

MARTIAL POWER AND ELIZABETHAN POLITICAL CULTURE: MILITARY MEN IN ENGLAND AND IRELAND, 1558–1594. By Rory Rapple. Pp 350. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2009. £60.

The failures of English interventions in early modern Ireland are commonly attributed to the difficulties of establishing an effective centralised English governing body, and the recalcitrant Irish chiefs' refusal to submit to Crown authority even in the face of violent military confrontations. However, there is another dimension to the 'Irish problem' that has remained largely unexamined: the existence of a unique Elizabethan military culture in Ireland that not only shaped the tensions between the English Crown and its Irish kingdom but, interestingly, between the queen and her administrative and military governors in Ireland. Rory Rapple's subtitle – *Military men in England and Ireland, 1558–1594* – immediately draws attention to the period the author chooses to cover. One would expect that a book on this topic should include the infamous Nine Years War (1594–1603), a conflict so disastrously unsuccessful until its final phase that it left England on the brink of bankruptcy. This omission, which may initially appear as a shortcoming, is what distinguishes Rapple's book from the proliferation of early modern Irish studies produced over the last few decades.

In the opening chapters of his book, Rapple persuasively argues that our understanding of the final stages of the Tudor conquest is compromised if we overlook the social and political idiosyncrasies that were peculiar to English military men in Ireland *before* the outbreak of the Nine Years War. He acknowledges a thesis that is all too commonly taken for granted: the steady decline of chivalric culture and the influences of Continental humanist ideas rendered warfare for chivalric honour uncivilised and barbaric. The new generation of Elizabethan men of means found more dignity in academic achievements than in military prowess, more honour in courts than on battlefields. In light of this shifting social trend, professional captains and soldiers were often considered to be uncouth and vulgar men corrupted by the lifestyles they adopted during their tour of duty; and in times of peace, idle soldiers were likened to vagabonds.

It is apparent that these two social developments – the emphasis on higher education and the decline of military culture – are clearly not mutually exclusive, but what is less apparent, as Rapple points out, are the results they had for men who were not sent to Oxford or Cambridge (perhaps where such a privilege was reserved for male heirs), and for other martial men who felt unappreciated and marginalised in England. Some of the most prominent English figures in Ireland – William Drury, John Perrot, Nicholas Bagenal, Richard Bingham – were second and third sons. Disillusioned captains and soldiers in England found favour in Ireland, where many believed that a complete conquest could only be achieved through brute force.

The highlight of Rapple's book is the detailed discussion of what constitutes brute force, and, more importantly, who had the authority to decide the extent to which violence was justifiable to preserve the queen's honour. For instance, Sir Nicholas Malby complained to Walsingham that he was unable to defend his troops against a 1579 attack in Munster because he did not have 'imperial crown' authority; his plight is underscored by the death of Lord Justice of Ireland Sir William Drury. This incident presents a stark contrast to Humphrey Gilbert's notorious 1569 Munster campaign where men, women and children were ruthlessly massacred, and those held captive made to shuffle on their knees through streets strewn with the heads of their kinsmen. Gilbert's defence was not an uncommon one: he was merely exerting the authority given to him in his commission, and his actions were motivated by his reverence for the queen, even as Elizabeth discouraged unnecessary bloodshed of this sort for practical and financial reasons.

Rapple's extensive use of the state papers reveals that authority was ultimately a question of interpretation. Gilbert's patent granted him the 'discretion' to 'treat, parley with any traitor, rebel or outlaw, when and, as often as shall seem good for the service of her Majesty' (p. 210). There were no explicit outlines of the precise nature of what 'discretion' entailed,

leaving interpretations of royal authority open to corruption, abuse and misrepresentation to the detriment of the local Irish community and the queen's advisors, both in Whitehall and within the Irish administrative body of the Pale. Moreover, the tumultuous conditions in Ireland made the specifications of the military leaders' commissions somewhat irrelevant since royal authority – however broad or narrow its limitations – had little practical use on the battlegrounds. Rapple's explorations of the power struggles between military leaders and their patrons, and their obligations to the long-distance relationship with their superiors in England, amplify an irony that is still under-examined: the difficulties of setting up a functional centralised government in Ireland, perhaps, had less to do with the resistance of Irish rebels than with the internal decentralisation of an already splintered English authority.

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SCOTLAND AND THE ULSTER PLANTATIONS: EXPLORATIONS OF THE BRITISH SETTLEMENTS OF STUART IRELAND. Edited by W. P. Kelly and J. R. Young. Pp 165. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2009. €49.50. (Ulster and Scotland Series)

With the approach of the four-hundredth anniversary of the 'official' plantation of Ulster, as the series editors note in the preface (p. 7), 'this volume seeks to make an important historiographical contribution to that event'. With a star-studded line-up of fine historians, such a volume cannot fail to impress, at least from the historiographical perspective. Give someone like the masterful Ciaran Brady an opportunity to 'explore a comparatively neglected and under examined topic' (p. 41), and an intellectual gourmet feast is almost certain to be served up. It is a great pity, therefore, that the editorial dimension to the book, by contrast, leaves much to be desired. Errors can happen, but when it comes to a statement such as the 'early seventeen century ought to be viewed as a another phase' (p. 83) – a far from isolated example – as well as the potential confusion resulting from the publisher's house style which sees footnote numbering revert to 1 after 100 (p. 105), boundaries of tolerance are being stretched. It is to be hoped that these matters will be addressed in the promised future volumes in the series.

In terms of the subject matter of the volume, Alison Cathcart's revealing essay sets the Scottish involvement in the 'Ulster Plantations' against the background of the 'Scots and Ulster: the late medieval context', the third essay in a strangely arranged volume that begins with an essay dealing with the 1640s. Cathcart is in excellent form when demonstrating the interplay between Scottish and Ulster affairs, not least in detailing the career of a fifteenth-century pretender to the Scottish throne, the unenviably named James 'the fat'. The plantation policy of James I in Ulster is profitably set against a background of his Scottish policies in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, revealing many interesting parallels. His efforts to control Lewis included 'a very clear separation between original inhabitants and the planters' (p. 77), reflected in the segregation principle underpinning the 'official' plantation of Ulster in 1610.

Ciaran Brady's essay entitled 'East Ulster, the MacDonalds and the provincial strategies of Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, 1585–1603' perhaps inevitably catches the eye of the present reviewer. Drawing the conclusion that the 'deeper motivations underlying Hugh O'Neill's conduct in Ulster in the early 1590s will in all probability for ever remain indeterminate', he memorably remarks that the 'inscrutability of his ultimate intentions remains a lasting memorial either to his sheer disingenuousness ... or to his secret commitment to greater ideological causes ... or simply to his own genuine uncertainty amidst the intensely volatile conditions of the time' (p. 55). Prospective biographers of O'Neill beware. Despite such difficulties, Professor Brady's discussion of O'Neill's policies in east Ulster uncovers 'aggression' (p. 55) and 'expansionist' (p. 57) plans. Reminding us of the importance of