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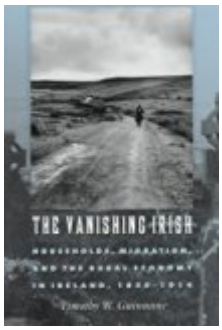

Timothy W. Guinnane. *The Vanishing Irish: Households, Migration, and the Rural Economy in Ireland, 1850-1914.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997. xvii + 335 pp. $39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-691-04307-4.

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Published on EH.Net (August, 1998)

Over the post-Famine years from 1841 to the eve of World War I, the Irish population fell from 8.2 million to 4.1 million--a complete reversal of the rapid population growth of the pre-Famine era. By 1881, nearly 40 percent of the Irish-born were living elsewhere. As late as 1911, with slowing emigration, 33 percent resided elsewhere (p. 104). In studying the why and how of this de-population, Timothy Guinnane (Yale University) examines, at the rural, household level, the decision-making giving rise to major features of that demographic experience: "the rarity of marriage, large families...extensive emigration" (p. 7). None of these features alone, Guinnane argues, were unique to Ireland, but the three in combination were.

Before examining why young Irish people made the decisions about marriage, childbearing, and emigration they did, Guinnane undertakes a survey of the Irish rural economy, the role of the state as well as the "several churches," and the demographic patterns of the post-Famine era. After that survey, there follows a detailed examination of household decision-making and it is here that the full range, subtlety, and depth of analysis come into play. The empirical data available are limited and imperfect. As Guinnane ruefully admits, the empirical circumstance is somewhat similar to the drunk-under-the-lamppost anecdote--searching where the light is best. The specific example of this is the "somewhat unusual procedure of going backward in historical time," i.e. using manuscript census samples from 1901 and 1911 together with tax valuation data to infer individual behavior and decision-making for much earlier, empirically darker, decades (p. 133). However, such data in combination with less detailed, published census material and demographic work done by O Grada, Connell, and others, provide the basis for Guinnane's attempt to "visualize the [economic and demographic] decisions as people of the day saw them." Thus, Guinnane aims for what he notes (quoting Hammel) as "culturally smart microeconomics" (p. 17).

The first step in analysis is with "Households and the Generations," an examination of the household structures characterizing rural Ireland, the patterns of impartible and partible inheri-

tance, farm size, and the evidence against primogeniture. Guinnane finds a large number of extended family households ("the real Irish departure from the nuclear-family model," p. 142) where an efficiency logic militated against primogeniture, and where increasing emigrant opportunities changed notions of intra-family equality to one of "giving one son a solid farm and the others a chance at good life elsewhere" (p. 164). In support of that logic, Guinnane finds that few farms were subdivided in the post-Famine period and the average holding increased, suggesting that amalgamation of holdings became more common.

The analysis then turns to "Coming of Age" and "The Decline of Marriage" where Guinnane finds a Malthusian model of nuptiality (a trade-off between personal consumption and marriage/family) largely a failure. Three grounds are cited: many of the never-married were heads of prosperous households, many remaining in Ireland and remaining unmarried could have emigrated to "a decent life overseas," and rising rural incomes in the 1851-1911 period were directly at odds with the Malthusian preventative check of increasing poverty (p. 227). Other causal hypotheses, demographic, cultural, and religious are also rejected. Neither a sex imbalance argument nor the role of Catholicism in serving as a brake on marriage are perceived as plausible. Post-famine emigrant flows were surprisingly evenly balanced across the sexes, leaving the remaining home population with a balanced sex ratio as well. A "marriage squeeze" was then, in Guinnane's judgement, an unlikely occurrence. The Catholicism argument encounters "a simple empirical weakness," i.e. marital status differences between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland were minor, and overwhelmingly Catholic areas abroad, like the Quebec Province of Canada, did not exhibit high celibacy. Rather, the causes of the rise in permanent celibacy in Ireland are found in economic circumstance: land tenancies made more secure and valuable by the Land Acts, and in the development of a poor relief system with, late in the period, an old age pension system as well. The former meant a rise in the value of an eventual succession to an Irish tenancy relative to the value of emigration. The latter provided a security that substituted, to a degree, for the necessity of family and children. Thus, Guinnane develops "a perspective on marriage" that is quite "Becker-like" in pointing to the altered costs and benefits of marriage and the rise of "marriage substitutes" (p. 238). The outcome, in the Irish case, was a weakened incentive to marry coupled with a rising attractiveness of emigration. By 1911 then, cohort celibacy rates (for ages 45-54) of 25 percent appeared (Table 4.1).

While celibacy rose, marital fertility remained comparatively high, though Guinnane notes that "recent studies...produce stronger evidence for the beginnings of a fertility transition in Ireland by 1911" (p. 255). An index of marital fertility (referenced to 1000 for a population with uncontrolled fertility) falls from 868 in 1840 to 769 in 1911 (p. 249). More refined measures of fertility such as cohort parity analysis indicate a beginning adoption of fertility control measures, though fertility remained high by European standards of a fertility transition. Guinnane observes: "The Irish fertility transition consisted, it seems, of couples reducing their families from seven to nine children down to four to six, a number very high by contemporary European standards but demonstrating fertility control nonetheless" (p. 259).

If there is an understated dimension to this nicely-detailed demographic history, it lies with the primacy of emigration in determining the magnitude of the Irish population decline. That point is more evident in Cormac O Grada's chapter on the same period, "Population and Emigration, 1850-1939" in his *Ireland: A New Economic History, 1780-1939* (1994). In all decades from 1861 to 1926, the net external migration rate dominates the population change rate with its negative impact being nearly double the positive con-

tribution of natural increase (O Grada, Table 9.6). In Guinnane's analysis, emigration and the emigration decision are never absent--its empirical dimensions (though aggregate population change is never decomposed into its components), the coming of age and leaving home, the impact of emigration decisions on nuptiality and fertility. Indeed, a fair portion of the chapter defining the demographic setting is given over to emigration with discussions of migrants' characteristics and chain migration. Yet, for all that, the decision to leave seems less well-defined than are others. That is, perhaps inevitably, a result of the inability to bring empirical evidence to bear directly on migration decisions. Unlike the case with two of the major contributions of the work--the empirical base given to discussions of nuptiality and marital fertility--the micro-evidence on migration may be beyond reach.

In this work, as in Guinnane's earlier articles on economic-demographic interrelations in Ireland, the case is made for "a more careful integration of microeconomic analysis and institutional detail" (p. 276). It is that sort of careful integration that makes *The Vanishing Irish* a major contribution to both economic and demographic history.

Citation: Henry A. Gemery. Review of Guinnane, Timothy W. *The Vanishing Irish: Households, Migration, and the Rural Economy in Ireland, 1850-1914.* EH.Net, H-Net Reviews. August, 1998.

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