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Review Essay: The Cambridge History of Ireland

The Cambridge History of Ireland. Volume I. 600-1550, edited by Brendan Smith, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2018, ISBN: 9781107110670 (hardback), 680pp., £100.
The Cambridge History of Ireland, Volume II. 1550-1730, edited by Jane Ohlmeyer, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2018, ISBN: 9781107117631 (hardback), 806pp., £100.
The Cambridge History of Ireland, Volume III. 1730-1880, edited by James Kelly, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2018, ISBN: 9781107115200 (hardback), 874pp., £100.
The Cambridge History of Ireland, Volume IV. 1880 to the Present, edited by Thomas Bartlett, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2018, ISBN: 9781107113541 (hardback), 1004pp., £100.

Every academic library will want these as ebooks for their students, and with paperbacks available in February 2020 (£100 for a set), many academics should consider adding them to their personal collection. Geographical themes are occasionally explicit, generally implicit, and each volume teases the geographical imagination with a wealth of provocative material.

All such ventures must begin somewhere This one claims its period as one that can be studied from written, and then, later, printed sources. Writing was an innovation that incited a new set of relations to past, present, and elsewhere. The first volume covers a period defined by the primacy of writing for History, reaching from the proliferation of manuscripts in the seventh century up until the publication of the first book in Ireland in the mid-sixteenth century. The new world-view from within writing was shaped by the culture that incited it, European Christianity. Initially at least, written sources were from and for Christians. A central question of the first volume might be posed in methodological terms as the matter of bias. In literal terms, the written sources are a minority's view. An evangelising church, however, must speak with, and not only of, it's Other. As Edel Breathnach notes in a chapter on 'Communities and their Landscapes', parts of the farming calendar were re-named saints' days, some grave sites of important Irish families were occupied by monasteries and re-purposed as saints' shrines, relics such as ogham stones were taken into the fabric of churches, and in learning Irish place-names Christians gave themselves an opportunity to access a vast store of native tradition.

Syncretism is also important for John Carey in 'Learning, Imagination and Belief'. At

least initially, missionaries were content to offer Yahweh one more god, albeit the most powerful. Early Irish Christians, even those educated and privileged enough to adopt writing, remained polytheistic in their prayers. While the druids did not prosper, the filid (poet-historian-justices) seem to have played a role within both Native and Christian administrative systems. Literacy reaches out and not only within. With a written account, perhaps from the seventh-century, of how the grammar of Irish differs from that of classical languages, Ireland produced a very early account of the grammar of a vernacular European language for the next known example is from Iceland in the eleventh century. The Irish related its myths into the narrative forms of classical European Christianity. They also copied for their own use ecclesiastical texts, indeed some apocrypha survive only in Irish versions.

Christianity had its missionary, monastic and ecclesiastical forms and each organised its own spaces and hierarchies. Each incorporated, expelled and sought after indigenous societies in different ways. In an essay, 'Disaster and Opportunity: 1320-1450', Brendan Smith, in following the reverberations of plague through Ireland, notes a singular example of ecclesiastical Christianity remarking that in 1324 Kilkenny was 'the site of the first witch-burning in Western Europe – a pioneering expression of modernity applauded by the local Franciscan chronicler' (p. 246). Smith finds other evidence of European modernity in responses to plague where in the aftermath of the earliest outbreak, penitents in Drogheda whipped themselves as they processed through the streets. It might be as worthy of attention that the novelty of burning witches did not really establish itself in Ireland. Outside some groups of transplanted Scots Presbyterians, it did not resonate as a communal enthusiasm, and even the index case in Kilkenny was targeted by some wealthy people at a very rich woman, and it was taken up by a reforming bishop from England, the 'local Franciscan chronicler' in this case congratulating himself (see Callan 2014).

