

Purgatory. The authors make fun of indigenous religious practices, diet, dress and housing, and of the clergy, physicians and lawyers. Attachment to St Patrick, potatoes and shamrocks is already strong. Much of the humour may be too earthy and crude to amuse many today. Even so, the elaboration of stereotypes of the native Irish, while they may not have originated with these compositions, could have been entrenched more deeply by the verses. Some of the episodes and characterization do little more than recycle well-established prejudices, but arresting local details are added. Reaction against the irksome intrusions of the puritanical Cromwellians is apparent – ‘no [church] wardens or rigid loons to spoil our Sunday afternoons’.

Mysteries about authorship, readership and circulation remain, as Carpenter readily admits (although he has done much to try to solve them). The itch to versify was felt powerfully and indulged by pupils at grammar schools, graduates of the university, and by trainee and qualified lawyers. All, through their education, were steeped in the classical canon on which the travesties were based and were practised in composing in the standard metres (here tetrameter) through their routine academic exercises. How far poetizing extended beyond these convivial groups into the generality of English-speaking settlers is mysterious. Less certain too is the audience for such works in Ireland, even around and in Dublin. What might – owing to its length and monotony – weary a reader, in oral recital scampered along, and listeners need not give total attention. Intermittent passages of vividness and vigour would rouse the somnolent. At their most inventive, the lines prefigure the lexical surfeit of Flann O’Brien. The absence of early Irish printings of the verses, together with the London location of the publisher of *The Irish Hudibras* in 1689, should perhaps warn that the market within Ireland remained small. Undoubtedly there were coteries in which effusions of this kind circulated, and indeed had probably begun. The essentially derivative and imitative characteristics marked another puzzling verse miscellany that had its Irish recensions: *The Counter-Scuffle*. In at least one version of the latter (published in 1684), those high in the English administration of Ireland were involved. By making *Purgatorium* and the *Travesty* readily accessible, Professor Carpenter has greatly eased the task for those wanting to investigate the rollicking literary cultures of later Stuart Ireland, the evocations of ‘Shamrogshire’, and their relationship with those of the neighbouring island.

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POSSESSED BY THE DEVIL: THE REAL HISTORY OF THE ISLANDMAGEE WITCHES AND IRELAND’S ONLY MASS WITCHCRAFT TRIAL. By Andrew Sneddon. Pp 222. Dublin: History Press of Ireland. 2013. €15.30.

Andrew Sneddon is bidding fair to become the leading expert on the trials for witchcraft in early modern Ireland, though that is a distinction worn among a small company, as the Irish trials were, famously, few. That at Carrickfergus, County Antrim, in 1711, provoked by events on nearby Islandmagee, was the largest of them, with a total of nine people eventually convicted. It is also one of the best-documented in the British Isles, a long contemporary account being supported by letters, depositions and local administrative records. It was also the last successful prosecution for witchcraft in Ireland (and the only one to convict a male defendant), though the law, which enabled it, actually remained in force until 1821. These qualities make it a very suitable subject for a book-length case-study, which Sneddon now richly provides.

Certainly it is a good story, complete with a villain, a young gentlewoman called Mary Dunbar, who manifested dramatic symptoms of demonic possession and insisted that they resulted from bewitchment. She described her persecutors in detail, enabling the arrest of

local individuals who corresponded to these descriptions and had existing bad reputations and often physical deformities. Sneddon suggests plausibly that she was advised in choosing her victims – none of whom she had previously met herself – by an accomplice in her household, and here he points the finger tentatively at a maidservant called Margaret Spears. The latter was suspiciously closely associated with dramatic series of poltergeist activities which had recently beset the household concerned, and were associated with the death of its mistress. Spears was sole witness to many, and present during most, though Sneddon acknowledges that this was not true of all. Dunbar convinced most of the community of Islandmagee, Presbyterian Scots who had brought a fear of witchcraft from their native land. The local minister took a leading role in prosecution, supported by a Church of Ireland clergyman and the mayor of the nearest town, Carrickfergus. This credulity among the key local officials enabled the case to be brought to a secular court, where the accused would have been sentenced to death had not one of the judges been sympathetic and arranged matters so that they were tried on less lethal charges. As it was, they were gaoled and pilloried, which was quite bad enough.

As a good historian, Sneddon not only tells the tale well but puts it into context, especially the political one. He shows that, as in England, the case was caught up in partisan rivalry. It reversed the English pattern, however, in that it was Whigs who drove on the prosecution and Tories who expressed scepticism; a proof that party attitudes to witchcraft were largely opportunist and situational. Sneddon's subtitle of the 'real' history suggests a bellicose attitude towards some fellow writers, and to some extent this is sustained. He rebukes other scholars for not appreciating that demonic possession was central to the Islandmagee case, and for underestimating the number of accusations of witchcraft actually made in Ireland; but since he does not name them it is hard to tell how just this is. At the same time he actually reinforces a sense that the Irish did not much hunt witches, not only by agreeing that the Roman Catholic majority did not, but by showing (valuably) that the Presbyterian Scottish settlers, in sharp contrast to their fellows at home in Scotland, strove to keep accusations out of the criminal courts; it would have been nice had he speculated further on why this might have been. To a reader familiar with witch trials in the English- and Scots-speaking world in the period between 1680 and 1730, what is most striking about the Islandmagee case is its normality, having a similar cast of characters, motivating factors, partisan religious and political factors, demonological aspects and confluence of unusual local circumstances to several of the others. This is itself a helpful revelation, and another achievement for which Andrew Sneddon can be thanked.

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A VERY INDEPENDENT COUNTY: PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS AND POLITICS IN COUNTY ARMAGH, 1750–1800. By C. F. McGleenon. Pp xii, 324. Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2011. £24.99.

Both the freeholders and a majority of those who represented the county during the second half of the eighteenth century revelled in Armagh's reputation as 'a very independent county'. This image was cultivated by the patriot interest, which sought to promote this aspiration as an ideal that others might emulate, but it was in truth largely a product of circumstances. County Armagh was entitled to return six representatives to the Irish House of Commons – two for the county constituency, which was brought into being as a consequence of the shiring in 1605 of the 'territory of Airthir', and two each for the boroughs of Armagh and Charlemont which were incorporated in 1613. As corporation boroughs with an electorate of thirteen burgesses and a handful of borough officials,