire Studies and Irish postcolonial studies actually intersect or whether the scholarly objects of the two are distinct. Does Empire Studies concern itself with Irish involvements in the wider imperial world whereas postcolonial studies aims to rethink established nationalist and revisionist modes of writing about domestic Irish society? Or, is it the disciplinary boundaries between history and cultural studies that really separate the two modes of analysis?

The fact that it is so plastic, transdisciplinary, and perhaps even an ill-defined a “field” of scholarship is surely one of the reasons

52. Innes is the only figure who has edited volumes on a postcolonial literature outside Ireland; see C.L. Innes and Bernth Lindfors, eds., *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1979); C.L. Innes and Chinua Achebe, eds., *African Short Stories* (London: Heinemann, 1985); and C.L. Innes, *Chinua Achebe: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

why postcolonial studies (not just in Ireland of course) provokes so much controversy. Many historians remain thoroughly skeptical and critique this mode of analysis for its alleged lack of historical nuance or specialization and for what they see as its consequent tendency to overgeneralization and theoretical abstraction. Critics on the right complain about the imposition of an “affirmative action” approach to literary studies that values writers on the basis that they represent “multiculturalism,” but critics at the opposite end of the spectrum lament that the category of “the postcolonial” facilitates the teaching of randomized samples of literature from across “the Third World” in ways that exempt universities from having to support proper offerings in any particular non-European literature.⁵³ Several prominent left-wing critics have argued that postcolonial studies is disabled by a postmodernist epistemology that privileges cultural diversity over a commitment to economic redistribution and by a textualist approach to imperialism that lacks purchase on the economics of empire or underdevelopment.⁵⁴

Not all of this criticism can be dismissed; some of it is certainly valid. That allowed, it is also clear that a good deal of the criticism leveled at postcolonial studies is itself seriously at cross-purposes, and much of it also misses its target because it misconstrues the nature of the scholarship it assaults. Postcolonial studies is a constitutively self-divided body of scholarship that has always sponsored two very different, possibly incompatible, projects. In one of its modes, it is fundamentally interrogative and antinomian in nature, essentially a mode of critique rather than a matter of positive proposition. In this instance, its intellectual affinities are with Frankfurt School critical theory and/or with various kinds of poststructuralist and deconstructivist theory: its object, therefore, is not to produce

53. For a useful review of recent debates on these issues, see Terri A. Hasseler and Paula M. Krebs, “Losing Our Way after the Imperial Turn: Charting Academic Uses of the Postcolonial,” in Antoinette Burton, ed., *After the Imperial Turn*, 90–101. For a more comprehensive review of the scholarly debates, see Neil Lazarus (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

54. The key texts on this topic are Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992); Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997); and Epifanio San Juan, Jr., *Beyond Postcolonial Theory* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988).

a new body of expert knowledge on empire, imperialism, or colonialism (in the manner, say, of Atlantic or Commonwealth History), but to subject the existing bodies of knowledge production on these topics to critical scrutiny. The goal, in other words, is to elucidate the rhetorical devices, linguistic conventions, or narrative grammars that govern the various epistemologies of empire and imperialism, to tease out their normative assumptions and blindspots, and to identify the social interests that they have served. Influential works in this vein include Said's *Orientalism* (1978), Johannes Fabian's *Time and the Other* (1983), Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bernard S. Cohn's *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (1996), Gayatri Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999), or Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* (2000).⁵⁵ But in another register postcolonial studies does indeed seek to elaborate new kinds of historical narratives that purport to tell the story of empire or the resistance to empire differently, and in such cases the emphasis is clearly reconstructive rather than interrogatory. Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) is close to this mode; other key texts of this kind might include C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins* (1938), Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993), Catherine Hall's *Civilizing Subjects* (2000) or Robert Young's *Postcolonialism* (2001)—all attempts to sketch new, less Eurocentric kinds of histories of empire.⁵⁶

55. David Washbrook's assessment of the impact of postcolonial studies on imperial history seems judicious: "Whatever its status as theory, however, colonial discourse critique certainly inspired a major paradigm-shift in the historiography of imperialism which strongly informed writing in the 1980s. The shift altered the focus of study away from 'social' towards 'cultural' history. It also promoted critical methods designed to 'deconstruct' the British Imperial record and the artifacts of colonial experience in order to represent how the knowledges represented by and in them were the functions of culturally relative assumption and exercised power. The shift very much broadened the range of phenomena brought under the scrutiny of history." See D. A. Washbrook, "Orientalism and Occidentals: Colonial Discourse Theory and the Historiography of the British Empire," in *Historiography*, Vol. 5, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, 596–611, 599.

56. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, op. cit.; C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1989 [1938]); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Catherine Hall, *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Historical Imagination, 1830–1867* (London: Polity Press,

In the case of Irish Studies, the interrogatory mode of scholarship is best exemplified by David Lloyd's essays in *Anomalous States* (1993) and in *Ireland after History* (1996), Luke Gibbons's articles on race and modernization in *Transformations in Irish Culture* (1994), or Colin Graham's critiques of nationalism in *Deconstructing Ireland* (2001).⁵⁷ In all of these, the main thrust is to unsettle received modes of conceptualizing the nation and its history; the goal is not so much to advance strong alternatives to existing scholarship as to create conceptual clearings that might allow alternative modes of analysis scope to develop. Where the latter, more reconstructive mode is concerned, the best-known example is undoubtedly Declan Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland* (1995), while David Cairns' and Shaun Richards's *Writing Ireland* (1988), and Seamus Deane's *Strange Country* (1997) are curiously hybrid enterprises in which the interrogatory thrust of postcolonial discourse analysis and the narrative drive to produce new and different versions of Irish literary history uneasily converge.⁵⁸

Despite its amorphous transdisciplinary nature, postcolonial studies in Ireland has undoubtedly achieved a great deal over the past two decades. In both of its main currents, this scholarship has delivered the most sustained and articulate critique of Irish historical revisionism to emerge in the Irish academy. When revisionism first became an orthodoxy in Irish history writing during the 1970s, its most vocal critics were historians or general intellectuals such as Brendan Bradshaw or Desmond Fennell who expressed their dissent from a traditional Catholic nationalist standpoint. Postcolonial

2002); and Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

57. See David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993) and *Ireland after History* (Cork University Press in association with Field Day, 1996); Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press in association with Field Day, 1994); and Colin Graham, *Deconstructing Ireland: Identity, Theory, Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001).

58. See Declan Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (1995); David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing Since 1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

studies has furnished Irish scholarship with a critical language and with a value-system that has allowed it to develop in non-revisionist directions yet without having to revert to the scholarly norms or values of the nationalist scholarship of earlier generations.⁵⁹ Championing the values of gradualism, constitutionalism, and the more liberal accommodationist currents in Irish history, revisionism generally has represented the ascendancy of a kind of intellectual “Redmondism” in contemporary Irish Studies. Postcolonial studies, on the other hand, while broadly internationalist in its outlook, has been dispositionally more sympathetic to the radical republican, republican socialist, and other dissenting minoritarian elements in Irish history. For opponents, its identifications with these social movements merely confirms the sentimental nationalist affiliations that postcolonial discourse seems terminologically to disavow; for postcolonialists, the recovery of the memory of radical struggles in the past is an important element of any commitment to building contemporary modes of social consciousness and social analysis that extend beyond the limits of nationalism.

There are real scholarly differences between revisionists and postcolonialists that turn on different methodologies and on divergent interpretations of issues such as modernization, the nature of the Protestant Ascendancy, the causes of the Great Famine, the consequences of partition, the role of the British state in modern Ireland, and so forth. Ultimately, though, the differences between the two “schools” are more than just scholarly; different sections of the Irish upper-middle, middle- and petty-bourgeois classes—the classes to which most academics are affiliated—have always had very different conceptions of what Ireland’s role in the world should be, and the contentions between revisionism and postcolonial studies are partly at least a late-twentieth-century outworking of these

59. On the earlier skirmishes between revisionists and anti-revisionists, see Ciaran Brady, ed., *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994). Later, more explicitly postcolonial studies-informed critiques include David Lloyd, “Outside History: Irish New Histories and the ‘Subalternity Effect,’” in Lloyd, *Ireland After History*, 77–88; Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing Since 1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 181–97; and Kevin Whelan, “The Revisionist Debate in Ireland,” *Boundary 2* 31:1 (Spring 2004): 179–205.