Divisions within the Christian church were made bear the significance of broader disputes not only over doctrine but also those arising from the structural fissures of society. In 'Late Medieval Ireland in a Wider World', Michael Bennett comments that parochial Christianity was aligned with Anglo-Irish culture and insisted upon a celibate clergy, whereas monastic Christianity more easily associated itself with Gaelic society and was more tolerant both of 'clerical concubinage and illegitimacy' (p. 350). In his essay on 'The Church, 1050-1460', Colmán Ó Clabaigh suggests that in the period between the mid-fourteenth and mid-fifteenth centuries, divisions between native and settler ran between different mendicant communities and he proposes that a native Franciscan was responsible for a text that 'accused Friar Simon le Mercer, a Franciscan, of asserting that it was no more a sin to kill an Irishman than to kill a dog and that he would not hesitate to celebrate Mass after so doing' (p. 373). The affinity of some monastic communities with their native neighbours encouraged them to adopt reforms that would place them under nominal direct rule from Rome, thereby bypassing the local control of 'the Anglo-Irish and English friars who had governed them since the thirteenth century' (p. 384).

Ireland had many characteristics of the frontier lands of feudal Europe. It showed the structural instability and tendency towards irredentism that resulted from feudal monarchs granting territory at the margins in return for sponsoring expansionist war. In 'Conquest and Conquerors', Colin Veach describes March Law and Divide-and-Rule as two monarchical strategies for the margins: in the former the local lord is given significant autonomy from the monarch in the administration of law and taxes, whereas by the latter, the need for alliances in securing occupation allows the monarch to insert itself into a web of cross-cutting alliances among the occupying lords. With 'Angevin Ireland', Nicholas Vincent describes an Anglo-Norman policy of establishing small boroughs in Ireland as an attraction for English settlers. This gradually changed, as Christopher Maginn explains in 'Continuity and Change, 1470-1550', and when, in 1541, a parliament in Ireland accepted Henry VIII as king of Ireland it capped a period of extending claims that had rendered the Irish 'in effect illegal aliens squatting on territory that rightfully belonged to the crown' (p. 309) but with Henry's lordship all were now claimed as subjects and those that resisted were understood as internal rebels rather than external enemies.

The conquest was always incomplete. In the twelfth century, a plan to introduce English barons with English peasants foundered on the risks to the settlers and, as Veach describes, a treaty of 1175 required the Irish under the defeated Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair to return to their farms but now as serfs for the English. Vincent notes that, in the thirteenth century, Ireland was more like a colonial margin than a settled territory and that the English law there shared much with that under which parts of the Holy Land had been claimed. As arms sales to Saracens were illegal, so too with the Irish, and by the 1290s an Englishmen 'convicted of killing an Irishman was to be punished, not as a felon, but with a fine of a mere £3 10s' (p. 210). But, as Beth Hartland explains in 'The Height of English Power 1250-1320', in many parts of Ireland the English could only stay by accepting local (Irish) law and custom. It is striking that Smith concludes that over the course of the fifteenth century, the tax return to the English crown lagged far behind the growth of the Irish economy. The Gaelic lords, however, were unable to eject the English, and, as Katharine Simms writes in 'The Political Recovery of Gaelic Ireland', at least before the sixteenth century, the English felt able to remain in Ireland without incorporating the Gaelic lords into 'the political community of the Lordship' (p. 299). In a concluding review, 'Contexts, Divisions and Unities: Perspectives from the Later Middle Ages', Robin Frame picks up this same point and draws a contrast with the colonial administration in Wales. He concludes that the repeated requests from the British interests in Ireland for military and financial support 'made the crown acutely aware of the gap between its theoretical and actual authority in Ireland' (p. 530).

The shift into the early modern period with the second volume continues the story of incomplete conquest but with a global rather than European context. Ireland now joined this global system of commodity flows but it did so under the restraint of British legislation which, as Jane Ohlmeyer outlines in her 'Introduction: Ireland in the Early Modern World', 'consistently privileged the English economy over the Irish one and created a political economy of dependency' (p. 9). These measures included,

