

Shane Nagle. *Histories of Nationalism in Ireland and Germany: A Comparative Study from 1800 to 1932.* London: Bloomsbury Publisher, 2017. 259 pp. \$114.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4742-6374-0.

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At first glance, the choice of national case studies for this comparative analysis—Ireland and Germany—may seem a little odd. So too, the time frame for the work, 1800 to 1932, may also need some justification. However, Shane Nagle does justify his approach in solid fashion, from the very outset of his book. As he points out, the formative age of both Irish and German history in terms of nationalist narratives commenced with the upheavals around the turn of the nineteenth century (the Act of Union that brought Ireland into political conformity with Great Britain in 1801, and the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in the face of Napoleonic predominance 1806). In extending his time frame to 1932, Nagle is also on firm ground, as this year witnessed the accession of Eamon De Valera’s Fianna Fáil government, as well as the electoral ascendancy of the National Socialists under Hitler (although they had to wait until 1933, before finally forming the last cabinet of the tottering Weimar Republic).

Nagle’s justification for the beginning and end of his analysis is well made in the introduction and the conclusion; however, as is also pointed out in the opening pages, the great political and national events of the 1800-1932 period really only provide the essential context for a more concentrated study—one that observes the way nationalist historians, writing between the 1840s

and the 1920s, dealt with, reconceived, and then conveyed such events and processes to their readerships. “It is not necessary to belabor the point” (p. 151), writes Nagle, that this was the culture of history-writing that shaped the ideas of De Valera and Hitler, which they brought with them into power in the early 1930s and which in turn influenced the policies they sought to impose. The end date for Nagle’s survey might therefore more realistically be 2017, living as we are—as Irish or Germans, or Europeans or citizens of the global community—with the still uncertain consequences of both nationalisms and both histories.

To best illustrate the way history was written (and such histories were, inevitably, histories of the *nation*—still the default subject of the discipline today), Nagle explores the work of a selection of key authors. While the Germans (Leopold Ranke, Heinrich Sybel, Johannes Janssen, Felix Dahn, Gustav Freytag, Heinrich Treitschke, and Johannes Haller) are perhaps better known to the profession more broadly, the Irish selection (Thomas McGee, Thomas Osborne Davis, John Mitchel, Alexander Sullivan, Standish O’Grady, W. E. H. Lecky, and Eoin MacNeill) is just as important. It is also worth noting the way at least one major female author, Alice Stopford Green (1847-29) played a key role, in the boys club of history-writing in this period. But the historians of

note who receive attention are not confined simply to these two nationally defined groupings; history has always been transnational. Hence, several British historians (in particular) are given attention as important touchstones and conduits for historical thinking and historical writing in both Ireland and Germany, including Henry Buckle, Thomas Macaulay, James Froude, Thomas Carlyle, and Walter Scott.

Despite this foundation, the analysis is not biographical (although there is a very valuable appendix of *Dramatis Personae*, with potted biographies) but rather concentrates on the work of these scholars. Moreover, they are a mixed bunch of academics as well as popular writers, whose impact is explored in thematic chapters. The question of the supposed origins of the Irish and German nations is a logical starting point. So too, the nation and religion are of great importance to contexts where the interplay between Roman Catholicism and forms of Protestant denomination produced great consternation (despite the secularizing Enlightenment project). Of particular note here is the way Nagle observes the problem of the national *territory* in historical writing.

The Irish territorial problem has always seemed straightforwardly one of the “the island of Ireland”: the legal realm that acceded to the Union in 1801, was claimed by Pearse in 1916 and then again by De Valera’s new constitution of 1936, was reframed for the sake of lasting peace in 1998, and is still unsettled in the age of Brexit and the Conservative/DUP agreement. The German territorial question (*Kleindeutschland* versus *Grossdeutschland* in just one formulation) is and always has been less straightforward. By comparing the two contexts, the apparent plainness of the Irish territory is destabilized; the questions around the German *Heimat* take on new concreteness. Race, too—as slippery a concept as the “homeland”—is dealt with in a thematic chapter, as it should be in a study that focuses on the period of ascendant social Darwinism. The themes are

nice rounded out with a discussion of the very theoretical and historiographical problem that dogs any work of comparative history in the twenty-first century: how to observe the entanglements inherent in *transnational* ways of thinking.

It is therefore with the final chapter that Nagle manages to add extra value beyond what might be of interest to scholars of Irish or German history and history-writing. Indeed, he succeeds in escaping what one early reviewer termed “the trap of the national case study” (Aviel Roshwald in a review cited on the back cover of the volume). Nations and nationalists have always narrated their histories in relation to, and reaction to, their counterparts elsewhere. Indeed, as Nagle points out, historians of both Ireland and Germany measured themselves and their countries’ histories against that of “England” (p. 140). For instance, Alice Green’s conception of Ireland and Irishness saw the Germanic incursions into England as the decisive influence. By default, Ireland was only conquered by England because the English had first been conquered and reorganized by “Germans.”

Nagle’s prose is exemplary, both in style and structure, and in the clarity of what he seeks to argue. Perhaps the only criticism that can be leveled at the book is—particularly in the case of chapter 3, on “National Territory”—the absence of visual and material culture. The employment of historical geography by the historians analyzed (particularly by the Germans, whose publishers were often engaged in the production of atlases and other cartography), was surely as important as the way they wrote about topography, geography, and toponymy. Alice Green included maps in her *History of the Irish State to 1014* (1925), and—although in the nineteenth century such expensive inclusions were rarer—some sense of the way these imaginings of national territory (including the ethnographic assumptions about their inhabitants) interplayed with the texts would have been useful.

That said, it is worth noting that Nagle has now laid some important foundations for scholars wishing to observe the broader patterns of nationalist historical narrative construction in other forms of literature and art beyond the self-conscious profession of history. Commentators on the way Irish and German national identities were conveyed via (e.g., cartography, theater, literature, art, journalism, film, etc.) will find in his work an indispensable foundational text, as the cultural turn continues to spiral into the future.

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