longstanding disputes. Northern Ireland has thrown the differences between the two sides most fully into relief for many decades; how the re-routing of the Northern conflict into parliamentary politics will affect scholarship on the island in years to come remains to be seen. In the decade ahead, Irish foreign policy may become much more of a lightning rod for academic disputes than it has been in the past. In recent times, for example, leading public intellectuals of revisionist persuasion—among them Conor Cruise O’Brien, Kevin Myers, and Eoghan Harris—have been among the most vocal supporters in the Irish public sphere for the US-UK-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Irish scholarship on British imperialism or on Ireland’s role in the Empire ought not to become hostage to current controversies about these matters. But neither can nor should intellectual life be immunized from wider social conflicts; so the future of Empire Studies in Ireland will certainly be affected by what happens in the international arena as well as by more immediate domestic concerns.

But postcolonial studies has not just been oppositionally defined. It has also broadened the range of Irish cultural analysis and has inserted the study of Irish writing into a wider international context than had hitherto been the norm.⁶⁰ Scholars committed to the field have made productive use not merely of the canonical works of Fanon, Said, Gilroy, or Anderson, but also of the Indian Subaltern Studies historians and of postcolonial feminist scholarship. Skeptics will rightly argue that some analogies drawn between Irish writing and that of other regions are “stretched” or often remain gestural, but the ambition to situate Irish cultural history in broader continental European and postcolonial contexts (the two goals are not at odds) is nonetheless commendable, and any enterprise of this order—demanding new kinds of reading and research—will inevitably take

60. For some examples of work in this direction, see Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Margaret Kelleher, *The Feminization of Famine: Expressions of the Inexpressible?* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997); Joe Cleary, *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State: Culture and Conflict in Ireland, Israel and Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Colin Graham and Glenn Hooper, eds., *Irish and Postcolonial Writing: History, Theory, Practice* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

time to mature. Seamus Deane's *Foreign Affections* (2005), a series of far-reaching studies of Edmund Burke's responses to colonialism in Ireland, America, and India, and of the reception of Burke's thought by European figures such as Tocqueville, Newman, or Acton is exemplary in this regard and has set a benchmark for what might be achieved in the (largely neglected) area of intellectual history.⁶¹ If Deane's study of Burke demonstrates anything, it is that the real question is not—as often so crudely posed—whether the Irish were for or against empire. Clearly, the various modes of ideological support, opposition, or accommodation that were elaborated across the centuries were always context-determined and took widely divergent forms. Hence, the real challenge for intellectual historians is to reconstruct how particular Irish figures or political movements negotiated issues of national identity, race, and empire, and how their thought contributed to the subsequent evolution of Irish nationalist or unionist thinking. The essays in this volume by Bruce Nelson, Niamh Lynch, Jason King, Paul Townend, and Jason Knirck all explore Irish nationalist intellectual engagements with empire in this manner.

Thirdly, if Irish scholars have borrowed heavily on bodies of post-colonial theory from elsewhere, the results have not simply been derivative or applicationist; they have also won a wider audience for Irish Studies, setting up modes of intellectual exchange that can only be invigorating over the longer term. Said's interest in Swift or Yeats as critics of colonialism, Elleke Boehmer's studies of Irish nationalists in India and South Africa, Robert Young's comparative analysis of attitudes to anti-colonial violence in James Connolly and Frantz Fanon, or Patrick Brantlinger's study of discourses of vanishing races are only the more obvious examples of this widening out of cultural exchange in new directions.⁶² As Ireland begins to sit-

61. See Seamus Deane, *Foreign Affections: Essays on Edmund Burke* (Cork: Cork University Press in association with Field Day, 2005). For a different but related take on Burke, see Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Colonial Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

62. See Edward Said, *The World, The Text and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983) and *Culture and Imperialism*; Elleke Boehmer, *Empire, The National, and the Postcolonial, 1890–1920: Resistance in Interaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism*; Patrick Brantlinger,

uate itself in an increasingly “globalized” world in the twenty-first century, and as its own population becomes more ethnically diverse due to immigration, the impetus to connect key themes and topic areas in Irish Studies to comparable ones elsewhere will increase. In this respect, postcolonial studies is not the rearward-looking enterprise that revisionists imagine it, but rather the most outward- and forward-looking trend at work in Irish Studies.

