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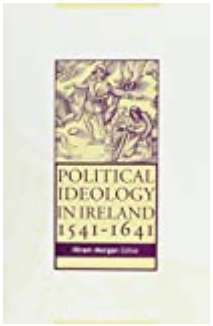

Hiram Morgan, ed. *Political Ideology in Ireland, 1541-1641.* Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999. 264 pp. $55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-85182-440-3.

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Irish history with the Britishness left out

This is a lively collection of essays, on a topic of central importance to historical writing about early modern Ireland. The volume originated in a seminar held in the Folger Institute Center for the study of British Political Thought, and grants from the British Council in Belfast and the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin assisted with the travel costs of visiting speakers. The editor, an enthusiastic young College Lecturer at University College Cork, is perhaps best known for his work in connection with the highly successful magazine, *History Ireland*, of which he is founding editor, and for his scholarly monograph on the origins of *Tyrone's rebellion*, the product of his doctoral thesis. The other eight contributors, seven historians and one literary scholar, are all well-known and respected for their work on early modern Ireland. The result is 'a diverse series of essays covering ideology in this turbulent period of Irish history in more depth and breadth than ever before' (p. 8). How far do the volume's contents live up to these claims?

As the editor remarks, the essays focus more on 'political ideas as adumbrated in surviving texts and manuscripts' than on 'the elucidation of general themes' (p. 8). This is probably a sound strategy, given the presently underdeveloped character of the subject. Setting aside for the moment the matter of the introduction, the essays fall into two groups. For New English writers, the preference is for the colonial hardliners of the 1590s. There is a fine essay by Morgan's colleague, David Edwards, which fundamentally alters our understanding of the circumstances in which Edmund Spenser wrote his *View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596). Edwards charts the use and abuse of martial law in Elizabethan Ireland, and argues persuasively that the *View* sought successfully to persuade Elizabeth to reimpose martial law following a period of renewed reliance on more traditional Tudor reform strategies. A second essay, by Nicholas Canny, looks at the importance for Ireland of Spenser's earlier work, *The Faerie Queene*, arguing that it was quite consistent with the *View* as an exposition of Spenser's ideas. Vincent Carey addresses a different aspect of Spenser's *View*, his resort to Machiavelli to advocate extreme measures. Yet the main focus of this reconsideration of Machiavelli's influence on later sixteenth-century English writers about Ireland is on *Solon his follie* (1594), by Spenser's fellow colonist,

Richard Beacon. Carey convincingly disposes of a recent argument that Beacon's *Solon* is 'perhaps the first fully fledged exposition of classical republicanism in England' (p. 93).

Finally, among the New English writers, there is a fascinating study by Eugene Flanagan of Captain Barnaby Rich, that prolific but marginal writer and critic whose works are here compared with the *Discovery* of the respected and influential Sir John Davies. Whereas Davies argued that reform was succeeding in Jacobean Ireland, for Rich it was failing. Yet, according Rich, 'the guiding principle behind reform' was religion, whereas Davies's *Discovery* marked 'a return to a traditional reform policy that insisted on the centrality of common law' (pp 164, 179). Rich's stress on the continuing failure of religious reform in the aftermath of the Tudor conquest leads naturally on to Alan Ford's elegantly-crafted analysis of the political thinking of Irish Protestants, particularly the contradictions inherent in the concept of the godly prince in early Stuart Ireland. Focusing on the career of Archbishop James Ussher, Ford shows how, in the circumstances following the outbreak of the War of the Three Kingdoms, Ussher was increasingly unable to maintain 'the twin strands in Irish Protestant political thought', viz. 'apocalyptic anti-popery and absolute loyalty to the divinely ordained monarch' (p. 228), and was by 1644 firmly identified as a royalist.

Individually, these are all substantial essays. In their discussions of late Elizabethan soldiers and writers, however, the authors frequently make reference to different sets of ideas propounded by other New English officials. For instance, Carey briefly outlines two 1583 tracts by Sir James Croft (lord deputy of Ireland, 1551-2) which reflect 'his experience of the Irish mid-century humanist-inspired reform era'. These argue that the wayˆÃto rekindle the loyalty of the "meer English nacyon" in Ireland' was not to treat them as a ' "forwin enimye" ' but to govern them '"more by forme of justice then by force of armes"' (p. 87). (Talk here of the 'mere English nation' in Ireland also sits rather uneasily with the volume's persistent references to 'gaelicized Anglo-Normans' or 'Anglo-Irish'.)

