

Valerie McGowan-Doyle. *The Book of Howth: The Elizabethan Re-Conquest of Ireland and the Old English*.

Cork: Cork University Press, 2011. xvii + 206 pp. €39. ISBN: 978-1-85918-468-4.

Valerie McGowan Doyle's *The Book of Howth* through both careful study of the manuscripts and the arguments significantly contributes to our understanding of early modern Irish history by analyzing this until-now largely misunderstood text as a defense of the Old English position against the policies of the New English. The most famous of those New English settlers in sixteenth-century Ireland, Edmund Spenser, described the Old English (descendents of the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman conquest of Ireland) as "more stubborn and disobedient to law and government than the Irish and more malicious against the English" (*A View of the Present State of Ireland* [1997], 175). The author of the book of Howth, as McGowan-Doyle shows in this closely argued study, went to great pains to reconstruct a history of Ireland that would illustrate the loyalty of the Old English to the crown, the superiority of their counsel to that of the New English, and the devastating effects of the New English Conquest. At the core of this study is the notion of displacement, the hallmark of Christopher St. Lawrence's critique of the New English system of innovation in economic and political practice that he argues is the cause of decline in Ireland.

McGowan-Doyle does a masterful job of contextualizing the Old English tradition of historical writing (chapter 1) in order to distinguish Baron Howth, Christopher St. Lawrence, from his more rebellious and passionately recusant Old English contemporaries. His service to the Dublin administration as ally of many an English lord deputy (although not of Sir Henry Sidney), and his domestic life fraught with scandal are the subjects of a fascinating second chapter. One would hope this chapter-long biography might issue into further work, given the rich character of the research and this material's potential for illuminating the relation between the private and the public in early modern Ireland, a topic about which we still know so little.

A combination of St. Lawrence's checkered career (he was convicted for wife-beating) and the confused state of the nineteenth-century first printed edition of his text contributed to the sense of his and his text's unreliability. The text had been discounted and little analyzed since it was calendared by Brewer and Bullen in 1871 because these editors misconstrued the sequence of scribal hands, and, hence, the sequencing of the narrative history and commentary by the text's compiler, Christopher St. Lawrence. At the center of this study (chapter 3), McGowan-Doyle painstakingly sorts out the actual sequence of folios, reconstructing the order in which the parts of the text were written, which parts were authored directly by

St. Lawrence, and which sources the text is based upon. Her reconstruction of the textual tradition that St. Lawrence quotes and comments upon allows her to show how he perceived parallels between the Norman and the Elizabethan conquests and rebutted the representation of the former by Giraldus Cambrensis and the later by Sir Henry Sidney. She also assesses St. Lawrence's analysis of the colonial conflict (chapter 4): he saw the New English innovations as debilitating to the economy (a cess imposed hardships on tenants and aristocrat alike) and disruptive of the social order (the abolition of coyne and livery legitimated Irish incursions into the Pale). In effect, the New English in displacing the Old English gave rise to the rebellion of the Old Irish.

This text was not always so little known, as chapter 5, dealing with its circulation, proves. Cited, for example, in Camden's *Britannia* (1607), and contested in Sir John Davies's *Discovery of the True Causes Why Ireland Was Never Fully Subdued* (1612), *The Book of Howth* continued to be an important text for such historians of Ireland as the late seventeenth-century Sir Richard Cox and the late eighteenth-century Thomas Leland. The remarkable scholarship of Valerie McGowan-Doyle has restored an understanding of the text of the *Book of Howth* and its important place in the sixteenth-century debate over why the English conquest of Ireland had failed.

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