as enumerated by Charles Ivar McGrath in 'Politics, 1692-1730', Navigation Acts (1651, 1660, 1671, 1681) that, among other things, limited the access of Irish merchants to colonial trade, and Cattle Acts (1663, 1665) that, reports Ted McCormick in 'Restoration Politics, 1660-1691', 'subjected Irish to metropolitan interests' (p. 111) and a Woollen Act (1699) that, as Raymond Gillespie shows in 'Economic Life, 1550–1730', was introduced to reverse an increase in the export from Ireland of worsted, or new draperies, to England where local producers complained of Irish competition. In 'Ireland in the Atlantic World: Migration and Cultural Transfer', William O'Reilly notes that, while Irish merchants were excluded from the Royal Africa Company (1660–1752) and thus from direct engagement in trading slaves, Cork merchants found in the slave plantations a booming market for their salted butter and salt beef while other Irish people themselves owned plantations and slaves to the point where, in 1729, 'the majority of the 5,855 slaves on the Caribbean island of Montserrat were owned by Irish families' (p. 396).

During the period covered by this volume, 1550–1730, England and then Britain practised three forms of surplus extraction in Ireland. As Ciaran Brady shows in 'Politics, Policy and Power, 1550-1603', there were parts of Ireland where the best the English could do was to insert themselves into the authority structures of Gaelic Ireland and claim resources in the form of 'coign and livery', the hospitality and military support relied upon by Gaelic lords. Only the four (loyal) counties of the Pale were shired and thus had law administered by a sheriff. With legislation in 1569, it was, as Brady describes, the English ambition to shire the rest of Ireland. This would incorporate districts into English law and raise taxes for the English crown. There was resistance. This brought periodic attempts at reconquest and a third form of surplus extraction as plantation.

David Edwards, in 'Political Change and Social Transformation, 1603–1641', notes that in the early seventeenth century about three-quarters of British state spending in Ireland went on the army and, whereas most of that was an English subvention, later in the century military spending was sustained by taxation in Ireland. By the close of the seventeenth century, in the terms that McGrath quotes from Walsh (2013, p. 633), Ireland had become 'a self-funding garrison for a significant portion of the British standing army'. Whereas the British people associated a standing army with despotism, from the late-seventeenth century the British executive began peppering the Irish landscape with military barracks and by 1699 there were, again as McGrath documents, 12,000 British soldiers based in Ireland and funded therefrom.

Plantation was an integral part of this transition. In the first place, it funded re-conquest. For its military venture against the catholic Irish Confederacy (1642–9), as John Cunningham remarks in 'Politics 1641–1660', the British parliament passed the Adventurers' Act which set aside 2.5 million acres in Ireland to repay those who would invest in the war. In 'Wars of Religion, 1641-1691', John Jeremiah Cronin and Pádraig Lenihan estimate that the period of the war led by Cromwell that ended the Confederacy, together with the contemporary disruption to agriculture and the circulation of plague, saw Ireland's population cut by 30 per cent. The earlier scorched-earth policy of Mountjoy in Ulster over 1600–1 was rendered all the more cruel by the severity of the winter which,

as Francis Ludlow and Arlene Crampsie show in 'Environmental History of Ireland, 1550–1730', was the worst in the period 1400–1800. Violence against the Irish was not restrained by law, and Ian Campbell, in 'Irish Political Thought and Intellectual History, 1550–1730', notes that Edmund Spenser (View of the Present State of Ireland, 1596) in justifying force said that reason of state would permit the slaughter of the entire Gaelic elite, while a British attorney general for Ireland (John Davies, 1606–19) said that the British monarch had absolute power to use force in Ireland. Having been achieved with such force, plantation had then to be defended in like manner. Under the Confederacy the Catholic ownership of land in Ireland was, as Micheál Ó Siochrú and David Brown illustrate in 'The Down Survey and the Cromwellian Land Settlement', about 59%, which was broken after its defeat leaving about 14% in Catholic hands by the 1650s. While it had climbed back up to 22% in the 1680s, the Williamite confiscations pulled it share back to 15% by the 1690s. Taken together, these transfers constituted 'the single largest shift in land ownership in Europe […] during the early modern period' (p. 606).

