

INTRODUCTION

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THIS VOLUME PROVIDES AN ACCOUNT of modern Irish history from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century. Its approach is both thematic and chronological in nature. Part 1 contains six overarching narrative chapters dealing with the main developments in society and politics throughout the period covered by the book. The aim here is to present readers with an up-to-date rendition of the course of Irish history. Part 2 then focuses on topics and themes that played a peculiarly important role in the shaping of that trajectory. These chapters range from exercises in intellectual, cultural, and literary history to analyses of formatively significant subjects like religion, nationalism, empire, and gender. The aim of the volume is to make available the necessary ingredients for an understanding of Irish history together with a range of insights on pivotal issues and key controversies.

The contributors to this collection constitute a new generation of historians whose work seeks to build on the achievements of their predecessors. Historiography in Ireland after the Second World War was devoted to advancing specialized research, but it can also be seen in part as a reaction against prevailing popular assumptions rather than a revision of a body of scholarly writing.¹ In this last guise it aimed to free history from the influence of fable and polemic.² Its main achievement was the accumulation of a sizable body of research that enriched the picture of the Irish past by systematically studying available evidence and archives. Looking back after a quarter century of progress in that direction, T. W. Moody was eager to draw attention to “unprecedented advances in specialist research, in professional technique, in the organisation of historians and in the publication of special studies, source materials, bibliographies and aids to scholarship.”³ Members of the succeeding generation of historians were still more focused in their objectives. Writing in the shadow of the Troubles in Northern Ireland after 1968 and

then the accession of the Republic of Ireland to the European Economic Community in 1973, historians from the 1970s through to the 1990s were in general terms more withering in their approach to national traditions. Above all, skepticism about the legitimating narratives that underpinned the establishment of the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland became pervasive. The principal targets here were the revolutionary ideologies employed to legitimize nationalist and unionist rebellion. Both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland have their roots in popular militancy. The last generation of historians sought to question the justification for this political stance. This could lend their writing a degree of urgency as well as a didactic tone. At times the temptation was to blame rather than explain what was not approved. This volume sets about incorporating the insights of earlier scholarship while moving beyond the more admonitory approach sometimes adopted by precursors.

Few, if any, states have been established by a formal “contract,” whereby their populations consented in an orderly way to their formation. Most commonly they have been a product of conquest or revolution. This general observation applies to India and Mexico, as well as to America and France. Much like these last two countries, contemporary Ireland has its origins in revolutionary change, and historians are obliged to account for the process of transition. Recounting major moments of national upheaval, like 1776–1787 in America or 1789–1799 in France, usually involves processes of evaluation as well as reconstruction. Since historians habitually revise their predecessors, they tend to reassess earlier evaluations as they embark on new attempts at reconstruction. In the American, French, and Irish cases, this commonly takes the form of new perspectives on the aims and achievements of the revolutionary generation. Yet it is soon found that this fresh vantage affects perceptions of the antecedent past, meaning the longer history preceding the revolution itself. The reason for this seems clear: revolutions have to justify themselves in relation to their past, and so a reappraisal of a revolution entails a revision of its past. The immediate heirs of the Irish revolutionary generation of 1912–1923 constructed a past that pointed to the legitimacy of their revolution based on two principles: the right to self-determination on the one hand, and the entitlement to assert that right by force of arms on the other. Both principles explicitly depended on one another, because the justification for the resort to violence was taken to follow from the prior existence of a self-determining people.

This position relied on a set of historical assumptions, above all the idea of the unity of a people in a position to proclaim themselves as constituting a state. In 1963, the Belfast historian J. C. Beckett challenged this picture by contrasting the history of Ireland with that of England and France. In the latter cases, Beckett thought, history disclosed a clearly ascertainable pattern based on the facts of political cohesion and continuity. Even Germany and Italy, though late in establishing their own unity, could apparently point to the continuous presence of coherent

peoples. For Beckett, the history of Ireland seemed to be lacking on both counts: it was peopled by distinct and often opposing populations who at the same time were deprived of the instruments of self-government. This left Beckett searching for the significance of Irish history while struggling to avoid lapsing into teleology. The projected unity and continuity imposed on the past by republican and unionist militants in early twentieth-century Ireland should be rejected, Beckett argued. But he then wondered whether this exercise in ideological debunking did not at the same time deprive Irish history of any distinguishable subject matter. If there existed no enduring substratum of people whose travails could be collected into a continuous narrative, what was the history of Ireland a history of? Beckett's answer was that continuity was supplied by the "land," which influenced the careers of settlers and natives alike.⁴

