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across Munster – the region lagged behind relative to English regions and he indicates that Protestants dominated Munster's clubs and societies, though Catholics were involved. He is correct to call for further research on 'regional sociability' which will clarify the extent to which associational culture penetrated the whole island. Regional newspapers, used to good effect by Fleming, Magennis and a number of other authors, undoubtedly have more to offer the willing researcher.

While *Clubs and societies in eighteenth-century Ireland* extends to almost five hundred pages, it has been tightly edited and effectively showcases the current health of eighteenth-century Irish history. Indeed, it is a major work of social history and a significant intervention in the growing international literature on the associational impulse. It presents important insights which should inform the interrelated and contentious debates about the nature of sociability and the applicability of concepts of a public sphere and civil society to Irish history.

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THE LONDON LETTERS OF SAMUEL MOLYNEUX, 1712–13. Edited by Ann Saunders. Pp 168. London: London Topographical Society. 2011. £20.

The Molyneux family flourished in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Ireland. One member – Samuel, son of the more celebrated writer and scientist William Molyneux – made a transition common among successful Irish Protestants. The younger man secured office in England (and Hanover) as secretary to the future George II while Prince of Wales. As a consequence, Molyneux uprooted himself from Ireland and established himself in some opulence in England. There he made a prestigious marriage and collected an impressive library. An extensive archive used for a history of the family published in 1820 has vanished; so too have portraits known until quite recently. These losses have greatly enhanced the value of documents that survive in Southampton. This archive, known only to specialists, has been quarried by Theo Hoppen for his work on the Dublin Philosophical Society. In Queen Anne's reign, Samuel Molyneux, only recently graduated from Trinity College Dublin, resuscitated the society which his father and uncle had helped to create in the 1680s. To this end, he ventured deep into provincial Ireland and made contact with antiquarians and virtuosi.

In 1712, Molyneux arrived in England, en route for Ostend, Antwerp and Hanover. Seven letters from the English visit have now been edited by Anne Saunders, and supplemented with extensive and illuminating commentary by Paul Holden. The result is valuable particularly for Molyneux's responses to sights in and around London. He is, for example, one of the earliest recorded observers of the almost completed St Paul's Cathedral and new work at Hampton Court and Blenheim Palace. He judges the cathedral to have been built 'in the antique Roman manner of architecture' and responds to the dome as its architect had hoped by likening it to the 'vast arch of heaven'. Even so, his response was not uncritical. The variations in the exterior were judged 'very Gothick and unnatural' and the choir, mean. In his letters Molyneux is intermittently opinionated and frustratingly terse. He admired Inigo Jones but not the style of garden and landscape associated with the French baroque. He wonders at paintings, tapestries and cabinets of coins and medals.

If such reactions are the prime value of the letters, they have Irish interest. In part, Molyneux personifies the trend of those who always insisted that they were the English of Ireland to gravitate back to England. At first unfamiliar with the English scene, Molyneux uses Ireland as a standard of comparison. The roads on which he travels south are worse than their Irish equivalents, but improved by turnpiking and signposts. Claret, owing to the war with France, is unobtainable; 'the honour of Ireland' is upheld by comparing the linen

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available in England unfavourably to that at home. London was reckoned to be at least six times larger than Dublin. Its trade generated specialisation as yet unknown in Dublin. However, the streets of Dublin were better lit. Furthermore, Oxford colleges were smaller than Dublin University.

The reports were almost certainly intended for an uncle in Dublin, Sir Thomas Molyneux, a leading physician. The correspondence is predicated on shared interests and knowledge. Samuel Molyneux assumed, for example, that his uncle would know the engravings of the Raphael Cartoons and the gardens at Hampton Court. He despatches to Dublin recent engravings of Blenheim and Heythrop House. In Cambridge, he is impressed by Wren's library for Trinity College, 'as beautiful a shell and disposition for a library as could be'. What can only be guessed is how far the opinions expressed in the letters were shared and deferred to by those still in Ireland. Sir Thomas Molyneux's son, visiting Paris during the 1730s, showed a passionate and informed taste for engravings. Given the extensive contacts within and beyond Ireland of his kindred, this connoisseurship might be regarded as a hereditary attribute.

At the elevated level of the prosperous Molyneuxs and their affinities, lives were organised according to the values and styles in vogue in metropolitan England and across fashionable continental Europe. What can only be speculated is whether Samuel Molyneux's up-to-the-minute accounts affected, even altered, how friends and acquaintances in Ireland built and furnished their houses and landscaped their grounds. What is apparent from the letters is that the young traveller, no doubt quick to learn on tour, arrived already well-equipped with manners and knowledge. The apparent ease with which he was welcomed and accepted into polite society had precedents with others from Ireland, including his own father when travelling during the 1680s, but cannot be assumed to have been universal among émigrés from Ireland. A reversal of the usual stereotype is Molyneux's praise of the hospitality and courtesy that he encountered in England. Only among crotchety Jacobites did the young Molyneux's sententious Whiggism provoke criticism, even placing him under suspicion of being a spy. The latter allegation is not altogether dismissed, since the reasons why this Irish Protestant was taken up by the Marlboroughs are unknown, as also his mission to, and subsequent employment at, the electoral court in Hanover. The welcome availability of the letters in this helpful edition prompts many questions, notably concerning the interactions between Ireland, England and continental Europe.

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A CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE IRISH NOVEL, 1790–1829. By Claire Connolly. Pp xi, 269. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2011. £55.

Writing in 1913, Lady Gregory complained that the problem with Maria Edgeworth was her distant, 'bird's eye view' of an Irish landscape starved of close representation. Claire Connolly's book aims to challenge this opinion and prove instead that Edgeworth and her companion novelists of the Romantic period were fully attentive to a material and political landscape; to the facts, and not simply the *idea*, of the Ireland in which they lived. To this end, Connolly rejects quantitative 'survey' tactics in favour of intimate textual interpretation, an initiative guaranteed to warm the hearts of those readers who, exhausted by a decade of valiant archival cataloguing in Irish literary studies, are in broad agreement with her opening salvo – that 'we are richer in data than in the means to deal with it' (p. 18). Wisely, she aims to intervene between the high road of theoretical overview and the low pathways of forensic data-basing in order to return to what looks, at times, like an appealingly old-fashioned new historicist engagement with the genre. Parallel tactics see her politely sidestep several recent

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