

depth than has any other writer on the topic to date, but he fails to explain persuasively what caused it. It must be more than his youthful education at the hands of Ursuline nuns, a point by the way, that Orwell never mentioned in any of his writings. Orwell regarded Catholicism as the most doctrinaire Christian faith and thus the most antithetical to his way of thinking. This explains much. And then, maybe part of the answer is as simple as old-fashioned English patriotism, which had viewed Catholicism with suspicion since the days of the Reformation. Still, Orwell's version of such patriotism would likely be complicated.

Brennan has produced an important addition to the field of Orwell studies. His examination of Orwell's writings is thorough and shows a familiarity with the works of the best authorities on his career. It will take its place as the best study of Orwell's complex relationship with religion in its various forms, though it will leave room for further exploration of the topic.

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When faced by seventeen autobiographical essays by one's peers, the temptation to review like with like is of course very strong (and after all, my second book's title, *Empire Made Me*, has confused a reader or two looking for a memoir). Here I sit typing up this review of Antoinette Burton and Dane Kennedy's collection, *How Empire Shaped Us*, fifty-two years old, a product most immediately of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University College London and a couple of postdoctoral fellowships, which involved serendipitous intellectual encounters with peers and mentors. More widely I was a child of the Royal Air Force and its global commitments and network of bases that in my case included Hong Kong, Germany, Cyprus, and Northern Ireland. My family background encompasses an Indian Army officer and educator in Malaya/Malaysia, an archdeacon in Rangoon, a farmer in Rhodesia, and others in the Eastern Cape and in Queensland. And let's not forget the gas fitter Bickers in the Transvaal or the quartermaster at the Sergeants' Mess, RAF Khartoum. Where, after all, would empire be without its gas engineers and quartermasters? I could work this up; indeed, I have used all of them in a lecture for Bristol undergraduates on the routine and unexceptional embeddedness of a family as undistinguished and forgettable as my own—trust me on that last point—in the circuits of empire service and opportunity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, while it served to make that case, I am not really sure it can tell us anything about me, or specifically (and to the point, surely) about the enterprise I have been engaged in since commencing graduate work in 1988. (The Hong Kong connection does at least satisfy those asking the eternal “Why China?” question, although that is a biographical red herring). But such is the stated objective, in regard to seventeen scholars whose essays are assembled here, of this attempt to take the “autobiographical pulse in British imperial history” (1).

The cast is distinguished, if eclectic, and there are some omissions that make it seem a rather random sampling of those prominently engaged in the study of British imperial history whatever that is, here very broadly defined. Of course, some of those invited to contribute apparently declined, and one or two people had, in a sense, got their memoirs in first, including the late Sir Chris Bayly. Bayly's epilogue to his *Origins of Nationality in South Asia* (1998) is an exercise in “informative scholarly autobiography” (Bayly 307) and a model of the kind, at once vividly personal (the accidental “bibulous” encounter (311) and its consequences), and

intellectually candid (he was, he reflected “a liberal with a reluctant penchant for Marxism” [322]). Bayly argued that there was something “potentially valuable” (307) to be learned from such exercises about how knowledge was produced (the trail blazed there, not for the first time for imperial historians, by anthropologists), and about the history of the field and its concerns. The Bayly challenge is taken up here by Burton and Kennedy, although with a handicap or two. For a start, some of the contributors would actually reject the organizing description altogether: empire is certainly not what they do. And who could quibble with that, though we might question where this leaves the editors, and any focus for their enterprise outside their tightly argued and generally interesting introduction. There are certainly some stimulating essays here, not least from John MacKenzie, Roger Louis, Kennedy, and Jonathan Saha, but this highlights most strongly, for me, the power of good writing. We might need to know more about each other, and our students and publics might benefit from knowing more about us. But we certainly need to train our students to write well and to think imaginatively about how to craft the arguments they make about these vital contemporary issues.

The book works as well as might be expected, or perhaps less well, as it is less than tightly edited, despite the rubric set out for the contributors who have it seems largely been allowed to shape their own essays. As a result, the book is an uneven read, with, in one or two cases, such an entire absence of self-reflection that the exercise is quite pointless. Ultimately, we do need to ask whether it tells us anything new about this field (or even if it ever possibly could). Bayly’s essay gains in strength from its context, and from being published alongside essays in which he makes a series of bold arguments. The one mode informs the other. I think the current collection on the one hand too rich, and on the other, actively diminishing the power of some of the contributions by divorcing them from the history work that their life-histories actually inform. I remember how Paul Cohen’s powerful survey *Discovering History in China* (1984) was immeasurably strengthened for me by the autobiographical preface in which he mapped out his three-decade trajectory to the book in hand, and the arguments it presented. Context, I think, is vital.

This lively field best presents itself through the publications and imaginative projects led and shaped by many of those assembled here: Clare Anderson’s Carceral Archipelago project, Catherine Hall’s work on the Legacies of British Slave-Ownership, Roger Louis’s editorial coordination for the Oxford History of the British Empire volumes, and John MacKenzie’s pioneering of the Studies in Imperialism series. Their work, and that of many of those assembled here, undermines the oddly defensive presentation of the field in the introduction. Do we really need to be told that “debates about British imperialism have ramifications that extend well beyond the cloistered walls of academia” (4)? In this obtuse (and hackneyed) presentation of the world of work in which we are all engaged, “arcane historiographical debates” are “sometimes” held within closed academic worlds (5). Reader, I think not. I see no cloisters here on Bristol’s Woodland Road, and I think there were precious few hemming in any of the scholars gathered here either.

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