

landed estates, etiquette, visiting friends, entertainments, and so on and so forth. Her chapter on politics shows that, while elite women clearly occupied a 'subordinate' position, they were by no means marginalised and played a more important role than is usually allowed. Elite women did not, she insists, 'stand on the political sidelines. Throughout the period they influenced politics, and politics influenced them. Events like the Glorious Revolution merely gave them greater scope to act and brought their activities into sharper focus.' Again, in the field of philanthropy – the establishment of hospitals, charity schools, and the like – their contribution 'was considerably greater than has previously been revealed'. All in all, their importance 'was manifested in different ways to that of men, but was no less real, for the creation of a new ruling order, composed of members of the country's minority religion, required a group effort in which these ladies had a key role'.

Two minor points: the references to manuscripts in the bibliography are sometimes excessively terse, while the fact that, in the opening quotation to the first chapter, a 'Miss Burton' is mentioned without a first name does not, as Wilson seems to think, suggest any brusqueness, for, should she have been the eldest or only daughter, this was precisely the correct form to use – only younger daughters would have had their first names indicated (see Jane Austen, herself a younger sister). But these are minor quibbles in relation to a book which is consistently interesting and which makes a real and important contribution to Irish history and to the history of women generally.

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UTOPIANISM IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY IRELAND. By Deirdre Ní Chuanacháin. Pp xi, 260. Cork: Cork University Press. 2016. €39 hardback.

This rich and interesting book argues not just for the importance of utopian themes in eighteenth-century Irish writing, but also for the existence of a 'utopian propensity' in Irish culture from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries.

Ní Chuanacháin's first chapter reviews various taxonomies of the concept of utopia, leaning on the work of Lyman Tower Sargent, Timothy Millar, Philip Gove, James T. Presley and others. For example, Sargent settled on nine types of utopia, ranging from unreal societies that were intended as models for the improvement of one's own, to satires on the concept of the ideal society, to real communities of people seeking to live in an improved manner. Ní Chuanacháin decides that a literary utopia must have three elements to merit the name: the society described must be unreal; this unreal society must undergo evaluation by the author; and finally this literary construct must encourage new thinking about the real society in which the author and his or her readers live (p. 23).

Succeeding chapters review a wide range of texts moving across genres and languages. Chapter two tackles *aisling* poetry, narratives of journeys to Hy Brasil, Michael Comyn's *Laoi Oisín ar Tír na nÓg*, and later eighteenth-century accounts of disappearing islands. The next short chapter introduces George Berkeley, bishop of Cloyne, and argues for a 'utopian impulse' common to Berkeley and Dublin's philosophical clubs. Ní Chuanacháin suggests that utopianism constituted a 'structure of feeling', something less concrete than a worldview or ideology, in 1720s and 1730s Dublin. Chapter four juxtaposes a treatment of Berkeley's plans for a settlement in Bermuda, which was to contribute to the evangelisation of the British colonies in North America, with Theobald Wolfe Tone's plan for a British military colony in the Pacific. Chapter five explores societies of the upper atmosphere and moon, as described by Jonathan Swift, Murtagh McDermot, Margaret King Moore, Countess Mountcashel, Francis Gentleman, and others. Chapter six is devoted entirely to Samuel Madden's *Memoirs of the twentieth century* (1733). This remarkable work described a world in

which the Jesuits had achieved a world monopoly on spectacle-making (which allowed them to control what was read), and Laplanders in the service of the Russian Tsar had learned how to manufacture sunlight. Ní Chuanacháin concludes by arguing that this eighteenth-century utopianism had a legacy extending into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, ranging across John Scott Vandeleur's cooperative experiment on his estate in County Clare in the 1830s and James Connolly's socialist pamphlets.

Ní Chuanacháin is certainly right to note that eighteenth-century Irish people were developing new ways of thinking about the relationship between past, present, and future: this turn to the future was a new development apparently common to all Europeans. Traditionally, Europeans who advocated natural societal change employed the language of restoration and reform: they sought to return to an idealised past. Historians follow J. G. A. Pocock in labelling this 'ancient constitution' discourse. Some medieval and early-modern Europeans did look hopefully to the future, but this was a future dominated by supernatural inventions like the second coming of Christ, the millennium, and the end of this natural world.

Nevertheless, Ní Chuanacháin is not quite as precise about what her authors thought they were doing as one might wish. For example, her own threefold definition of utopia does not fit Comyn's *Laoi Oisín* particularly well: it is not clear that Comyn attempted to evaluate *Tír na nÓg* to any extent, and neither is it clear that any of Comyn's contemporaries were encouraged to think anew about Ireland by the example of this unreal society. In fact, Ní Chuanacháin does not explore the reception of these constructs that she identifies as utopias, so it is difficult to tell what function they served in eighteenth-century society. And without an analysis of reception we cannot be sure that what we are looking at is a utopian tradition, rather than a series of unconnected utopian moments: Vandeleur, for example, appears to have been ignorant of the eighteenth-century authors who dominate this study. Moreover, Ní Chuanacháin chose not to identify non-utopian ways in which contemporaries spoke about societal change. Some brief mention of alternative ways of urging change might perhaps have sharpened our understanding of her utopian category. For example, the *aisling* verse that Ní Chuanacháin treats might seem in some ways to belong to older ways of speaking about time rather than to some new utopian impulse. Ní Chuanacháin quotes Breandán Ó Buachalla's characterisation of *aisling* verse as involving the restoration of the Stuart kings and the Catholic nobility, the re-establishment of the Catholic church, and the rehabilitation of the Gaelic intellectual elite (p. 26). This sounds much more akin to an Irish ancient constitution than a utopian way of speaking new to the eighteenth century. On the other hand, Ó Buachalla appears to suggest that there was an element of partly secularised millenarianism to typical *aisling* verse: perhaps the relationship between Irish utopianism and the Christian supernatural is something that Ní Chuanacháin might explore in the future.

Ní Chuanacháin's study raises many stimulating questions about the theories and discourses of human society employed in eighteenth-century Ireland, and it should be of interest to all scholars of early-modern Ireland and students of utopianism in general.

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CHARLES O'CONNOR OF BALLINAGARE: LIFE AND WORKS. Edited by Luke Gibbons and Kieran O'Connor. Pp 286. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2015. €55.

Perhaps the most surprising thing about Charles O'Connor of Ballinagare from the perspective of the present day is that we still lack a good modern biography. Of course