Beckett's question at first glance is more promising than his answer. If by "land" he meant landscape, then it is clear that this was continually made and remade by human labor. If, alternatively, he intended the term to refer to territory, then evidently this has not been a singular entity through the Irish past. What is ultimately most interesting about Beckett's question is the extent to which it was fundamentally *mal posée*. Irish history can have no overarching meaning or pattern unless it could be said to be a product of design. The chapters in this book cumulatively show that there was no underlying purpose to which the history of Ireland can be made to conform. What we encounter, instead, is a sequence of attempts at political construction that met with various forms of contingent resistance. For this reason, the subject matter of Irish history is not to be sought in persistence and stability but in discontinuous processes of conflict and conciliation. Given that these processes spilled beyond the geographical boundaries of the island, Irish history should be seen as porous rather than self-contained—affected overwhelmingly by English and British policy, but also by European and American events, as well as developments in the wider diaspora.⁵

The Florentine humanist Niccolò Machiavelli distinguished in his *Discourses* between states established by accident and those created by design.⁶ The formation of the Irish polity after 1541 fits neither model. To begin with, it did not come into existence as an independent entity but as a dependent province of an expanding English empire. In addition it was a product of both accident and design. Machiavelli's principal examples were Sparta and Rome: the Spartan commonwealth had been the deliberate creation of a founding legislator, while the Roman republic was brought about by chance. The kingdom of Rome, naturally, had an original founder, but the constitution of the republic was a product of circumstance. Yet despite its contingent origins, Rome was blessed by fortune. In the case of Ireland, accident combined with design to produce a less happy result. This volume opens in the middle of the sixteenth century, with the passage of the Kingship Act of 1541 that established Henry VIII as King of Ireland. This brought an end to English lordship over the country by subjecting the Kingdom of Ireland

directly to the imperial crown. It was an act of deliberate constitutional design, yet it collided with the reality of an existing set of forces.⁷ In this way, from the Tudor period onwards, statecraft competed with contingency in Ireland. The Irish polity was not so much “constituted” by a harmonious arrangement of orders as marked by a collision of countervailing powers.

The relevant contingencies were determined by the pattern of settlement in Ireland. The attempt to consolidate Henrican power occurred against the background of Norman invasion and occupation, beginning in the twelfth century. After the subjection of Irish territory to the authority of Henry II in 1171, Norman settlement penetrated westwards from Leinster and Ulster as far as Galway and Mayo. This resulted in the establishment of powerful earldoms under the Geraldines, the Burkes, and the Butlers, though these were soon independent of the Dublin government and the crown.⁸ This was followed by the relative attrition of Norman power as native Gaelic resurgence diminished the might of settler communities and the authority of administration within the Pale receded. Under these circumstances, Norman colonists, now styled “Old English,” were suspected of “degeneration” as their culture merged with that of the “mere Irish.”⁹ Tudor policy was designed as a response to these developments. This policy began with the scheme of surrender and regrant under Henry VIII, designed to subject the disaffected Irish to common law tenures. However, pledges of allegiance on the part of the Irish nobility were not matched by corresponding acts of subordination. Rebellions were then met by new waves of colonization between the middle of the sixteenth century and the early seventeenth. These occurred in the midst of the spread of Protestant Reformation, dividing the religious loyalties of “New English” planters from the Catholicism of the Old English and native Irish combined. Settlement, from then on, introduced an adverse population as an instrument of imperial consolidation.

