

philosophy' (p. 21), while Magdalena Kozluk's descriptive piece uses single treatises and compilations contained in the Worth collection to explore early eighteenth-century attitudes to syphilis and the search for a cure. Included by Kozluk is a very helpful hand-list of works in the library dedicated to the disease.

Howard Caygill's contribution concerns the role of medicine in the philosophy of René Descartes, while Sachiko Kusakawa's wonderfully-illustrated essay examines Edward Worth's copy of Andreas Vesalius's *De fabrica humani corporis*, a sixteenth-century work reprinted in 1725. Kusakawa argues that Vesalius's book stresses the importance of dissection and bones to medicine and its stylised and detailed illustrations perform the dual role of an anatomical teaching tool and vehicle for artistic expression.

This is a thematically and chronologically disparate collection and some contributions are perhaps not as historiographically grounded as they might have been. However these shortcomings are mitigated by the fact that this is a work produced by largely non-historians from a wide variety of disciplines. More importantly, the book demonstrates the possibilities of further academic study within the fields of early modern 'science', philosophy and medicine using the Worth collection. Furthermore, it comes at a time of increased historical interest in the rise of print culture in the early Irish Enlightenment and in the history of the book in general. The collection should also be commended for the inclusion of a number of excellent black and white illustrations, a particularly welcome addition as the early history of medicine in Ireland is not well provided for in terms of easily available, contemporary imagery.

ANDREW SNEDDON

*School of English and History, University of Ulster*

THE TWO UNIONS: IRELAND, SCOTLAND, AND THE SURVIVAL OF THE UNITED KINGDOM, 1707–2007. By Alvin Jackson. Pp xiii, 467. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2011. £35.

The Scottish National Party (S.N.P.) leader and current First Minister of Scotland, Alex Salmond, is fond of suggesting parallels between himself and Parnell, and of quoting the not unambiguous statement by Parnell in 1890 that no man had the right to block the march of a nation. Indeed the quote adorned the frontispiece of the S.N.P.'s 'National Conversation' document issued soon after it took power in Edinburgh as a minority government in 2007. Now Salmond looks forward to a referendum verdict in favour of breaking a political union that has lasted since 1707.

Salmond's curiosity about Parnell is reason enough to prompt questions about the two Unions, that of Scotland and the Irish one of 1801. How do the two experiences of union compare? Given the current political pre-eminence of Salmond and his party, could what is left of the Irish Union outlast the more illustrious Scottish example?

As Alvin Jackson notes in this distinguished book, there has been little in the way of scholarly comparative appraisals of the two unions. Indeed, as he justifiably observes, modern historians have been reluctant to identify links and points in common, particularly political historians (p. 22). Jackson sets out to provide a rigorous comparative treatment of the Irish and Scottish experience of union, and to explain why both have endured, if only partly in the Irish case.

The result is a richly textured work by a historian at the top of his game. Jackson's command of the historiographical debates pertaining to a daunting range of periods and issues in the history of the two unions, and his lucidly argued judgements and insights combine to put this book in pole position in the area of comparative historical studies concerning these islands. It is a book that could hardly have been timelier given the amount of speculation and conjecture surrounding the possible effects of independence

for Scotland on the position of Northern Ireland. It brought many people up short when former Ulster Unionist leader Sir Reg Empey wondered aloud if Scotland's departure from the union might 're-ignite' the conflict in Northern Ireland; yet on reflection such a fear cannot be dismissed as outlandish.

Jackson reprises to some extent his previous work on the reasons for the Union's survival in Ireland until the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922. He shows how the same institutional bulwarks that underpinned the Scots Union – parliament, monarchy, armed forces, empire – also helped to regularise the Union project in Ireland; the long-standing strengths of Union – its flexibility and capacity to accommodate – applied in the Irish case as well as the Scottish, if to a significantly lesser extent. He is as adept at assessing the role of the railways in the functioning of the Union as he is at delineating the contribution of intellectuals to the 'commonsense' around it. On Scotland, Jackson wisely builds on the insights of historians such as Graeme Morton and Colin Kidd around the blurring of the unionist and nationalist borders in the country's modern political thought. The subtleties of unionist politics in Scotland are well caught. As Jackson valuably points out, civil society in Ireland did not serve, as in Scotland, to defuse separatism (pp 213–14).

The book is marked by colourful depictions of Scottish and Irish political culture at various points in time. One such, drawing on the records of the Western Conservative Club in Edinburgh in the Edwardian era, conjures a world where the Nicky Fairbairns of the day drank and frolicked. In fact, as Jackson hints, it was Labour that was more serious in its commitment to Union in Scotland as the twentieth century wore on. Certainly, it is only now becoming clear how valuable Labour's 'constructive unionism' has been to the U.K.

In this connection Jackson might have said more about key figures such as Donald Dewar who was responsible for the legislation delivering devolution to Scotland at the end of the twentieth century. Dewar, in political science terms, believed in a 'union state' that was de-centralist and accommodated diversity. This version of the U.K. as opposed to the 'unitary' model that fetishised Westminster sovereignty and basked in Diceyan nostalgia, has prevailed, although the question remains whether it has laid the ground for an ultimate break-up. Regardless of this, the 'union state' or small 'u' unionism school that advanced the case for devolution and quasi-federalism in the late twentieth century paid more attention to Northern Ireland's place in the union; moreover, its advocates often argued for a deeper, more expansive notion of citizenship. Jackson joins many others in seeing little credible ideological content in unionism. It would have been intriguing if he had addressed the arguments for union that have identified virtues in the U.K.'s state of 'permanent negotiation', and have stressed the desirability of a polity which involves such diversity especially given the way the largest and as yet undeveloped part of it – England – is by far the most diverse ethnically and culturally.

GRAHAM WALKER

*School of Politics, International Studies and Philosophy, Queen's University Belfast*

THE IRISH COUNTRY HOUSE: ITS PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE. Edited by Terence Dooley and Christopher Ridgway. Pp 268, illus. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2011. €55.

The jacket design of *The Irish country house: its past, present and future* incorporates two images of Clonbrock House, Galway. The country house of the past provides an illustrious backdrop to a wedding party. However, hopes of a fecund future appear unrealised in the ivy-clad corpse of Clonbrock today. Both images set the tone for this chronologically-expansive volume of essays jointly edited by Terence Dooley and Christopher Ridgway. Comprised of eleven chapters, thirty-eight illustrations, and a foreword from R. V.