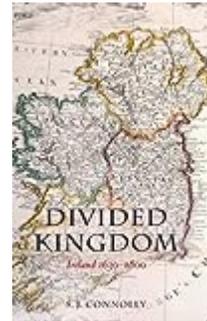




**S. J. Connolly.** *Divided Kingdom: Ireland 1630-1800.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 519 pp. \$70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-954347-2.



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## Cultural Identities Reconsidered

In this thoughtful, engaging, and broad historical survey, the sequel to his *Contested Ireland* (2007), S. J. Connolly continues to track the evolution of the divisions that characterized early modern Ireland. The success of this book lies in its stimulating reassessment, as Connolly argues, of “the fluid and contingent nature of allegiances and aspirations,” which could traverse as well as reinforce cultural divides (p. 497). These shifting loyalties played havoc on identity, which could be made and remade especially during times of upheaval, of which Ireland was never short in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As a result, such identities as Gaelic, Old English, New English, Catholic, and Protestant in Connolly’s account emerge more complex, as neither static nor fleeting.

The implications are significant. Confronting the recent historiographical interest in British identities, Connolly’s account breaks from the prevailing nationalist interpretation, especially that of Brendan Bradshaw, that views cultural identity in Ireland as a straightforward issue between Gaelic and English or Catholic and Protestant. Such convenient divisions exemplify a nationalist

tradition of resistance against English rule on the part of the Gaelic and Catholic population pushing aside themes that Connolly illustrates, such as Catholic monarchical attachment and Protestant anti-English sentiment. These and other examples that complicate cultural identities fill *Divided Kingdom* and allow Connolly to question both the image of a uniquely polarized society as well as misguided attempts to ascribe modern nationalism to a sectarian era. The resulting account, combining primary sources with recent publications, is the most convincing revisionism since T. W. Moody’s voluminous *A New History of Ireland*.

Evoking the revisionist spirit of Moody, Connolly breaks from the traditional teleological starting point of 1641. Shifting the focus away from the British Civil Wars of the 1640s to 1630, which was preceded by three decades of peace in Ireland, serves to highlight the interaction between groups in society. To be clear, Connolly does not skirt the violence and turmoil of the seventeenth century but that is not his main concern. Instead, he explores the complex strategic and personal re-

relationships and alliances that could bring English settlers and Irish natives together. These patterns continued, as ethnic identities gave way to religious distinctions in the eighteenth century obscuring seemingly clear-cut conflicts between Catholics and Protestants. Although deficient in the history of gender, Connolly's account weaves a complex political narrative with thematic chapters on religion, society, and the economy. Taken together this book represents Ireland as a divided society common to ancien régime Europe, but also one that was neither conveniently nor exceptionally polarized.

Connolly's narration is at its best in post-1660 Ireland or the period encompassing most of his research, making for engaging reading. Of special mention is the chapter "Rulers and Ruled" that deals with popular disaffection. While most historians want to argue that the age they study are eras of major upheaval, Connolly does the opposite. He considers flawed, recent efforts that overstress the magnitude of Jacobite sentiment in Ireland, because of their use of Gaelic poets detached from political reality, as a dubious source. Furthermore, agrarian protest so often cited by historians as proof of agitation, especially those linked to the Catholic Whiteboys or Rightboys, posed little threat to the Protestant state. The movements were inherently conservative with followers looking to protest rising costs, not the political system. They could also target fellow Catholics and receive support from Protestants, further supporting Connolly's argument of the complexity of Irish allegiances.

In the last chapter, Connolly offers proof that the religious identities that divided Ireland were not as fleeting as historians have recently conceived. He concludes that the new republicanism of the Society of United Irishmen proved impermanent and only served to deepen cultural divides. Out of the brutal United Irish-conceived Rebellion of 1798 emerged Catholic Ribbonmen and Protestant Orangemen, not modern democratic republicans. This confronts the lately popular misconception that the United movement is the origin of a modern national identity void of sectarianism. Instead, ancien régime identities survived, and like other nationalisms, the conventional Irish variant emerged much later in the course of the nineteenth century. Although Connolly notes this in the conclusion, a more thorough examination would have been most welcome or perhaps will serve as a starting point for a future project.

Since cultural identities remained a divisive factor beyond 1800, Connolly injects one final revision. He challenges most previous historical interpretations of the Act of Union arguing that the joining of Great Britain and Ireland should not be viewed as a great failure but perhaps as a lasting effort to deal with religious divisions. This revisionist approach combined with concise summaries of only the most recent research, a straightforward writing style, and thematic organization make the text most useful. At a juncture when scholars, students, and the public are reconsidering Irish identities, it is hoped that all will read Connolly's account.

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