Irish history, of course, cannot be understood in terms of the interaction between happenstance and an isolated legislative act. There was no single exercise of political will that set Ireland in a durable constitutional mold. Instead, the country was variously refashioned by a succession of attempts at design. What complicates the picture is that this succession of policies generated new forms of resistance in the process of implementation. Yet in general terms, a dialectical pattern can be discerned over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. To begin with there was an attempt to transform the medieval lordship into a provincial kingdom, subject to the sovereignty of the English crown. The English monarchy did not govern a passively receptive province but acted through the counsel of an Irish parliament. The problem was that this mixed regime presided over an imperfectly assimilated population. The plantation of Munster from 1586 and the plantation of Ulster from 1606 introduced politically amenable constituencies committed to English government and the Protestant faith. Colonization was an arm of conquest intended as an instrument of pacification. But if this strat-

egy made it possible to secure the territory, it also made the country more difficult to hold. As the seventeenth century progressed, expropriation and sectarian animosity bred disaffection among all sections of the Catholic population.¹⁰ The goal of a “perfect” conquest that would pacify the kingdom eluded every attempt at political subjection. In fact, pacification consistently sparked rebellion, leading to new demands for more effective subordination. A dynamic process of hostile action and reaction became entrenched.

A major push for a final conquest was launched in the aftermath of 1641. In October of that year, a Catholic rebellion against the administration in Ireland culminated in acts of atrocity against English and Scottish planters, drawing the country into the wars of the three Kingdoms that beset England, Ireland, and Scotland through the 1640s and 1650s.¹¹ Catholic royalist insurgency was met by Cromwellian retaliation between 1649 and 1653. Previous attempts to manage the Irish had been implemented by the crown. Now the new model army was led by Cromwell to deliver control of the country to a rump parliament at Westminster. English victory was accompanied by a dramatic series of confiscations. Before the confederate wars of the 1640s, Irish Catholics still held nearly two-thirds of the land. After the Cromwellian settlement, their tenure was reduced to approximately eight percent, rising again to twenty after the Restoration. This amounted to a drastic social revolution, giving rise to a significant transformation of government. More than fifty thousand confederate troops piled into continental armies. Prominent rebels were executed or exiled as indentured labor. The remainder, along with compliant Catholics, were systematically expropriated. From now on the Irish parliament was controlled by Protestant lords and gentry. Catholics were excluded from executive offices under the crown.

Migration of population was a standard feature of early modern European history. Much of this occurred against the background of waves of barbarian inundation in late antiquity and sequences of settlement and resettlement continuing down through the high middle ages.¹² The Saxon incursions and the Norman conquest are examples of a widespread European process. In due course, territorial annexation and regnal incorporation became characteristic continental dynamics.¹³ For this reason, it is interesting to examine the Irish experience in comparison with other European attempts at political integration. The union of Spanish crowns and the expansion of the French state are conspicuous examples of these processes of amalgamation. Yet in the English case, consolidation failed to win even minimally comprehensive support. Eastern colonization of Slavic regions by German settlers from the twelfth century led to the coexistence of populations from the Baltic to Slovenia.¹⁴ As in Ireland, the Reformation brought new tensions to German and Slavic territories. For example, orthodox Germans were forced to flee Bohemia during the course of the Hussite wars. Thereafter, centralization was pursued under Habsburg rule from 1526 by building a court party among the Bohemian estates and playing the kingdom against Moravia, Lusatia,

and Silesia. Conflict followed, culminating in Habsburg victory over the Bohemian estates on the afternoon of November 8, 1620, the expulsion of Czech nobility, and the confiscation of their estates. The region was then devastated by the Thirty Years' War. At the end of that brutalizing contest, the Habsburg crown asserted its power over depopulated Bohemian territory, yet the diet soon recovered a definite constitutional role. Fifty percent of landed estates changed hands after the Battle of White Mountain, and the German language soon acquired equal status in administration, yet native aristocratic families regained authority in affairs of state.¹⁵ An influx of German settlers buttressed the new regime, while the remaining Slavic ruling families cooperated with Vienna. In Ireland, by comparison, the Catholic nobility was more or less completely disempowered.

