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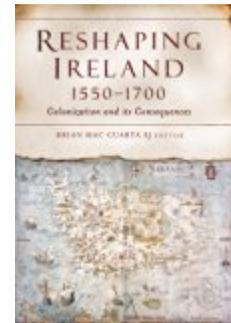
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Brian Mac Cuarta, ed. *Reshaping Ireland, 1550-1700: Colonization and Its Consequences*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011. Illustrations, maps. 300 pp. \$74.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84682-272-8.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey



Nicholas Canny is considered by many the leading scholar in early modern Irish history. Just as his work was influenced by that of David Beers Quinn, Dr. Canny has certainly touched the current generation of Irish scholars. This becomes quite clear when reading this volume, whose complete title includes the statement, “Essays Presented to Nicholas Canny.” The book then has two functions: as a straightforward history of certain aspects relating to Ireland in the Tudor and Stuart eras; and as a tribute to Dr. Canny on his retirement from the professorship of History at The National University of Ireland, Galway. There are fifteen essays in total (not counting the introduction by editor Brian Mac Cuarta and conclusion by Sir John Elliott) covering topics as varied the growing preponderance of the English language among all classes in Ireland, plantation building plans in Ulster, and the effects of the Irish Rebellion (or “Catholic Insurrection”) of 1641-42. The century and a half covered by the book was an intriguing and violent time in the British Isles as a whole, especially Ireland. Events in Ireland are focused on unsurprisingly, and the Rebellion of 1641-42 features heavily as a sort of fulcrum for all parties involved. The respect all contributors have for Prof. Canny features equally heavily.

The century and a half from the end of Henry VIII’s reign to the Glorious Revolution was a contentious one for Ireland; and the Houses of Tudor, Stuart, and Orange had varying plans for the Island to the West. Henry VIII added King of Ireland to his official title in 1542; but the actual process of assimilation would not be completed until long after his dynasty had ended. Following several decades of Tudor attempts to subserviate Gaelic chieftains to English administrators, Henry was granted

the title after the failed rebellion by Thomas FitzGerald, 10th Earl of Kildare (better known as Silken Thomas) in 1534. Silken Thomas’s rebellion would not be the last revolt against the English Crown that would have reverberations in Ireland. Thomas’s immediate successor as Irish antagonist to the English establishment was Hugh O’Neill, Earl of Tyrone (actually proclaimed the High King of Ireland, though not recognized as such by the English monarchy). From 1594-1603 O’Neill led a revolt against the Crown known as the Nine Years War, or Tyrone’s Rebellion. O’Neill was prescient, and like most later rebels against English power sought outside assistance, in this case from Spain. It was for naught, however, and following the inevitable defeat, O’Neill and his fellow Gaelic chieftains fled to the Continent in 1607. This episode, immortalized as “The Flight of the Earls,” would mean that the seventeenth century would feature English consolidation of power, with increasingly less centralized Irish Catholic leadership as English and Scottish Protestants were resettled in Ireland. Consolidation of power does not necessarily translate into smooth administration or pacification, however.

One of the underlying themes of this period, and thus this volume, is that part of the reason that the English Crown was having such a difficult time administering her policies in Ireland was that she was also having a difficult time administering in the British Isles in general. From 1639-51, The Wars of the Three Kingdoms rocked England, Ireland, and Scotland as a result of the Stuart monarch Charles I’s efforts to rule all three. The Irish theater of this conflict is known as The Irish Confederate Wars, lasting from 1641-53. The opening salvo of this struggle, and the main fulcrum of the book, is the

Rebellion of 1641-42. Like most rebellions based in religious differences, the Rebellion of 1641 was noted for the cruelty and no quarter shown by both sides. To deal with this rebellion, Charles I sent an army, as did his Scottish Covenanter opponents. The Irish might have been crushed were it not for the outbreak of the English Civil War. The English Civil War turned Charles I from a monarch trying to enforce his will on the Irish, to a desperate ally hoping to hold on to at least part of his triple kingdom. The ability the Irish Confederate forces had shown to hold their own against Royalist and Covenanter forces was not replicated against the Parliamentarians. The “New Model Army” troops commanded by generals Michael Jones and Oliver Cromwell inflicted a series of defeats on the allied Royalist and Irish forces. While the Royalist forces generally melted away after these defeats, the Irish proved tenacious fighters, either while defending fortified towns, or while conducting asymmetrical warfare. The heavy casualties Cromwell’s forces suffered taking these positions hardly endeared them to the population; while the guerilla attacks on their logistics often led to the eviction of civilians and the destruction or confiscation of food stocks. Following Charles’s defeat and execution in 1649, Cromwellian rule and administration of Ireland was going to be a great deal more thorough than the previous century had witnessed. Many Roundhead veterans received payment in land or peerage. The repercussions of this rebellion then were immense. Four of the fifteen essays deal with some aspect of the Rebellion of 1641—specifically, Catholic defense of the Rebellion as a way to preserve their cultural and national identity; a royal commission set up (with the king’s knowledge or consent) to return land to those loyalists who had been forced to flee their property; the long-term impact of the Scottish Covenantor community in Ulster; and how English historical and religious writers right up to the Glorious Revolution spoke of Ireland as Roman senators spoke of Carthage in the decades following Hannibal’s terrifying Italian campaign.

Dynastic change in England usually saw the political crisis reach Ireland. The Glorious Revolution in 1688 was such a moment. After being overthrown in favor of his daughter Mary and her husband William of Orange, James II fled to the island to take advantage of Catholic

support there. Reigning as William III, William of Orange landed a multinational force to put down the Jacobite revolt. William’s army won a victory over that of James at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 (after which both monarchs left Ireland), then a decisive victory at Aughrim in 1691. The reign of William and Mary is where the volume closes. The last two essays deal with just how devastating was the loss at Aughrim, and the careers of well-bred Catholic peers in the latter seventeenth century, respectively.

It is clear reading this volume that Professor Canny has much to be proud of. Each essay has been thoroughly researched by scholars obviously motivated by their subjects. The rise of modern Ireland is also the story of the rise of modern Britain. Indeed, the Acts of Union in 1707 and 1800 owe much to the events that are covered by this volume. There are two major criticisms of this book, however. While there are some excellent period illustrations, quality maps are few and far between. Considering that there are several major and minor wars covered in the essays, this proves a bit of a hindrance. The second major criticism is a result of one of the volume’s strengths: its focus on Ireland. The century and a half discussed in the book was a tumultuous one in Europe as a whole. The English Civil War is mentioned only in a peripheral manner, while the Thirty Years War (1618-48) receives no commentary at all, despite the fact that it was the major religious war of the period, and Irish and Scottish soldiers served as mercenaries on both sides (Irish generally with Catholic Imperial Forces, the Scots with Protestants, especially under Swedish King Gustavus Adolphus). Many returning veterans saw service in the Wars of the Three Kingdoms. As a minor aside, there are several references to the Nine Years War. There were actually two Nine Years War(s). The first conflict took place in Ireland from 1594 to 1603; the second was part of William III’s War of the Grand Alliance from 1688-97. Both are covered in the time period of this volume, and both saw fighting in Ireland. The authors and editor assume the reader will choose the former conflict by default, but it is more confusing for those of us not from the Emerald Isle. These criticisms aside, I would certainly recommend the book to anyone interested in Irish history and the rise of Great Britain.

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