The emphasis on texts and manuscripts is all very well, but how representative are the chosen tracts? One misses here some discussion of those important tracts by leading New English officials who, in different ways, most influenced English attitudes to Ireland in the half-century before the outbreak of Tyrone's rebellion. *The vocacyon of John Bale to the bishoprick of Ossorie*, written by the intellectual mentor of Foxe's Book of Martyrs and promoter of new ideas about the English as anˆÃelect nation', adds the key Reformation dimension to conventional depictions of Ireland in terms of civility vs. savagery; while William Gerrard, chancellor of Ireland and vice-president of Wales, offers in his 'Notes of his report on Ireland' an extended discussion of the problem of degeneracy which argues that the proper enforcement of English law and justice in Ireland would, as experience in Wales had shown, 'defende the English from all Irishe spottes' and recover those 'Englishe degenerates' who had 'becomme Irishe'.[1]

The four remaining essays all address particular aspects of the formation of an Irish Catholic nationalist identity. Perhaps the most original is Vincent Carey's stimulating second essay on bilingualism and identity formation which, by way of a critique of Richard Stanyhurst's contribution to Holinshed's *Chronicle*, argues persuasively that the origins of the Gaelic-Old English rapprochement by 1641 lay not just in Counter-Reformation Catholicism butˆÃin the emergence of a hybridized dynastic culture on the Pale borders from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries'. It also pointedly urges that instead of relying 'on the prejudiced contemporary accounts of Edmund Spenser or Richard Stanihurst', scholars 'interested in questions of identity and literature in early modern Ireland must begin to equip themselves with all the languages of literary expression on the island' (pp 60, 61).

The implied challenge to master the neglected Gaelic sources is taken up in the next chapter, Marc Caball's survey of 'Irish Gaelic responses to early modern conquest and colonization'. From this standpoint, Caball offers a stimulating analysis of the origins of an Irish sense of identity. He argues (in innovating language) that although among *Gaedhil* [native Irish] and 'gaelicized Anglo-Normans' 'cultural homogeneity had long prevailed outside the nominally-anglicized Pale', the intrusion 'of an aggressive Protestant Anglo-Saxon politico-jurisdictional apparatus [in line with the views of the colonial hardliners] acted as a catalyst, by way of reaction, for the appearance of an inclusive national consciousness' (p. 71). Yet the wider Gaelic context of these developments might have been clearer had the volume included some discussion of John Carswell's *Foirm na n-Urrnuidheadh*. This prayer book inaugurated the Gaelic Reformation tradition among the Irish of Scotland and offers an instructive counterpoint to faith-and-fatherland depictions of Irishness.[2]

Both Carey and Caball's essays devote much space to the questionable concept of 'gaelicization'. This, unfortunately, is now a sacred cow of nationalist historiography, even though there was no more prospect in Tudor Ireland of Gaelic-speaking *Gaill* [foreigners] becoming *Gaedhil* than of an Afrikaans-speaking Zulu becoming an Afrikaner. Yet at a time when linguistic, cultural and political pressures were mostly running in the opposite direction, and steadily destroying the traditional Gaelic world, 'parity of esteem' might at least have prompted some extended consideration of what would presumably be classified here as 'anglicization' (an equally problematic term!) – for instance, its impact on the O'Brien earls of Thomond and their professional poets. Colm Lennon's revealing analysis of what is apparently an early draft in English of Bishop David Rothe's Latin 'Analecta' does in fact offer some insight into these countervailing pressures from within the emerging Catholic community. Rothe, of Old English descent, was the first resident Catholic bishop in early Stuart Ireland and, in the face of sporadic persecution by Irish officials, his tract stresses the loyalty of the Catholic population. Invoking the traditional English identification of civility with obedience, savagery with rebellion, Rothe argues that those of Gaelic stock, who were 'once somewhat disobedient and stubborn', had recently become 'sufficientlii civilized and secure for 'subiectione' to King James (p. 189).

Finally, an alternative option open to Irish Catholics after the Tudor conquest is illustrated by Clare Carroll's richly comparative study of the first published history of Catholic Ireland, Philip O'Sullivan Beare's *Compendium* (Lisbon, 1621). The *Compendium* reflects the views of the substantial Irish emigre community in Spain: it recounts the continual Irish resistance to English aggression from Laudabiliter to the Spanish Armada, calls for (Hiberno-Spanish) Catholic solidarity against the heretics, and urges a crusade to reverse the recent unjust conquest and expel the English, so restoring Ireland to her former glory.

At this point the reader looks for a conclusion to draw together the findings of individual essays. Even a short bibliography might have been instructive in this context. It seems fair to assume, however, that the volume's chosen themes, as outlined in individual essays, do at least reflect the editor's assessment of what constituted the most important developments in terms of political ideology. The key to an understanding of the volume's agenda is in fact the editor's introduction. At the outset, Morgan identifies what he describes as 'a political problem' – 'whether and how Irish Studies should be connected with the "New British History" project' (p. 7)? The title, *Political ideology in Ireland*, appears to sidestep this difficulty. Three chapters (by Morgan, Canny, and Lennon) do indeed advert *en passant* to those ideas which were most closely associated with English and British patterns of state formation. Yet there is no sustained analysis of them, even though the focus of most essays in the volume is actually on *English* political ideas with reference to Ireland and the Irish.

