

Ireland and empire is now one of the most vibrant fields of inquiry in Irish Studies, reflecting in part a burgeoning interest in imperial topics across the disciplines in European and American universities in the last twenty years. Inspired by Edward Said and postcolonial studies, much of the late-twentieth-century work on the British, French, and other empires focused on placing empire and imperial themes within national literatures and histories in order to blur distinctions and divides between domestic society and the colonial world. The writing of empire into modern Irish literature and history proved somewhat contentious at first, producing a vibrant and far-ranging debate on whether or not Ireland after the early modern period could usefully be considered a colony and on the colonial and/or postcolonial affiliations of Irish nationalists and the Irish diaspora.<sup>1</sup> Although often interesting and provocative, this discussion has perhaps run its course for the moment as a consensus of sorts that Ireland's relationship to Britain shared at least some features in common with those of other British colonies has settled in

1. For a wide-ranging, if often critical, review of work in the field see Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) and "Historiography," in *Ireland and the British Empire*, ed. Kevin Kenny (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). See also Terence MacDonough (ed.), *Was Ireland a Colony?* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2005).

across most of the disciplines in Irish Studies.<sup>2</sup> The essays in this volume are at the forefront of the next phase in Irish imperial studies: they do not deliberate on whether or not Ireland was a colony and rather than simply examining Irish support for or resistance to colonial rule in Ireland, India, or other corners of the British Empire, they demonstrate that the different strands of Irish nationalism have engaged intellectually and politically with empire in a variety of complex ways. The main focus of this issue, therefore, is on how some key leaders and groups contributed to shaping or re-shaping that response to empire during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The volume suggests that Irish nationalist engagements with empire were more continuous and vigorous than many commentators have allowed, and that they were frequently central to the elaboration of Irish nationalist understandings of Ireland's place within the wider world.

The essays in this volume are presented in chronological order, but readers will find that many of the questions and concerns about Ireland and imperialism, as well as the uses of empire in Irish politics, remained consistent in the one hundred and fifty years spanned by these articles. The contents can be grouped into three categories. The first group explores how major Irish and Victorian figures such as Daniel O'Connell, Thomas Davis, John Mitchel, Justin McCarthy, and James Fitzjames Stephen engaged intellectually and politically with imperialism and the British Empire specifically. The second group of essays examines the ways in which particular groups such as the Home Rule Party, Irish-American Fenians, early-nineteenth-century journalists, interwar Republicans, and the Free State Government understood and used imperialism and empire for their own political and polemical ends. The final three essays in the volume shift the focus to late-twentieth-century Irish academia, exploring Nicholas Mansergh's partition paradigm, Irish reaction to the work of Edward Said, and postcolonial and feminist criticism in contemporary Ireland.

Joe Cleary opens this special issue with an overview of current trends in the study of empire. He identifies three main fields of scholarship in modern Irish imperial studies, exploring their origins,

2. See, for example, the essays in Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire*.

strengths, and shortcomings. His essay concludes with some suggestions for the future of the field. The history of empires, he argues, must be understood in terms of interlocking systems and inter-imperial rivalries rather than in terms of discrete territorial units. Hence, rather than confining themselves to the study of Irish involvements in the British Empire, scholars should be encouraged to address the place of the Irish within the wider world of the European empires and indeed within the imperial or neo-imperial systems that have emerged in the period since World War II.

Cleary's survey of Irish scholarship on empire is followed by Bruce Nelson's study of Daniel O'Connell and abolitionism. Many of his Irish nationalist contemporaries regarded O'Connell as an essentially conservative figure, but the *Liberator* could rightfully claim to hold a more radical position than the Young Irelanders on at least one issue—slavery. Nelson demonstrates that O'Connell's abolitionism stemmed from his understanding of Irish racial identity and history and from his Catholic training. These combined to produce in O'Connell an internationalist outlook in which the Irish people were naturally and morally bound to resist oppression wherever it appeared. Hence O'Connell's ambivalence toward the British imperial government, which he regarded as a potential partner in the effort to eradicate slavery but also a force repressing national ambitions in Ireland and elsewhere in the empire.

Niamh Lynch then explores the genesis of Irish anti-imperialism in the writings of two of O'Connell's most distinguished contemporary critics, Thomas Davis and John Mitchel. Lynch argues that empire and anti-imperialism were at the center of modern Irish nationalism. Lynch reveals that Davis's concepts of nation and nationality, notions that fundamentally informed Irish nationalism into the twentieth century, were a response to the problems he associated with imperialism. Mitchel was deeply influenced by his friend, but he also developed a more complex and wide-ranging analysis of empire and the "British System," a critique that (in Mitchel's mind at least) was completely consistent with his support for slavery in the United States.

The next essay is the first of several in this volume to explore the role of Canada in the Irish imagination of empire. Jason King examines the ways in which journalists writing for the *Nation* and *Dublin*

*University Magazine* found contrasting lessons in political developments in Canada, and Quebec in particular, for Ireland's future constitutional status. Although the hopes of some Irish nationalists that French Canada would pursue a revolutionary path to independence were to be disappointed, British North America did eventually provide Irish nationalists with an invaluable model for incremental constitutional reform. For unionist commentators, however, the lessons to be derived from French Canada in the 1840s were uniformly negative, exposing the deficiencies of Catholics, the folly of concession to disloyalty and papism, and the abiding necessity of an established Protestant church.

