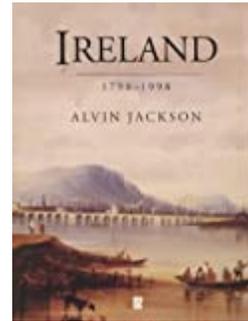




**Alvin Jackson.** *Ireland 1798-1998.* Oxford, UK and Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1999. xii + 407 pp. \$43.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-631-19542-9; \$70.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-631-19541-2.



**Reviewed by** Alan O'Day (School of Arts and Humanities, University of North London)

**Published on** H-Albion (June, 2000)

## Surveying Ireland

Still a young scholar, Alvin Jackson already has written impressive studies of the Ulster Party, Colonel Edward Saunderson and Edward Carson along with a bevy of academic articles. His work is impressive and this new survey is an important addition to the bookshelf. He has written a fine narrative that nicely outlines and interprets the course of Irish history from the rising of 1798 to the as yet unfinished peace process in Northern Ireland in 1998, a two century period which he believes is a 'discreet phase within Irish political history...'. A linking facet, he suggests, is the consolidation of the Catholic propertied interest by the 1790s and at the close of the twentieth century the increase in Northern Ireland of Catholic self-confidence. He assures us that we are now witnessing the modification of militant republicanism and militant loyalism. The book contains a useful chronology of events, maps, bibliography and a number of illustrations. Jackson, who teaches at The Queen's University of Belfast, is a northerner by background though one with experience living in Britain, the Republic of Ireland and America and he brings this varied experience into play in the text which gives appropriate space to the Ulster dimension of Ireland's history. The most comparative study

of K.T. Hoppen's stimulating, *Ireland since 1800*, which, however, is less accessible to the ordinary reader because of its topical organisation. Students and general readers will find Jackson's book the best single volume on the period.

The author treats the major events and themes of Ireland's history in chronological sequence, examining the birth of modern Irish politics, the problem of knitting together the diverse traditions, peoples and laws of a 'united kingdom', the emancipation of Catholics, Daniel O'Connell's influence, the impact of the land question, the rise of nationalism and unionism, the settlements of 1920/21, the growing separation between north and south afterwards and then the tendency towards convergence in recent times. He concludes on an optimistic note 'the end of Irish history?', which sees the decline of sectarian feeling throughout the island; this may prove a shade premature. Yet, a notable characteristic of the account is a balance between events and the personalities who shaped Ireland's destiny. Five elements are less well developed. This is essentially a political narrative, though Jackson provides a rounded account of land tenure and

the famine, and the economy is discussed less extensively than perhaps is merited. Cultural development, too, is neglected, except for the years of the Gaelic revival. The book does not unveil the interaction between the homeland and the diaspora to a great extent and the role of southern Protestants receives comparative little attention. There is not a challenging comparative dimension with national movements elsewhere in Europe and here some reference to the writings of Miroslav Hroch and Ernest Gellner among other would have contributed a useful ingredient. Finally, Jackson's consideration of nationalism and unionism could have been placed in the context of the theoretical literature. But such comments do not detract from the overall quality of the book.

He traces what made Ireland tick, dissecting both the nationalist and unionist versions of the past, also investigating critically the various historiographic traditions. Readers may puzzle over the reference to Michael Flatley, an American, symbolising the re-greening or counter-revisionism of Irish history. What he attempts to achieve, and largely succeeds in achieving, is 'plausibility'. Jackson usefully points to the significance of evangelicalism in the early nineteenth century for fostering a cohesive Protestant identity. His chapters on the land question 1845 to 1891 and the end of the Union 1891 to 1921 are more than a synthesis, being an original interpretation in their own right. However, this reviewer dissents with Jackson on several points—perhaps he over-states the sense of guilt suffered by survivors of the great famine, the Independent Irish Party of the 1850s is dismissed too readily, the references to the Irish Church Act (1869) fail to illuminate the issue at stake and the wider importance of this legislation, home rule was something other than 'basically Repeal', it is retrospective reasoning to maintain that only the Tories could deliver home rule in 1886 [H.C.G. Matthew commented on the fluidity of the situ-

ation], nor is it obvious that 'Parnellism' was an artificial alliance any more than other political associations such as the parallel British Liberal and Conservatives parties or the Ulster Unionist Party so well-sketched earlier by Jackson himself. Within certain limits the Irish party was a flexible and innovative organisation, responsive to its constituency. Its defect lay, if that is the right word, in the political sociology of its base of support which did not admit to easy accommodation of Protestants and Unionists within the 'nation'. The author's comments on the Republic of Ireland's failure to gain admission to the European Economic Community in 1962 seem odd, not least because the proposed entries of the United Kingdom and the Republic were linked for practical purposes just as in 1971. But, these reservations seem modest in a tome of such length and sophistication. Jackson's observation on Parnell, 'his legacy speaks both to the Irish upper middle classes who carry an icon of the Uncrowned King on their 100 notes and to ideologues of Provisional Sinn Fein who have found a home in Dublin's Parnell Square' is worth the price of the book!

The chapters on Northern Ireland up to 1972 and the two Irelands 1973 to 1998 are well-constructed, readable (a feature of the books as a whole) and can be recommended a short treatment of events. The comparison between Gerry Adams and Michael Collins may not be greeted with universal enthusiasm but is 'plausible' and even illuminating though his treatment of David Trimble may be seen by some as jaundiced, even as departing from the measured balance found in the book generally. But then distancing oneself from contemporary politicians and incidents is never simple.

Copyright (c) 2000 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-albion>

**Citation:** Alan O'Day. Review of Jackson, Alvin, *Ireland 1798-1988*. H-Albion, H-Net Reviews. June, 2000.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=4185>

Copyright © 2000 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.org](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.org).