

by its courts mean that this neglect has left unexplored important aspects of the development of English law, especially commercial law. Penny Tucker's book provides a solid foundation and an indispensable guide for the many scholars who one hopes will take up the challenge.

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James Kelly, *Poyning's Law and the Making of Law in Ireland, 1660–1800*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007. Pp. 424. €55 (ISBN 978-1-84682-078-2).

This study is focused on a precise, even narrow topic: the procedures which regulated the dealings of the Irish parliament with the administration in Dublin and the government in London. Poyning's Law, enacted in 1494, created a cumbersome procedure by which Ireland's English rulers had to approve any bill before it became law. Thereby, it seemed, both governors and members of parliament in Ireland were subordinated to English wishes. Yet, from the 1690s onwards, a mechanism was devised which allowed greater initiative to the Irish legislature. The process, the framing by MPs of heads of bills which were then vetted by both the Irish and British privy councils, was not free from friction. On the one hand, the Dublin assembly, meeting regularly every two years, resented interference. On their side, the British authorities did not hesitate to amend or stop measures at odds with English interests. In particular, commercial and religious bills fell victim to the differing priorities of Ireland and England.

Kelly, if not altering the fundamentals of the usage, adds enormously to the detail of how it evolved and operated. His entirely innovative analysis of the privy council registers allows him to follow the fate of the many proposals. The proportions amended, suppressed, or returned to Ireland to be enacted are established and tabulated. He reveals a growth in the volume of legislation, the declining importance of both the Irish House of Lords and Council, and the incidence of private and public bills. Much of this is minutely technical. However, such is Kelly's skill that the projected laws are incorporated into the larger political histories of Ireland and England. Not only does he exploit the hitherto little-used privy council records, he deploys his formidable knowledge of the newspapers and of the archives of leading politicians. His mastery of the contexts means that this account is effectively a study of parliamentary politics and Anglo-Irish relations over more than a century. As such, it will prove invaluable. The causes of patriotic fervour and of an intermittently torpid parliament are now better understood. Among the many insights are accounts of the lobbyists, particularly Catholics and Quakers, who sought to advance particular causes. Also, he shows how the stubbornness of individuals—for example, law officers in England such as Thurlow and Wedderburn during the 1770s—affected the situation. Similarly, sensitive governors (Buckinghamshire and Carlisle) and their assistants (notably the Chief Secretary William Eden) could smooth the ruffled feathers of the Irish parliamentarians. New light is thrown on the arguments in the Irish council which led in 1757 to a

scheme for Catholic relief being rejected. In many ways, the book provides the fullest and most illuminating account of the Irish parliament between 1660 and 1800.

In addition to his own pioneering researches, Kelly benefits from a collaborative project into the legislation of the Dublin parliament, of which he is joint overseer. The latter investigation encourages him to set his findings in a comparative framework. However, extended comparison is hampered by the small number of analyses of colonial legislatures. The colonial context is the one on which Kelly insists. The formal constitutional dependency of Ireland on England, of which Poyning's Act was a conspicuous part, remained notwithstanding adjustments and accommodations. In time, it may become possible to set the Irish developments alongside those of the provinces and dependencies in Europe's several multiple monarchies. Only then will it be possible to find a satisfactory solution to the paradox of a colony which was a kingdom with its own parliament and which, in 1801, was united with England, Scotland, and Wales: a fate rather different from that in the North American colonies. Meanwhile, thanks to Kelly's meticulous and systematic researches, it is possible, as never before, to appreciate what the Irish legislature achieved, in terms both of bills reaching the statute book and of pragmatic politics.

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Eugenia Lean, *Public Passions: The Trial of Shi Jianqiao and the Rise of Popular Sympathy in Republican China*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. Pp. 304. \$45.00 (ISBN 978-0-520-24718-5).

Eugenia Lean's engaging book explores the implications of a sensational assassination that rocked Republican China in 1935. In the city of Tianjin, a woman named Shi Jianqiao shot a notorious former warlord, Sun Chuanfang, at a public prayer service, and immediately distributed to shocked onlookers a mimeographed manifesto explaining her deed. Her father, an officer in a rival warlord army, had been beheaded by Sun in 1925—and despairing of justice, Shi Jianqiao had finally taken revenge with her own hands and was willing to die herself to prove the righteousness of her cause.

There followed a struggle over what we would call "spin": how to interpret Shi Jianqiao's violent vigilantism, and whether to punish or praise her. Shi herself proved a master at public relations: in her manifesto, jailhouse interviews, and testimony, she consistently presented herself as a filial daughter who had acted out of righteous anger, and also as a patriotic citizen who had given a hated warlord the punishment he deserved. The story made good copy, and via the popular press and entertainment media it captured the public imagination. Newspapers breathlessly reported every development; when facts would not quench the public thirst, they serialized fictional accounts casting Shi Jianqiao as a woman warrior expert at martial arts; and theaters offered dramatized versions of her story that