At a disciplinary level, postcolonial studies has also provoked a series of important revaluations of several major Irish writers: Spenser, Swift, Burke, Edgeworth, Stoker, Yeats, and Joyce have to date attracted most attention. But it has also stimulated several ambitious attempts to reconfigure the larger historiography of modern Irish writing. This work is impelled by a drive to frame new questions concerning the nature of intellectual traffic between center and periphery, the politics of language shift and exchange, and the relationship between various modes of writing and social power. With rare exceptions, Irish literary history before the postcolonial turn had construed the Gaelic, Anglo-Irish, and Northern Irish literary traditions as largely discrete and autonomous bodies of writing or else as literatures that could be connected only via a humanist celebration of common aesthetic values that supposedly transcended politics. In a related manner, Irish and international scholarship had also tended to assign the country’s most distinguished writers—Swift, Burke, Joyce, Yeats, and Beckett—to the category of “European” or “world literature,” thereby rescuing these figures from a larger but lesser canon that was more overtly political, wedded as it was to “the national question.” However, in works such as *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, *Inventing Ireland*, *Irish Classics*, *Writing Ireland* or *Strange Country* there has been a much greater drive to put the different strands of Irish writing—Gaelic, Anglo-Irish, unionist, romantic, gothic, modernist, popular—into various modes of critical dialogue with each other, and to do so in ways that acknowledge rather than elide the intersections between literary and political enterprises. Critics will quarrel with how this is managed in *Writing Ireland*, *The Field Day Anthology*,

Dark Vanishings: Discourse of the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800–1930 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

Inventing Ireland, or *Strange Country*. But these are the works that have set the agenda for rethinking literary history in Irish cultural studies over the past two decades, and revisionist, Marxist or intellectuals of any other school have yet to essay synoptic works of literary history of similar scale and ambition.⁶³

One might allow Irish postcolonial studies these achievements though and still want to question whether it had contributed much to our understanding of empire or of colonialism. Postcolonial studies has certainly stimulated greater interest in the Irish academy in political and cultural connections between Ireland and places such as India, Egypt, Africa, or the Caribbean. Where the “non-white” colonies are concerned, Irish relations with India are currently the focus of the most extensive research. But much of the most serious work on this subject—by Howard Brasted, Scott B. Cook or in the volumes edited by Michael and Denis Holmes, or by Tadhg Foley and Maureen O’Connor—has been led by political or literary historians working the archives in conventional ways and owing little enough to postcolonial theory.⁶⁴ The same might be said of Angus Mitchell’s works on Roger Casement, Patrick O’Farrell’s *The Irish in Australia* (1986), or Donald Harmon Akenson’s *God’s Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel and Ulster* (1992).⁶⁵ There

63. See variously Seamus Deane, ed., *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, 5 Vols. (Derry: Field Day, 1991, 2002); Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*, and *Irish Classics* (London: Granta, 2000); David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* Terry Eagleton’s *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verso, 1995) is a wide-ranging Marxist work, but it covers a shorter time span than these other volumes and its sympathies are close to those associated with postcolonial studies.

64. Howard Brasted, “Indian Nationalist Development and the Influence of Irish Home Rule, 1870–1886,” *Modern Asian Studies* 14:1 (1980): 37–63; and “Irish Models and the Indian Nationalist Congress, 1870–1922,” *South Asia* 8:1–2 (1985), 24–45; Scott B. Cook, *Imperial Affinities: Nineteenth-Century Analogies and Exchanges Between India and Ireland* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993); Michael Holmes and Denis Holmes, eds., *Ireland and India: Connections: Comparisons, Contrasts* (Dublin: Folens, 1997); and Tadhg Foley and Maureen O’Connor, eds., *Ireland and India: Colonies, Culture and Empire* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006).