That process had not led to peace and prosperity, however. Commenting on Irish conditions in 1672, the political anatomist, William Petty, ascribed continuing discontents to two sources: first, to ongoing disaffection among the Catholic Irish; and second, to the division of imperial sovereignty between distinct legislatures. The solution, he argued, lay in a policy of combining "Union" with "Transmutation." The former was a proposal to incorporate the two kingdoms by reviving the arrangement in operation under the commonwealth, the latter was a scheme for transplanting the majority of Catholics and replacing them with well-disposed settlers from the mainland.¹⁶ In this way, Petty believed, divergent peoples could be blended into a coherent state. The idea of exchanging substantial bodies of population was never pursued beyond the stage of purely speculative projection. However, proposals for a legislative union were ultimately implemented, nearly a century and a half after Petty floated the idea. But if the project of mass transplantation was never seriously contemplated, in a deep sense the attraction of amalgamating nationalities persisted through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Petty's was just a drastic means of effecting a common objective.

The consequences of the Cromwellian conquest along with the Restoration settlement threatened to be reversed after the accession of James II: a Catholic monarch on the British throne allied to the French was not merely an affront to Scottish and English sensibilities, it also undermined the security of the Protestant population in Ireland.¹⁷ Their strength lay in their monopoly of land and therefore power, their weakness in the scarcity of their numbers. The retreat of James II at the Battle of the Boyne on July 1, 1690 followed by the Battle of Aughrim and the Treaty of Limerick that concluded the Williamite War enabled the victors to address this situation.¹⁸ The Protestant monopoly of public life was increased, and the expropriation of rebel forces implemented. Confiscations continued down to the end of the century, reducing Catholic holdings to approximately twelve percent. This was not quite Petty's dream realized by chance, although the flight of Jacobite forces into continental armies was a necessary prerequisite for the allocation of their lands. Since 1641, Catholics had gambled their future on insurrection, leading Petty to conclude that with the victory of "the *English*" they

had at least a “Gamester’s right” to requisition their opponents’ estates.¹⁹ From 1692, with the legislative authority of the Irish parliament more firmly entrenched, the balance of property was underwritten by an exclusive regime of power. Within three years, the Dublin parliament began to enact a series of proscriptions aimed at permanently depriving Catholics of political purchase and reducing the influence of their doctrines, liturgy, and ecclesiology.

These regulations have come to be known as the “popery” or “penal” laws. Their passage was completed in 1728, when Catholics were denied the right to vote in elections to parliament. Over the preceding decades, a series of measures of varying character and significance sought to diminish the threat that popery was felt to pose to the reigning establishment. Most conspicuous among them were attempts to restrict the intellectual commerce between the Catholic clergy and the continent, provisions for further reductions in the Catholic share of the land, and measures to address the suspected evasion of legislation.²⁰ Between 1649 and 1728, in a succession of sudden and sometimes violent developments, a comprehensive revolution in Ireland had occurred, transforming property relations and the distribution of power. Down to 1782, Ireland was administered by a proscriptive constitution subordinate to the final authority of Westminster. The Church of Ireland enjoyed the status of a national church presiding in the face of widespread religious dissent, most conspicuously among Presbyterians and Catholics. At the same time, despite these apparently stark polarities, Presbyterian industry developed in the north, while Catholic merchants and small farmers prospered in all four provinces.

Rising prosperity occurred against a background of rural and artisanal poverty. In the 1730s, George Berkeley, the bishop of Cloyne, fretted about the viability of social cohesion in the face of a luxury economy driven by the import of foreign commodities. National wealth, for the bishop, ought to include improved conditions among the poor. This, he thought, was best achieved on the basis of industry rather than overseas commerce.²¹ From this perspective, the key objective of political economy was not the liberalization of Irish trade restrictions lamented by Irish publicists since the 1690s, but the development of sustainable patterns of domestic consumption. With such a program, Berkeley was disputing the whole tenor of Protestant “patriot” rhetoric that had been mobilized by polemicists between William Molyneux and Jonathan Swift, and that still animated the rhetoric of the parliamentary leader, Henry Grattan, into the early 1780s.²² The patriot platform amounted to a protest against Irish “slavery” caused by the dependence of the Dublin parliament on the British government. In the 1770s and 1780s, complaints from this constituency were steadily addressed: restrictions on Irish trade were lifted in 1778 and legislative independence granted in 1782. In the same period, the popery laws affecting Catholic property and worship were repealed. Constitutional change was again undertaken in the 1790s: Catholics were admitted to the legal profession in 1792 and granted the electoral

franchise in 1793. However, concessions had to be wrung from an “Ascendancy” establishment that persisted in obstructing the right of Catholics to sit in parliament.