To fund this colonialism from local taxes required breaking Irish resistance. The material basis of Gaelic society was attacked by rendering illegal the collective ownership through which clan loyalty was claimed and by delegitimising the marriages that established legal descent in other cases. As Edwards points out, this allowed English opportunists to report faulty title and thereby claim property in reward. Mark Caball, in 'Language, Print and Literature in Irish, 1550–1630', notes that, by insisting that all title to land flowed from the British monarch, the colonial regime undermined the bardic claim to sustain Irish kingship through praise. Alongside these assaults upon Gaelic society, there was a systematic marginalisation of Catholics. The Penal Laws not only excluded Catholics from many professions but, as Cronin and Lenihan discuss, enforced partible inheritance and thus the subdivision of estates. In 'The Emergence of a Protestant Society, 1691–1730', D. W. Hayton concludes that 'taken together the popery laws of 1695-1709 implemented a formidable range of restrictions on the religious, social, economic, professional and political lives of Irish Catholics' (p. 147). These were disabilities placed upon a majority of the people in Ireland and, as Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin notes in 'Counter-Reformation: the Catholic Church 1550–1641', Ireland was the only country in Europe where Catholicism survived as a majority religion without the benefit of state support. To the victors the spoils and, notes Nicholas Canny in his 'Afterword: Interpreting the History of Early Modern Ireland: From the Sixteenth Century to the Present', from the 1640s almost all historical works about Ireland by Protestants are both anti-Catholic and anti-Gaelic.

The third volume begins in the midst of the Jacobite moment and closes during the early phases of the Home Rule movement. The Catholic monarch James II was on the British throne for three years until ejected by the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688. As Vincent Morley explains in 'Irish Jacobitism, 1690–1790', the Pope continued to recognise both him, and later his son as James III, as legitimate monarchs of Britain and Ireland giving them an authority which they exercised in appointing bishops to Irish sees. In this manner, the loyalty of Irish priests to the Jacobite cause was secured until the

death of James III. Following the defeat of James II 1691 to the death of his son in 1766 many Irish Catholics were loyal to an absent king sustained by thousands of Irishmen in the armies of continental European powers. Nationalism assumed a diasporic dimension it never lost.

The wars against revolutionary France drove Britain to make intense demands upon the blood and treasure of Ireland. In 'Ireland during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1791–1815', Thomas Bartlett documents a demand upon the Irish taxpayers for the British army of £544,000 in 1790 that had risen to £5.4 million by 1800. While drawing so many troops out of Ireland, the British were likewise increasingly concerned about a challenge to their sovereignty in Ireland having seen one set of colonies detach themselves as a United States in 1783 and France in 1792 make a public promise to assist any European people seeking to establish their own republic. In these circumstances the United Irishmen allied rural Catholic Defenders with middle-class Protestant Volunteers and, backed by a French expeditionary force they tried a revolution, and failed. With so many troops abstracted from Ireland for the wars in Europe, the defence of British sovereignty relied in large part upon the arming of sectarian local militias and, as Bartlett notes, the British armed the Orange Order in 1796, one year after its founding. Protestant sectarianism was now established as an official loyalism.

With 'The Impact of O'Connell, 1815–1850', Patrick M. Geoghegan lays out the innovations of this remarkable politician. Seeking civil liberties for Catholics and then the Repeal of the 1801 Union of the British and Irish parliaments, Daniel O'Connell urged British authorities to foster an inclusive democracy as an alternative to violent radicalism. He incorporated the poor into his movement through a Catholic, and later a Repeal, rent. He brought them to disciplined mass meetings and created what Geoghegan identifies as Europe's first mass democratic movement. He based the Irish cause upon a civil liberties agenda that drew from him a courageous solidarity with the cause of anti-slavery, despite how badly this was received by large parts of the Irish diaspora. This alliance of parliamentary and popular politics would not recur until the heyday of Parnell in the context of the Land War.