65. See Angus Mitchell, *Casement* (London: Haus, 2003) and *Sir Roger Casement’s Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents* (Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 2003); Patrick O’Farrell, *The Irish in Australia: 1788 to the Present* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001); Donald Harmon Akenson, *God’s Peoples: Covenant and*

are counter-instances, such as Margaret Kelleher's *The Feminization of Famine* (1997), Katie Trumpener's *Bardic Nationalism* (1997), Elleke Boehmer's *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial, 1890–1920* (2002), or Joseph Lennon's *Irish Orientalism* (2004) where the debts to postcolonial studies are obvious and acknowledged.⁶⁶ Moreover, postcolonial studies has created a readership and a climate of interest in Irish Studies for all of these works, whatever their methodology or orientation, that did not exist before. The first phase of postcolonial studies in Ireland was led by theorists and was perhaps inevitably generalist in intent; a second wave of scholarship, more historically specialized and more rooted in archival research, is now already underway.

For the present, though, Irish postcolonial studies remains nearly as firmly North Atlanticist in its horizons as either Atlantic or Commonwealth History. Its leading theorists may borrow widely from elsewhere, but their prime concern has been to use these resources to generate new interpretations of domestic Irish culture or of representations of the Irish in England or the United States. Since Ireland's contacts with the world of empire were predominantly mediated by Britain and the United States, and by emigration to the "white" colonies such as Australia, Canada, or South Africa, a North Atlantic or a Commonwealth focus will in many ways remain inevitable for Irish Studies. But in Empire Studies generally the most ambitious contemporary work increasingly recognizes that empires and imperialisms exist in relation to each other, not as discrete territorial units. Interactions between empires not only were matters of high diplomacy, but also took the form of competing economic formations, ideological rationalizations, and social visions. If it is to keep pace with wider international currents, Irish scholarship will ultimately have to deal not just with where the Irish were distributed in the British Empire, or what they achieved there, but also with how systemic mutations in the wider imperial system

Land in South Africa, Israel and Ulster, and If the Irish Ran the World: Montserrat, 1630–1730.

66. See Margaret Kelleher, *The Feminization of Famine: Expressions of the Inexpressible?*; Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*; Joseph Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004); and Elleke Boehmer, *Empire*.

affected Ireland or Irish communities abroad at different conjunctures. A focus on imperialism as a historically interlocking but mutable system of empires would invite comparisons as to how other imperial powers viewed Irish struggles or migrations within the British Empire; how Irish contributions to or struggles against empire compared with or differed to those of other subject peoples; how Catholic missionary orders operated within the British Empire relative to how European orders fared within French or Spanish ones, for example; how Irish soldiers in the British imperial machine were treated as compared to the soldiers of other subject nations in the Austro-Hungarian, Russian, or French imperial armies; or how Irish rebellions, in say 1641 or 1798, were handled by the British as compared to how equivalent insurrections in South America or the West Indies were managed by the various European powers that governed these regions.⁶⁷

Where literary studies is concerned, there is also considerable room for extending the field of analysis in new directions. Postcolonial studies has produced controversial but productive new readings of Spenser, Burke, Yeats, or Joyce, but plenty of scope remains to widen the field to examine how the works of Irish political figures or writers were received and interpreted across different regions of the imperial world. There are many opportunities, too, to examine other modes of non-literary writing or intersections between literary, historical, journalistic, and other discourses. Given the extent of Anglo-Irish involvements in India or of Irish Catholic missionary enterprises in Africa or South America, formidable archives of letters and memoirs relating to these undoubtedly await their archivists. Thus far, little use has been made of such resources to develop case studies of the everyday mentalities and lifeworlds of the Irish of various classes or vocations in the many different outposts of empire. Postcolonial studies has been one of the most dynamic forces for innovation in Irish Studies since the 1980s, but were it to satisfy itself with producing endless postcolonial readings of a narrow range of canon-

67. On the Irish missionary movements, see Edmund M. Hogan, *The Irish Missionary Movement: A Historical Survey, 1870–1980* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990), and also his *Catholic Missionaries in Liberia: A Study of Christian Enterprise in West Africa, 1842–1950* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1981).

ical Irish texts it would soon condemn itself to irrelevance. Given the volume and quality of activity in the area by scholars working in Ireland and beyond, this seems unlikely. Much work remains to be done, however, at institutional and pedagogic levels to equip new generations of scholars with the range of linguistic, hermeneutic, and historical skills that any really enterprising postcolonial studies requires.⁶⁸