What is missing here is some discussion of two basic sets of ideas underpinning English perceptions of Tudor Ireland. The first, which can be traced back to William of Malmesbury writing c.1125, is the characteristically English distinction between civil and savage peoples on grounds of material culture, so allowing the course of English history to be represented as the triumph of civilization over barbarism. English expansion into 'the Celtic fringe' was accordingly justified on the grounds of the need to promote English civility (notably towns, tillage, and commerce) among the savage peoples living in idleness and brutality in their woods and bogs.[3] In an Irish context, the key texts are the writings of Giraldus Cambrensis sixty years later: Morgan's second introductory essay does indeed provide an instructive discussion of Giraldus's continuing influence on New and Old English writers in Elizabethan Ireland, but not of this broader English context. More surprisingly, the volume also lacks a discussion of another set of ideas which also reflected in part England's medieval experience of empire and which reached its apogee in an Irish context in the erection of Ireland into a kingdom and the surrender and regrant initiative. This concerned the alleged ability of the common law and English administrative structures to work a reformation of society in 'the dark corners of the land'. The presumption was confirmed most recently by the early Tudor experience of the revival of strong government and the growth of 'civil society' following the Wars of the Roses. And as Brendan Bradshaw and Ciaran Brady have both argued elsewhere,[4] English initiatives towards Ireland in Henry VIII's later years likewise reflected a heightened optimism in official circles about the ability of English government to work a similar reformation in Ireland. In essence, therefore, through its inclusion or omission of central themes, the volume offers a striking, if unintended, demonstration of how the influence of modern ideologies can also shape the agenda for studying past ideologies.

The editor's 'historiographical introduction' is effectively a catalogue of writings on early modern Ireland since Richard Stanyhurst in 1577, with occasional com-

ments on the background of earlier writers. For the very recent past, there are some entertaining,ˆÃknockabout' comments concerning the revisionist debate among Irish historians. We learn, for instance, of Bradshaw and Canny being 'pulverized' by Brady, that Canny and Brady thenˆÃexchanged blows' elsewhere, and that following 'the Canny-Brady set-to', Spenser had 'grown like Topsy' (pp 17, 18, 19). Yet the reader gains no sense of the fundamental issues about the writing of Irish history which have been raised by this debate, and the editor's own opinions are indicated chiefly by way of inclusion and omission of individual historians.

A second reason for the volume's uneven quality may be, as Morgan's introductory comments imply, its difficult gestation. Originally intended asˆÃthe first of the three seminars on ideology in Ireland between 1500 and 1800', the seminar was held in autumn 1995 under the titleˆÃText and Conquest: political ideology in Ireland, 1570-1630'. That, since then,ˆÃsome of the original speakers have dropped out and other young Turks have come to the fore' (pp. 7, 8) is presumably why the chronology was revised yet again. The resultant volume thus covers much of the same ground as the second Folger Seminar, on Political Thought in Seventeenth-Century Ireland, held in May 1997. The earlier delays perhaps also provide an underlying explanation for the rather elastic character of the volume's editorial direction. The ˆÃchapters' are unnumbered: some have subtitles, some just numbered sections, some are undivided. Sometimes quotations are modernized, and there are other inconsistencies in spelling and terminology.

Overall, therefore, this is a volume whose contents are very firmly weighted towards events from the Nine Years War (1594-1603) to the Ulster rising, and a particular slant on them. Very little space is given to mainstream Tudor developments. And this in turn creates a serious difficulty for the non-specialist reader, that the Tudor background and context remains unexplained. To conclude that a different editor would have assembled a different collection of essays is to offer no more than a truism; but in this case the volume is so far from offering a balanced analysis of the period's writings that the present reviewer was left wondering whether its eccentricities chiefly reflected the difficulties involved in transforming seminar papers into a representative volume or the editor's 'political problem' with the British dimensions of Irish history.

Notes

[1], Printed, respectively, in *Harleian Miscellany*, vi (1734), pp 402-28; *Analecta Hibernica*, ii (1931), pp 93-291 (quotations, pp 96, 121).

[2]. R.L. Thomson, ed., *Foirm na n-Urrnuidheadh: John Carswell's Gaelic translation of the Book of Common Order* (Edinburgh, 1970).

[3]. See esp. John Gillingham,ˆÃFoundations of a disunited kingdom' in A. Grant and K.J. Stringer, ed., *Uniting the kingdom? The making of British history* (London, 1995), pp 59-60.

[4]. Brendan Bradshaw, *The Irish constitutional revolution of the sixteenth century* (Cambridge, 1979); Ciaran Brady, *The chief governors: the rise and fall of reform government in Tudor Ireland, 1536-1588* (Cambridge, 1994).

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