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Reviews and short notices

PROMOTING 'ENGLISH CIVILITY' IN TUDOR IRELAND: IDEOLOGY AND THE RHETORIC OF DIFFERENCE. By Carla Lessing. Pp 256. Hannover: Wehrhahn Verlag. 2021. €28.

Ever since the sixteenth century itself scholars have been aware that Tudor commentators in Ireland employed an argument that the Irish were uncivilised by comparison with their own form of Renaissance civility in order to justify the conquest of the country. However, often this discussion of civility, or what Carla Lessing calls the 'rhetoric of difference' in her new book, has been more alluded to in studies of Tudor Ireland than studied in depth. Lessing's book, *Promoting 'English civility' in Tudor Ireland: ideology and the rhetoric of difference*, sets out to provide a more systematic analysis of how this 'rhetoric of difference' functioned.

The book's structure allows for such a systematic analysis. After a brief overview of the historiography and the 'rhetoric of difference' as a concept, the bulk of the book is divided into four major chapters. These assess how the concept of civility was created by the English in Ireland; how it was legitimised; how it was expressed; and, finally, what the consequences of it were. For instance, chapter 3 on the 'Creation of civility' presents an analysis of how the English in sixteenth-century Ireland constructed an image of Irish incivility by focusing on the supposed backwardness of their legal system; their alleged nomadism; lack of tillage farming; clothing; language; and several other cultural demarcators. Then chapter 4 on the 'Legitimisation of civility' moves on to provide an extended assessment of how English writers defended their own intervention in sixteenth-century Ireland. For instance, one argument was the idea that English people had attained a greater level of civility than the Irish centuries earlier by virtue of Britain having been part of the Roman Empire.

Some of this provides fascinating insights. For instance, the argument used by Tudor Englishmen in Ireland that the country could rightfully be colonised as it had been granted to King Henry II by the Papal bull *Laudabiliter* of 1155 is well known to historians. But Lessing provides fresh insights into it, notably the fact that prior to his becoming Pope Adrian IV, Nicholas Breakspear had visited Sweden in 1153, during a period when the Swedes were undertaking the initial conquest of Finland. Lessing supposes that this experience shaped how Adrian conceived of Ireland in relation to England when it came to issuing the *Laudabiliter*. However, in places sections of the book rehash details of how the Irish were considered barbaric that were detailed extensively in the 1960s by D. B. Quinn and more recently by John Montano and others. That said, perhaps such re-walking of familiar territory is justifiable in a book which aims at a holistic study of the topic.

One of the major strengths of Lessing's work is a comparative study, which runs throughout the book, of Swedish approaches to Finland with English involvement in Ireland. The entwinement of Sweden with Finland also began in the mid twelfth century. In the centuries that followed the Swedes developed a 'rhetoric of difference' regarding the Finns in an effort to delegitimise their culture and their right to their own land, one which was extremely similar to that employed by English observers in Ireland. In both instances the argument was that the Finns and the Irish were crude, irreligious and dwelt in the woods and caves, modes of life which justified the use of force against them by a more civilised polity. The array of similarities between English and Swedish activity in both regions is striking, which makes the few areas in which the experiences of the Irish and the Finns diverged all the more intriguing. Notably, the Finns adopted Lutheranism very quickly after it had become dominant in Sweden, whereas the Irish remained obstinate in their Catholicism.

Criticisms could be made of Lessing's book in other respects. Clarity is sometimes sacrificed in the name of overtly academic language. Thus, for instance, we hear that 'English

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civility shall be referred to in the sense of a *Forschunsbegriff* as a condensate of various discourses that are knowledge-sociologically determined and separate from each other' (p. 93). There are a good many other instances like this in the book. One could also quibble that a large number of the Tudor commentators on Ireland, such as Edmund Spenser, William Herbert and Richard Beacon, whom Lessing cites regularly, are very well known, whereas recourse to less well-known works in manuscript, or works only published from manuscript editions in recent years, would have yielded more novel information. However, this is balanced out by the span of time the texts Lessing has consulted cover. There is use of works from the oft-neglected reign of Henry VII right through to James I and a wider range of other less well-known works which went through the London press in the sixteenth century are also used to good effect.

Overall, this is a significant study on the 'rhetoric of difference' and how Tudor observers in Ireland used it to justify their actions. Readers who are familiar with the relevant literature may find some of the topics Lessing covers quite well known to them, but this is in the nature of a study which aims for a holistic overview. Conversely, substantial sections break new ground in assessing how the 'rhetoric of difference' was constructed, legitimised and used, while the comparative study of Swedish involvement in Finland is a major strength of Lessing's work. As such *Promoting 'English civility' in Tudor Ireland* makes a significant contribution to the study of sixteenth-century Ireland.

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The case of Ireland: commerce, empire and the European order, 1750–1848. By James Stafford. Pp 298. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2022. £75 hardback.

James Stafford's book sets out to reorient the study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Irish political thought in two ways. First, it turns away from the questions about nationality and religion which have long dominated the scholarship, to focus instead on problems of commerce and empire. Secondly, it asks what is revealed when Irish debates are treated in relation to British and continental European discussions of Irish politics. These innovations, Stafford suggests, open up an 'entirely new perspective' on Irish political thinking, and on Ireland as a subject in the history of modern political thought (p. 3). *The case of Ireland* argues that Ireland was, in fact, a 'central' problem in a sequence of seminal European debates about mercantile empire and international order in the turbulent century between the Seven Years War and the revolutions of 1848 (p. 258). Some gentle questions might be asked about these assertions of 'centrality'. But the book clearly demonstrates that Ireland was a distinctive and instructive problem in the political thought of the period it covers. This is an immensely suggestive, innovative and imaginative monograph.

The book's centre of gravity lies in the later eighteenth century and the 'age of revolutions', but it reaches further back and forward in time. The analysis proceeds chronologically. Chapter 1 offers a substantive treatment of the tract from which it borrows its title, William Molyneux's 1698 *The case of Ireland*, which responded to an English campaign to restrict Irish woollen exports, before moving on to mid eighteenth-century 'enlightenment' critiques of British rule in Ireland, as outlined by figures including Montesquieu, Adam Smith and Josiah Tucker. The second chapter examines debates about commerce, slavery and Pitt the Younger's abortive 1785 commercial propositions amid the altered constitutional circumstances of 1776–87. The rest of the book is, in different ways, about responses to the French Revolution of 1789, and the wars, conquests and imaginative possibilities to which it gave rise. Chapter 3, on 1789 to 1803, is mainly about how the United Irishmen rethought the future of their country in the shadow of the Bastille and the Directory. Chapter 4, covering the years from 1798 until 1801, is about how the union with Great Britain was conceptualised and sold at that critical conjuncture, a problem Stafford has