The following two essays build on what has been one of the most productive fields in Irish imperial studies, connections between Ireland and India. Jill Bender takes up the issue of comparative famines and examines how members of the Irish Home Rule Party used Indian famines to criticize the entire basis of British imperial rule. In essence, the early Home Rulers were expressing anti-imperial solidarity along lines laid out by Davis, O'Connell, and the *Nation* thirty years earlier. Gary Peatling, the only author in this volume to examine Ireland and empire from a British perspective, explores the Ireland-India connection in the thought of two prominent Victorian intellectuals, James Fitzjames Stephen and James Anthony Froude. Peatling carefully charts a number of parallels in Froude's understanding of Ireland and Stephen's of India to challenge what he perceives as a recent tendency among some scholars to minimize the role of racial thinking and the empire in the history of Anglo-Irish relations.

Niall Whelehan's essay deals with the same era, but focuses on Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa and Patrick Ford, the creators of the Skirmishing Fund. Whelehan reveals how these men and other proponents of this campaign of bombings and small-scale attacks justified in imperial terms the violence they sponsored by highlighting brutalities committed by British forces fighting colonial insurgents and by portraying irregular warfare, beginning with the American colonists, as a traditional weapon of colonial resistance. Justin McCarthy, the subject of Paul Townend's article, represented the other end of the Irish nationalist spectrum in this period. McCarthy was the most respectable member of the Home Rule Party, probably

more at home in the Cobden Club and Liberal society gatherings than in his native Cork. But, as Townend demonstrates, McCarthy's home rule schemes for Ireland also required a fundamental reform of the entire empire. Unlike many of his contemporaries, McCarthy did not seek the destruction of the empire or Ireland's withdrawal from it, but even his vision of a more decentralized British Empire held together exclusively by ties of mutual affection and goodwill was unacceptable to most of his British contemporaries.

The next pair of essays concerns the role of empire in interwar Irish politics. Jason Knirck demonstrates that Ireland's position within the British Empire was a central element in the Dáil debates over the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Drawing on a long tradition of Irish exceptionalism and anti-imperialism, opponents of the Treaty refused to countenance any connection with the British Empire and denied that it would accord Ireland the same political status as the other Dominions. The Pro-Treatyites were in a difficult position, as they sought to defend the Treaty without challenging the Sinn Féin commitment to republican sovereignty. Knirck reveals how the Pro-Treatyites positioned the Commonwealth as a potentially anti-imperial body that could be used to defend the autonomy of the Dominions against the demands of the imperial government.

The sincerity of the Anti-Treatyites' objection to empire, and indeed the continued vital sympathy for international imperial resistance as first expressed by Thomas Davis, is confirmed by Caoilfhionn Ní Bheacháin's study of the interwar republican press. Ní Bheacháin discloses that the republican press was a vehicle for lively discussions of anti-imperialist movements across the world—discussions that were focused on, but not limited to, the British Empire, and which also reflected a more robust internationalism than is often allowed.

The final three essays in this volume concern Irish academics' more recent engagements with empire and the colonial condition. Antoine Mioche offers an analysis and critique of the partition paradigm developed by Nicholas Mansergh in the 1970s. Mioche questions several key aspects of the model Mansergh applied to Ireland and India and tests it on two earlier examples of colonial partition: British North America (1774–83) and Quebec (1791). Mioche traces several similarities between these early partitions and those of

Ireland and India, suggesting that partition was a multivalent process that served multiple interests and could be more purposeful than Mansergh's model allows.

The following essay by Conor McCarthy's charts the reception of postcolonial theory and of Edward Said's work in particular in Irish academic debate since the late-1970s. His essay discusses Said's writings on Ireland and Yeats, and also explores how critics such as David Cairns, Shaun Richards, Colin Graham, Declan Kiberd, and Seamus Deane have responded to Said's work. Emer Nolan considers how Irish feminist critics have challenged a number of Irish postcolonial scholars, especially those involved with *The Field Day Anthology*. Nolan takes issue with elements of the feminist critique of Irish Studies, noting a number of contradictions in the works she examines and outlining the inherent problems in invoking the category of gender to explain inclusion or exclusion from the national literary canon.

The essays in this volume span the history of the modern Irish response to empire from the romantic nationalists of the early nineteenth century to twenty-first century academics. They explore the full spectrum of Irish nationalists in the period before the declaration of the Irish Republic in 1948 as well as the roles of Canada and India in their understanding of Ireland's imperial position. Individually and collectively, these essays advance a "second wave" of Irish imperial studies and suggest a number of interesting and productive new directions for future research. It should be noted that they also reveal the international scope of contemporary Irish Studies, with contributors based in Canada, France, and Italy as well as the United States and Ireland.

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