LOOKING AHEAD

Nearly all imperial scholarship—from the pro-imperial sentiments of John Seeley's *The Expansion of England* (1883) or James Anthony Froude's *Oceana: or, England and her Colonies* (1886) to the anti-imperialist works of V.I. Lenin and Hannah Arendt on to the postcolonial classics of Frantz Fanon or Edward Said—is charged by political and ethical engagement. Irish scholarship is no exception. The works of the major Irish historians of empire such as Mansergh, Quinn, and Canny or those of the postcolonialists Deane, Kiberd, or Lloyd are not only objective attempts to make sense of Ireland's place within the British Empire but also efforts to reappraise the manner in which that history has been constructed within the more powerful academic worlds of English or British Studies. In this sense, nearly all Irish scholarship on empire is charged not only by a longer history of pro- and anti-imperial Irish sentiment but also integrally connected, even if often in a negative or reactive sense, to twentieth-century British scholarship.

As commentators have noted, the remarkable spate of scholarship on empire and colonialism conducted over the last two decades seems somewhat odd in its timing.⁶⁹ Clearly, that scholarship is

68. There are now scholars in all of the literature departments of the major Irish universities who would characterize their work in terms of postcolonial studies, but there are only two designated postgraduate programs in the area on the island: one at NUI Galway, the other at NUI Maynooth. Scholarship in Ireland is generally more concerned with the application of postcolonial analysis to Irish society than with the study of other postcolonial literatures or societies. In this institutional sense, the field's anchorage in Irish Studies remains precarious and under-developed relative to the British or US academies.

69. For useful survey essays on imperial history, see Stephen Howe, "The Slow Death and Strange Rebirths of Imperial History," *Journal of Imperial and Common-*

partly at least a belated effort to make good on what Frederick Cooper has called “the nonreckoning that accompanied and followed the end of empires.”⁷⁰ But the impetus to restore to memory some of the darker dimensions of Europe’s imperial history has been advanced in an era when the old European empires, overseas and continental, had already passed away and when the old-style modes of colonial rule that they had sponsored had ceased to be viable forms of political organization. Does this mean that for all its emancipatory drive and sense of moral urgency the contemporary study of colonialism and empire remains tied to a defunct European imperialism that differs considerably to the American-driven successor that emerged in its wake?

The expansion of Irish scholarship on colonialism and empire since the 1980s is clearly part of this wider international phenomenon. Only a few decades ago the study of Ireland’s relationship to the British Empire was a minor field worked by relatively few highly specialist historians. Today, the scholarship on this subject is rapidly expanding, moving out beyond the confines of Commonwealth and Atlantic History into Migration Studies, and, in the form of post-colonial studies, it already occupies a central role in literary and cultural analysis. Because the Irish were one of the subject peoples of the British Empire, and not one of the European imperial nations (however much they may have collaborated in those European enterprises), this Irish scholarship on colonialism and empire has inevitably taken a different form to that which it has assumed in the old imperial centers such as Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, or Holland. Nevertheless, the questions recently addressed to Empire Studies elsewhere have also to be addressed in Irish Studies. If the impetus for Irish scholarship on colonialism and empire has to make good on “the nonreckoning that accompanied and followed the end of empires,” what does this mean for the development of scholarship into the future? Does it imply that it can have no function other than to offer new perspectives on a British Empire that has

wealth History 29:2 (2001), and Frederick Cooper, “The Rise, Fall, and Rise of Colonial Studies, 1951–2001” in his *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California, 2005), 33–55.

70. Cooper, *Rise, Fall, and Rise*, 54.

now vanished? Will this in turn mean that that scholarship must inevitably continue to be, however novel its themes or methodologies, essentially retrospective, with diminishing relevance to a contemporary world where the dilemmas of British or French imperial contraction have already been overtaken by those of an American global hegemony now also emitting distress signals?