Famine and emigration claim attention in the period of this third volume. In 'Society and Economy in the Long Eighteenth Century', David Dickson remarks on the tremendous increase in internal trade over the eighteenth century with only about 500 fairs in the 1680s but nearly 3,000 by the 1770s. Yet, even by the 1830s, as Andy Bielenberg shows in 'The Irish Economy, 1815–1880: Agricultural Transition, the Communications Revolution and the Limits of Industrialisation', while farmers generally paid their rent in cash, their own payments to the cottiers and labourers on their farms were almost as likely to be met in kind as in cash. Bielenberg notes that an income equivalent to between one-quarter and one-third of the farming produce was taken up as rent and that perhaps cottiers and labourers consumed about one-eighth of farm output. In 'The Great Famine, 1845–1850', Peter Gray finds that Ireland had about 916,000 landholdings in the early 1840s and that some 15 per cent of them were plots of less than one acre upon which the poor depended. This expulsion of poor subsistence to the verges of the agrarian economy, even while poor

people worked across the full reach of that economy, was the vulnerability was tipped into temporary famine by the contingency of the potato blight. From May to August 1847 the British state organised soup kitchens that, as Gray documents, distributed up to three million daily rations covering about 90 per cent of the population in some western districts. It could be done, but the British government suspended this direct aid and tried instead the novel policy of letting be, and using famine for the longer-term restructuring of the agrarian economy (Nally 2011). In India and Egypt they would later do so again producing what Davis (2001) terms Late-Victorian holocausts, but Ireland was first. Although in 'Ireland and the Empire in the Nineteenth Century', Barry Crosbie suggests that '[w]hile the catastrophe of the Great Famine exposed the fault-line at the heart of the political Union between both islands, there were positive benefits to Ireland's economic ties with the Empire' (p. 621), it is hard to balance these scales.

A mortality of over a million and an emigration of 1.5 million more cut the Irish population from nine million to 6.5 million within six years (1845–51). Net emigration continued for the rest of the century and by 1900 Ireland had, as Kevin Kenny remarks in 'Irish Emigration, c. 1845–1900', a population about half that on the eve of the Famine. With today a population of about 6.6 million (2016), it remains the only European country with a population less than it had in the mid-1840s. This was a migration of the desperate but not fully destitute. Unlike most European migration it was not family-based nor was there any significant return migration. For all the enthusiasm with which, as Douglas Kanter shows in 'Post -Famine Politics, 1850–1879', Fenians in North America applauded nationalists in Ireland, a sense of exile did not necessarily nurture any real plan to go back home.

In 'Bourgeois Ireland, or, on the Benefits of Keeping One's Hands Clean', Ciaran O'Neill describes the exponential growth of a Regulatory State (Moran 2004) in Ireland after 1850. Virginia Crossman, in 'The Growth of the State in the Nineteenth Century', suggests that while state development in Britain was a function of industrialisation, in Ireland it was primarily concerned with public order. This state was intimately involved with family matters. In 1850, for example, there were perhaps 120,000 children in the workhouses imposed by British policy and, as Sarah-Anne Buckley notes in her essay on 'Women, Men and the Family, c. 1730–1880', the separation of pauper children from their parents from the age of two established a practice of breaking up poor families that was continued with reformatories and industrial schools. The do-gooders who apprehended vagrant children and tore them from their destitute families came to be known as the cruelty men (Buckley 2013). Rather than supporting families through some sort of basic income, the state incarcerated children, setting a pattern of institutionalisation that was inherited by the Irish Free State albeit with the extra twist of devolving the running of many of these places to Catholic orders for whom this became a principal purpose and support.

The final volume of the series begins in the 1880s. Alvin Jackson, in 'The Origins, Politics and Culture of Irish Unionism, c. 1880–1916', notes that the Home Rule campaign united the political factions that opposed independence and put them under Ulster leadership and this is what took form as partition. Elements of the British state

were supportive from the start and the unofficial militia, the Ulster Volunteer Force, was passed intelligence from Henry Wilson a senior officer within the British Army. After the establishment of Northern Ireland, little effort was given to winning the allegiance of the one-third of the population who were Catholic and, as Susannah Riordan argues in 'Politics, Economy, Society: Northern Ireland, 1920–1939', the polity treated the minority as a traitorous insurgency and, as with the elimination of proportional representation in local elections, continually repressed its political expression. Paul Bew and John Bew, with 'War and Peace in Northern Ireland: 1965–2016', describe the Unionist resistance to civil equality and note that is only with the peace process from 1998 that Protestant privilege has been de-institutionalised.

