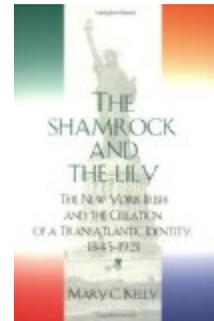


Mary C. Kelly. *The Shamrock and the Lily: The New York Irish and the Creation of a Transatlantic Identity, 1845-1921*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005. xvii + 262 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8204-7453-3.

Reviewed by Bryan McGovern (Department of History, Kennesaw State University)
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Forging a Diverse Irish-American Identity

Mary C. Kelly has added to the vast historiography of the Irish in New York in her monograph, *The Shamrock and the Lily: The New York Irish and the Creation of a Transatlantic Identity, 1845-1921*, by recognizing the contribution of both Catholic (represented by the shamrock) and Protestant (the lily) Irish in forming the expatriate community. Previous examinations of the Irish in the United States have tended to focus almost exclusively on either the Catholic or the Protestant experience. In effect, historians have continued to implicitly endorse what has been called the “Two Traditions” (distinctions made between Protestant and Catholic Irish histories).[1] Despite the divisiveness inherent in such distinctions, we still tend to focus on either Catholic or Protestant identities to help us understand their unique and specific Irish experience. Kelly attempts to bridge this gap (what some might call a chasm) to explore a more inclusive understanding of what it truly meant to be Irish in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century New York, regardless of religious affiliation. Kelly also attempts to demonstrate that the formation of Irish identity in America was unequivocally linked to the motherland. Irish-expatriate identity, she argues, was not distinctly American, but rather a product of a transatlantic process that incorporated Irish events and culture. As she notes, she hopes to “recast the city’s Irish settlement process as a dual-cultural genesis and the logical outcome of the transatlantic connections that produced it” (p. 5).

The importance of Kelly’s work lies in her ability to bring together various factions of Irish-America (men

and women; Protestant and Catholic; lower, middle, and upper class) to form an Irish-American identity that resonated in late nineteenth-century New York. Kelly’s Irish immigrant is not stereotypical because there was no such thing as the typical Irish-American. Rather, she rightfully points out that to truly understand the immigrant experience, we need to examine all the different types of people that left their homes on the Emerald Isle to build new ones in the land of opportunity. Her work is not simply a collection of monographs about the story of the “Scotch-Irish,” Irish women, Irish nationalists, Irish Catholics, etc., but rather a composite examination of a diverse component of nineteenth- and twentieth-century society.

While the book is a welcome addition to our understanding of how immigrant communities were formed in the nineteenth century, I do have some minor reservations about Kelly’s work. First, her introduction contains some unnecessary jargon that has found its way into the study of the Irish diaspora but unfortunately at times obscures more than it illuminates. She describes her work as a “compulsive narrativity” (p. 10) that relies on “settlement axioms” (p. 11). Those unfamiliar with Peter Murphy and Candice Ward’s work on Irish diaspora, or Patrick Ward’s work on Irish emigrant literature would likely be unfamiliar with such terms, and Kelly does not define them to any satisfaction.[2] As historians, I would argue that it is our job to deliver clarity rather than impose other’s theoretical constructs that are often undefined. Fortunately, the majority of the text is much more

clearly elucidated (i.e., readable).

Also, there are some factual errors (or perhaps imprecise statements) that should have been caught by the author and/or her pre-publication readers. For example, the Young Irelander and firebrand Confederate secessionist John Mitchel did not live in New York his first four years, nor did he spend the following seven years in Knoxville (p. 91). Mitchel settled in New York in November 1853 (he first arrived in San Francisco in October of that year after escaping from the Tasmanian penal colony) and then left for the area around Knoxville in early 1855. By late 1858 Mitchel was living in Washington D.C. Also, she claims that Thomas Francis Meagher was a major contributor to *The Citizen* but he wrote only a few articles for that short-lived paper while on a lecture tour in California (p. 92).

Finally, Kelly's book might be confusing for those without a fairly strong background in Irish history. She assumes that the reader is familiar with Home Rule, the Irish National Volunteers, and various incarnations of Irish nationalist movements. The reader might need to peruse a text or dictionary of Irish history as a supplement for *The Shamrock and the Lily*.

Kelly does an excellent job of demonstrating the importance that events in Ireland had on the expatriate community in New York. Kelly examines the transatlantic transplantation of the loyalist Orange Order that allowed Irish Protestants to create a separate identity that was no less Irish than that of Catholics involved in the Ancient Order of Hibernians or the Clan na Gael. Of course, the Irish brought their sectarian feuds to their new home as well. As Kelly correctly asserts, "the two 'traditions' under the New York Irish umbrella exhibited the same characteristics and patterns of behavior as they had engaged in across the Atlantic for centuries past" (p. 83). Although the Protestant evangelicalism of

the North often exacerbated sectarianism, the feud between Irish Protestants and Catholics mirrored a similar situation in Ireland. The anti-Catholic sentiment of New Yorkers, including Irish Protestants, led many clerics (including archbishop John Hughes) to attempt to insulate Irish Catholics from mainstream American society through the creation of strictly Catholic institutions such as parochial schools and fraternal organizations.

Despite these flaws, Kelly makes a notable contribution to the field of Irish immigration and provides a model for historians of all immigrant groups to follow in the future. Her ability to include various subsets within larger groups over time demonstrates the fluidity and complex nature of immigration and immigrants that allows readers to get past the stereotypes of certain groups of people.

Notes

[1]. Kerby Miller succinctly defines the "Two Traditions" as the historical and political notion that Ireland has been and continues to be "two separate ethno-religious groups with distinct historical experiences and sharply conflicting interests, outlooks, and political cultures. One is Gaelic, Catholic, nationalist, and 'Irish'; the other is English and Scottish, Protestant, unionist or loyalist, and 'British.'" Kerby Miller, "Ulster Presbyterians and the 'Two Traditions' in Ireland and America," in *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*, ed. J. J. Lee and Marion Casey (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 255.

[2]. Peter Murphy and Candice Ward, "'The Irish Thing': A Conversation on the Australian and American Irish Diaspora, Introduced by Vassilis Lambropoulos," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 98, nos. 1-2 (Winter/Spring 1999): 117-134; and Patrick Ward, *Exile, Emigration and Irish Writing* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2002).

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