An Irish scholarship on empire that aspires to be more than simply a project of recovery will be obliged to engage with the United States in ways that none of the above bodies of work has done to date. The history of empire in Ireland is fundamentally a history of the British Empire, but, even so, Britain's gradual surrender of its twentieth-century global pre-eminence can never be fully understood simply by indexing it to the loss of its overseas colonies; crucially, it must also be grasped in the context of the displacement of the United Kingdom by the United States in the course of the latter's ascent to global supremacy. And as the United States attained this supremacy, the two European societies that have always done the most to shape the Irish political and cultural imagination in modern times were each compelled drastically to redefine themselves. Broadly speaking, Britain did so first by creating the Commonwealth and then, when that project lost momentum, by defining itself as America's most loyal European ally. After the disasters of World War II and its Algerian and Indochinese wars, France took a different tack and bid instead for a leadership role in the project of European integration. These are the broad axes of international realignment that have shaped the Irish Republic's own attempt at self-redefinition ever since it extracted itself from the British Empire in 1948 and began its search thereafter for a new "post-imperial" international role. Since 1948, the Republic has continued to play a substantive role in the Third World, but in the post-decolonization period its foreign policy has shifted from a politicized register of anti-imperial solidarity to a more philanthropic address expressed in terms of development aid, disaster relief, and peace-keeping. To date, Irish Studies has not seriously grappled with the economic, political, ideological, or cultural dimensions of this larger process of international reorientation.

If the decline of the British Empire was one factor conditioning the emergence of an Irish version of Empire Studies, the other has

clearly been the crises suffered by Irish nationalism itself in the period since independence. The Treaty settlement of the 1920s may have delivered what Michael Collins called the freedom to achieve freedom, but it only worsened the condition of Northern Irish Catholics and did little to improve the lot of Irish women. When Northern republicans launched a sustained assault on the British state in the late 1960s and early 1970s and when the “women’s liberation movement” began its concurrent campaign to transform southern society, the two movements provoked a crisis of legitimacy that impelled several decades of intense reevaluation concerning the character and direction of Irish nationalism.

But is it the case, as Emer Nolan comments in the concluding essay in this volume, that the late twentieth-century Irish feminist critique of Irish nationalism has been conducted in a rather narrowly domestic framework, making little reference to how either Irish nationalism or Irish feminism have been conditioned by wider international contexts and forces? It is certainly true, as Nolan also suggests, that the place of Irish women within the British Empire, or in the wider world of the newly independent colonies, where they often played significant roles as settlers, teachers, missionaries or development aid workers, remains remarkably little analyzed. Elsewhere, the study of women’s activities in empire and of the sexual politics of empire is now one of the most dynamic areas of activity in Empire Studies and postcolonial scholarship. Should the comparative lack of take-up on such issues in Ireland be attributed to the fact that the campaigns of Northern republicans and the Irish women’s movements were so often conceived to be diametrically at odds with each other—the former associated with a resurgence of the oppressively Catholic, masculinist, and militarist nationalism the latter was trying to overcome? Or due to the fact that Irish feminist scholars were compelled by the exigencies of their situation to prioritize more immediate domestic agendas?

Whatever the reason, there is certainly plenty of scope for new scholarship here that would contribute significantly to Women’s Studies and to Empire Studies alike. Ireland’s most significant contribution to the British Empire was through emigration, and what distinguished Irish emigration to the colonies from patterns elsewhere in Europe was the relative absence of familial restraint on

female emigration.⁷¹ The business of empire and the historiography of empire have been conventionally conceived in very masculinist terms (as matters of male exploration, soldiering, administration, and governance), but the unusually evenly gendered outflow of the sexes from Ireland after the 1840s begs several questions. Did this peculiarity of Irish emigration to the British colonies have any measurable social or political effects? How did the fact that many overseas Irish continued to regard themselves as one of the British Empire's unwilling subject peoples play itself out in gender terms? Did the high level of women who emigrated from Ireland combined with the enormous ideological significance of Irish missionary activity overseas mean that the Irish relationship to the "Third World" was less rigidly "masculinized" than that of other European societies, and therefore marked by greater levels of cultural or ideological continuity in the transition from the age of high imperialism to the present? As Europe, in other words, managed the shift from playing the part of imperial overlord to the Third World to playing that of the post-imperial philanthropist and distributor of development aid, were the Irish able to accommodate this turnabout with greater facility than the peoples of the European metropolises, and, if so, to what consequence? If Irish women, as some feminists have argued, were impelled to leave Ireland in great numbers not only because of material hardship but also because of its harshly patriarchal culture, how did those women that fled to the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, or elsewhere negotiate their relationships with the diasporic versions of Irish nationalism that they encountered? Did the women that left Ireland for these regions escape one kind of anti-imperialist nationalist patriarchy at home only to be conscripted into new kinds of pro-imperialist patriarchies abroad? Or, did their experiences encourage them to develop political dispositions at odds with the dominant ones they left behind or went to meet? Women of nationalist and unionist backgrounds in the different regions of the Irish diaspora have patently had very different experiences of both nationalism and