With 'Introduction: Ireland 1880–2016: Negotiating Sovereignty and Freedom', Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh notes that within a short period of time the Republic of Ireland established itself as a stable democracy which was remarkable both as a newly minted ex-colonial state and as a European state that experienced the political and economic tensions of the 1930s. Michael Kennedy surveys 'Irish Foreign Policy: 1919 to 1973' and shows the importance for establishing the standing of the Republic among the family of nations, of Irish diplomacy within the British Commonwealth in the 1920s and within the League of Nations during the 1920s and 1930s. Kennedy celebrates the work of Seán Lester who, as League of Nations High Commissioner for the Free City of Danzig 1934–7, offered early and trenchant warnings about the rise of Nazism. This cosmopolitanism was always in tension with an Irish Ireland ideology that Brian Ó Conchubhair describes in 'The Culture War: The Gaelic League and Irish Ireland'. Ó Tuathaigh suggests that the emigration of so many young people over several generations gave the Republic of Ireland a consistently conservative hue, with Britain serving as a safety valve for many Irish citizens at the sharpest end of repression. In this respect, there was an ironic harmony between the two polities on the Ireland. For example, as Lindsey Earner-Byrne documents in 'The Family in Ireland, 1880–2015', women's rights across the island were very belated with divorced women in Northern Ireland only getting the right to challenge their ex-husbands for custody of legitimate children from 1971 and women in the Republic only getting the opportunity to bring cases of marital rape from 1990.

The Catholic Church was vital to the Irish Free State at its founding in 1922, giving it, as Daithí Ó Corráin remarks in 'Catholicism in Ireland, 1880–2015: Rise, Ascendancy and Retreat', 'continuity, stability and an extensive organisational infrastructure with over 13,000 clergy and religious' (p. 731) and even as late as 1961 there were more religious than civil servants in the state. In another ironic convergence, school education both north and south is in religious hands, and with a clear continuity from the period of British rule, incarceration in the Republic is a standard treatment for poverty. Earner-Byrne notes that a 1936 Commission of Inquiry found that poverty was responsible for 90% of committals to industrial schools. Catherine Cox describes 'Institutional Space and the Geography of Confinement in Ireland, 1750–2000' and remarks that the working-class family was cast in pathological terms as a risk out of which people needed to be sequestered. Having assumed this responsibility the state and the religious discharged it

very poorly. In 'Stability, Crisis and Change in Post-War Ireland 1945–1973', Brian Girvin cites one official report into a Mother-Baby Home where 'over 50 per cent of the babies born in [this] state-supported home died in one year' (p. 385). Girvin also notes that with accession to the European Economic Community in 1973, the Republic had been first obliged to remove the special constitutional protection of the Catholic Church. Rather than external pressures, however, the main solvent of the links between church and state were internal. In 'Ireland transformed? Modernisation, Secularisation and Conservatism since 1973', Girvin describes the dramatic loss of respect for the Church that followed revelations about just how poorly it cared for children in its care and, specifically, about the rape of children by priests and religious. This loss of prestige brought a new irrelevance rather than humility and it was as what Ó Corráin terms a 'civil theology' (p. 733) that catholicism was set aside in the recent referenda on abortion and gay marriage.

