



Breandán Mac Suibhne. *The End of Outrage: Post-Famine Adjustment in Rural Ireland.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. viii + 319 pp. \$30.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-873861-9.

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Breandán Mac Suibhne's *The End of Outrage* is a fine-grained study of agrarian politics, socio-economic change, and rural crime in one specific region of post-Famine Donegal, the far northwestern county of Ireland. The narrative thrust of the book is determined by the actions of Patrick McGlynn, a school teacher in Beagh, a townland in the center of Donegal. At the start of April 1856, McGlynn sent a conspiratorial letter to his local magistrate, offering up information on the actions of the "Molly Maguires," one of the several nebulous secret societies active in mid-century Ireland. Such groups, variously known as Ribbonmen or Rockites, were equal parts bandits and populist activists; they had contributed heavily to the general unrest of rural Ireland before and after the Famine of 1845-49. McGlynn offered up information on their movements and claimed to have advance knowledge of a planned attack on James Gallagher, an arriviste local farmer. Over several nights, members of the Royal Irish Constabulary camped out according to McGlynn's instructions, hoping to capture the Mollies in action. For a time, McGlynn's information came to nothing and he began to appear less and less reliable an informer. Yet ultimately, some local Mollies were apprehended in June 1856; twenty-three in total were arrested in one night, including the informer McGlynn. Those deemed the regional lead-

ers of the Mollies were sentenced to hard labor. McGlynn, whose financial debts had probably been the initial catalyst for his actions, received a payoff from the British government as well as generous assistance to emigrate. In August 1857, recognizing the dangers of staying in Ireland as an informer, he moved to Australia and, in his new home, he may have tried his hand at gold mining. If he did, he was unsuccessful. By July 1859, McGlynn was again gainfully employed as a teacher (albeit now in a Protestant school in Melbourne—he seems to have added apostate to his reviled status as an informer). The following year, with debts of £161 19s. 8d., he was declared financially insolvent, and by February 1862 he was dismissed from his school, still only at the age of thirty. The records for the rest of his life appear to be lost.

On its surface level, McGlynn's story is obviously interesting, if not much more than an intriguing anecdote. But where mainstream "revisionist" historians in Ireland often focus, to their detriment, on such anecdotes and parochial local histories, Mac Suibhne uses this small series of events to impart a much larger (and much more satisfying) argument about the nature and course of post-Famine rural Ireland. Mac Suibhne explains the events surrounding McGlynn and the Mollies in terms of serious structural changes in

Irish society while also using the case as a window into those changes.

Communal landownership, still common before the Famine, began to be dismantled by the 1850s. Rundale, the longstanding form of Irish commonage, was replaced with “squaring,” privately owned and rationally organized modern capitalist agriculture. Commonage land and associated practices were disappearing in places like Beagh, with implications for the sense of social unity in the district; a sense of communal conviviality was replaced by a more individualistic ontology, a “cold individualism” replacing a preexisting rhythm of life (p. 98). In post-Famine rural Ireland, there was an accelerated transition from “a system that involved communal rights and responsibilities to one of individualized risk” (p. 85). Gallagher, later to be targeted by the Mollies, was one of those new rural bourgeoisie who benefited from these developments. He was a person who was “ideologically better prepared” for the changes underway (p. 124). And ultimately, one of his crimes was his threat to evict unproductive tenants (“my tenants,” he haughtily termed them [p. 117]) and turn their land to more profitable pasture farming. Gallagher also threatened to cut off economic support for his seventy-year-old father, another informal crime in an Ireland undergoing rapid economic changes. Mac Suibhne never quite comes out and calls this entire process a transition to capitalism, but he certainly comes close and that is precisely what was occurring both in Beagh and across the island.

Yet there were other changes taking place too. Transport infrastructure was already being developed in the eighteenth century. A national school system was “quietly transforming notions of time and discipline, manners and obedience” among students (p. 13). Mac Suibhne sees changes in policing and law enforcement in the 1830s and early 1840s as being part of “the more activist state called into being in the decades before the Great Famine” (p. 208). The Catholic Church was

also taking a more active role in everyday life, helping the state to discipline the potentially rebellious poor. And a major language shift was underway. By 1880, Beagh was effectively monoglot, with Irish and bilingualism evaporating.

As elsewhere in Ireland, emigration rates rose exponentially after 1847. Donegal migrants tended to go to Pennsylvania as well as Scotland. Both Donegal and its neighboring county of Derry were converted in this period into de facto labor pools for the coal mines and canals of Pennsylvania. Increased economic opportunities fueled an increase in people’s expectations of what the economy and the state should be doing for them. “The district, in short, was being fitted into the periphery of the world economy and, between seasonal migration to Scotland, protoindustrialization at home, and the coal and canals its men were digging in industrial America, expectations were rising” (pp. 7-8). Mac Suibhne points out that Ribbonism flourished in the context of a “democratic deficit,” where property qualifications barred a huge percentage of adult men from voting (while all women were still barred from the ballot). The undemocratic nature of mid-nineteenth-century Ireland was even more apparent to those returning migrants who had experienced the American Republic. Molly Maguire-style groups peregrinated back and forth across the Atlantic, exporting their agitational mode of politics to the coalfields of Pennsylvania and then reimporting it back to Donegal. Indeed, in a letter to Gallagher, the Mollies called themselves “Red Republican Irishmen,” highlighting their investment in, and the influence of, international political currents (p. 132).

Mac Suibhne himself is a native of Beagh, and his research has an almost anthropological quality to it. He compares his own historiography to the actions of a hated informer. This is clearly the work of an “insider” to the community, one who has an intimate knowledge of the townland, its stories and oral culture, and its people. At times, he comes close to letting this get the better of him-

self. Mac Suibhne skirts an almost Peig-esque tone when he writes about developments in the twentieth century, as the region changed utterly and residents became more cut off from their past. And yet, he also shows his sophistication as a historian; “there is no simple opposition here of tradition and modernity” (p. 272). At the start of the book, Mac Suibhne states that “although my own forebears appear in these pages, genealogy’s charms are lost on me” (p. viii). The detailed unpacking of the family background of his large cast of characters certainly comes close to genealogy and sometimes with a surfeit of personal details for the purposes of the broader historiographic arguments. But these are minor quibbles and perhaps they are the price worth paying for a work of this density. Mac Suibhne’s book is a model of micro-history, detailed and intimate but not insular or obscure. Fernand Braudel once said that micro-histories are “dust”—studies of the ephemeral that lose sight of the macro-historical. *The End of Outrage* shows how the micro and the macro can each illuminate the other in studies of 1850s Ireland.

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