71. On immigration and empire, see David Fitzpatrick, "Ireland and Empire," in *The Nineteenth Century*, Andrew Porter, ed., in Louis, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, 494–521, 512.

imperialism, and this begs the question as to how the relationship between feminism and nationalism in these sites has been conditioned by these variables. In short, since so many chapters of Irish women's history were played out overseas, any comprehensive account of Irish women's politicization over the last century or more needs to be connected to the worlds of diaspora and empire and cannot be restricted to the island of Ireland only.

The analysis of the role of how Irish-American political culture evolved from the late nineteenth century to the contemporary moment will also be key to any future development of Irish Empire Studies.⁷² This after all is the sector of the Irish diaspora that has been strategically located at the crucial intersection between the decline of the old British Empire and the emergence of the new American world order. In the nineteenth century, the Irish Catholic and nationalist sections of the diaspora were often vocally anti-imperialist, bringing with them across the Atlantic bitter memories, real and imagined, of British coercion and exploitation in the homeland they had left behind. In that worldview, America was a benign alternative to England (and to Ireland) not simply because it was a land of plenty, but also because it was everything the United Kingdom was not—a republic, a state without an established church, a country with its own history of anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggle. But as Irish people were integrated into America's white republic, and as that republic itself came to exercise ever greater world power, first in the Spanish (and Catholic) Americas, then more widely, how did Irish-American attitudes to empire and imperialism evolve in this changing context? And how did interactions between Irish-America and Irish nationalism at home or in the other outposts of the diaspora mutually shape or modify each other's views on the post-European world order? These are questions with which any energetic Irish version of Empire Studies will want to wrestle.

However, assessments of how modern Irish attitudes to imperialism have been mediated by Ireland's relationship to the United

72. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, and Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995) have given an important lead here, moving the study of Irish-Americans to the foreground of debates on race and class in contemporary American Studies.

States ought not simply to imply a transfer of emphasis from one Anglophone metropole to another or from one Anglophone regimen of scholarship to another. The New World to which Irish people emigrated from the early modern period onward because of the disasters of British rule in Ireland was not the American superpower of today. It was, rather—as American Studies has been increasingly compelled to acknowledge—a culturally diverse continent that was, or had been recently, governed by several competing European empires: the British in the East, the French in the Southeast and the North, the Spanish in the Southwest and West. To the emerging United States’ north lay British and French Canada, to its south Spanish and Portuguese America, a little off its East Coast the extraordinarily heterogeneous Caribbean.⁷³ Emigration to the United States, therefore, brought Irish people into various levels of contact with many different imperial and post-imperial cultures other than the British one. Similarly, because immigration brought communities to the United States from so many different regions of the world that had also been subject to one or other of the European empires, Irish nationalism inevitably developed there in a much more multi-national context than it did at home. Later, as an increasingly ascendant United States exerted its control over South America, the Caribbean, Asia, or the Middle East, the Irish there had to re-negotiate their relationship to these regions as well—to view them no longer only through the prism of European empire but through that of American hegemony. As part of this process, they had to balance commitments to a shared Catholicism (in the case of South America say) with a commitment to a sometimes aggressively Protestant American nationalism, or they had to reconcile an Irish republican disposition to anti-imperialist sentiment with the US’s Cold War commitment to safeguarding the world from communism and “making it safe for democracy.” The story of how the Irish squared their anti-British-imperialist sentiment with America’s rise to power is, in other words, not simply one of how they “became white” or of how they accommodated themselves to

73. For an innovative study of Irish settlers in mid-nineteenth century Mexican and later American Texas, see Graham Davis, *Land!: Irish Pioneers in Mexican and Revolutionary Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002).

the American state: it is also a complex narrative of how they negotiated diverse relationships to Catholicism, Protestantism, capitalism, communism, imperialism, and democracy—and through these defined and redefined their relationships to most of the postcolonial regions and peoples of the world.