These volumes are a remarkable achievement of synthesis, logistics and editing. There are striking conclusions sprinkled throughout and they are earned by careful summary as when Matthew Kelly, in an essay in Volume IV on 'Radical nationalisms, 1882-1916', concludes that the most socialist newspaper in early-twentieth century Ireland was the feminist-nationalist Bean n hÉireann edited by the remarkable Helena Molony (Regan 2017) or when Alex Woolf, in 'The Scandinavian Intervention' in Volume I, reminds us that slavery was so important in tenth-century Ireland that 'the cumal, a slave girl, was one of the standard units of value' (p. 117), particularly in trading for Scandinavian silver. There is a commendable historiographical self-consciousness as these historians clearly understand themselves as laying down yet one more context-dependent understanding of shared pasts. In 'Irish Jacobitism 1691–1790' in Volume III, Vincent Morley notes that literature in Irish from the early-eighteenth century conflated religion and nation leaving little space for Loyalism. In Volume II with 'Irish political thought and intellectual history, 1550–1730', Ian Campbell describes the scholarship in Latin of a sixteenth-century historian, Richard Stanihurst who believed Irish was not a language in which rational thought could be articulated and that lacking any notion of the common good, the Irish could only be civilised in a commonwealth formed by the English. The interpretation of recent events is provisional because we do not know how things will turn out. Yet the shape of things long past are also contested.

Volume I takes up a complex of materials produced by writing as a technology of Christianity. Of course, this apprehends the non-Christian and the non-literate as an incursion from the margins, always, over a very long history, just about to burn off like a dawn mist. Volumes II and III carefully pick apart the braid of colonialism and christian schism, of partition and the wars of religion. As several authors remark, this creates a global and diasporic context for Irish history. There is plenty here about Irish migration, under pressure of religious exclusion, to catholic Europe. There is plenty here about Irish contributions across the British Empire, as entrepreneurs and labour migrants. Irish persons in Britain are not as evident in these volumes as they are, even, in the first. Ireland features as an object of British policy but how Irish lives were lived within the cultures, polities and societies of Britain itself is less apparent and an understanding of the Irish

diaspora somewhat abbreviated in consequence. In so comprehensive an undertaking it is unfair to dwell on what is missing but there are some issues that a history adequate to our present day should surely attend to. There is very little about the community of travellers across these volumes. There are materials about tied and untied labour in nineteenth-century rural Ireland in David Dickson's essay on 'Society and Economy in the Long Eighteenth Century' in Volume III, and these are suggestive of some of the labour mobility within which travellers might be placed. In several essays there are descriptions of fairs, or periodic markets, that punctuated the circulatory geographies of some travellers but, like the world in the Irish language, these are in the wings of the stage on which the history of sedentary, christian, and literate Ireland is played out.

Finally, let me just note the whiff of the guild about these works. Within these volumes, past historical understandings are shown as influenced by theology, philosophy and literature, and as forged in explicit engagement with contemporary politics, but as we approach the present this contextual understanding of historical scholarship is set aside and History stands proud in all its autonomy. There is no discussion of the entanglement of historical scholarship with the Troubles, for example, of the many ways revisionism set up straw men, directing conclusions away from anything that might be recruited by Republicanism, usually by exaggerating a nationalist claim the more easily to deny it empirical basis. After so many discussions of revisionism (Boyce and O'Day 2006) and of the legacy of Conor Cruise O'Brien (O'Callaghan 2018), some may find this refreshing, yet the studied irony of historiographical naïveté has its own costs. More particularly, these volumes eschew debating marxist, feminist, or social-science perspectives on the structures of history and their transformation. There is little engagement with interpretations such as those inspired by Wallerstein (Beatty et al 2016; Coakley 2012) or marxism more broadly (McCabe 2011). There are references to women here and there, and they step into the title of two chapters (Mary O'Dowd's 'Men, Women and the Family, 1550–1730' in Volume II, and Sarah-Anne Buckley's 'Women, Men and the Family, c.1730–c.1880' in Volume III), yet, while O'Dowd uses the term in a discussion of the domination of early-modern Gaelic extended families by a male chieftain, within these volumes there is no extended consideration of patriarchy in its various forms and transformations (Condren 1989; Mahon 1994). Future interpretations will be all the better for the materials assembled and described across these more than 3,000 pages, but it is a curious reflection on a discipline that it will emphasise contingency so consistently as to push structural factors almost to the vanishing point of unspecified context. In defiance of Dean's (2002) formulation of Foucault's work as an invitation to write critical and effective histories, this is a discipline insisting on the first seemingly to inoculate itself against the politics of the second.

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