Under the diffuse influence of French Revolutionary ideas, the Society of United Irishmen emerged in 1791, seeking parliamentary reform, Catholic emancipation, and political independence from the British parliamentary system. After 1794, the Society went underground. The view that Ireland’s difficulties could be traced to British perfidy gained traction among sections of public opinion at this time. From the perspective of the United Irishmen, somewhat paradoxically, national (or “republican”) fellowship, retarded by a century of suspicion among domestic sects and parties, would be advanced by allowing these local forces to confront one another directly without the mediation of British parliamentary power. Separation, it was thought, was a necessary prelude to a union of hearts and minds. That idea, of course, was challenged from the start. The best chance that oppressed Catholics had of ameliorating their conditions, Edmund Burke argued, lay in the pressure that Westminster could be induced to bring to bear on local obstructionism.²³ For similar reasons, Adam Smith had underlined the advantages of a parliamentary union: “By a union with Great Britain, Ireland would gain, besides the freedom of trade, other advantages much more important.” Above all, he surmised, the lower and middling ranks would gain deliverance from a singularly “oppressive aristocracy,” the likes of which could not be found in either England or Scotland. What distinguished Ireland from eighteenth-century Britain, Smith believed, was that its ruling class was differentiated from the mass of the population on the basis of “odious” religious and political distinctions. Given that such distinctions are commonly more potent than rivalry between nations, he concluded, “the inhabitants of Ireland are not likely for many ages to consider themselves as one people.”²⁴

Irish hostility toward Britain, along with domestic antipathies, came to a head with the rebellion of 1798. Over the summer months, fighting spread through Kildare, Antrim, Down, and Wexford. Captured insurgents were subject to brutal recrimination. The gulf between loyalists and United Irishmen widened. Divergences between Protestants and Catholic Defenders were bridged in the face of common opposition only to be driven apart again under conditions of mutual fear. With the failure of a French naval expedition to Donegal in October 1798, the rebellion was effectively at an end, with one of its leaders, Theobald Wolfe Tone, cutting his own throat in Provost’s Prison and dying on November 19. In the aftermath of the uprising, the edifice of Ascendancy rule in Ireland was abruptly dismantled at the behest of British prime minister William Pitt by the introduction of the Act of Union in 1800, which came into effect in January 1801. It has long been debated whether the introduction of full political rights for Catholics in tandem with the imposition of a parliamentary union might have fostered political integration among the populations of Britain and Ireland.²⁵ What is clear is

that emancipation under the existing British franchise would have entailed negligible Catholic representation in the UK parliament. In the absence of a specifiable dynamic leading to consensus, it is difficult to establish how assimilation might have occurred.

Writing at the end of the 1830s, Gustave de Beaumont interpreted nineteenth-century Ireland as the misbegotten offspring of its predecessor. De Beaumont shared with his traveling companion, Alexis de Tocqueville, a comparative interest in the fate of European aristocracies. Like Adam Smith, he contrasted the British system of integrative ranks with the proscriptive culture endemic to the Irish ruling class. Ireland, he wrote, was afflicted by a “*bad aristocracy*.”²⁶ Its principles were singular in European history, acting as a bulwark against assimilation. Throughout the eighteenth century, it had occupied the position of a colonial establishment whose antipathy to the mass of the population whom it governed was perpetuated by its weakness rather than its power. The Protestant insistence on being a “kingdom” and not a “colony” that found expression in patriot discourse for a century after 1698 was the product of a collision between a juridical claim to self-government and the reality of depending for security on the Westminster parliament. Acting as local agents without final responsibility, the Ascendancy, de Beaumont contended, lacked the impulse to seek rapprochement with Catholics. At the same time, in serving as the principal link connecting the two kingdoms, it operated as a screen between the London government and its Irish subjects. This left the majority of the population without representation. In the language of the time, the problem was not simply that they lacked elected deputies but that they were not beneficiaries of even “virtual” representation.²⁷

This predicament was not ameliorated by the passage of the Union.²⁸ Over the next thirty years, sectarian politics in Ireland were exacerbated rather than mollified. When Catholic emancipation was finally introduced by the UK parliament in 1829, the Catholic masses had been organized into a distinct Association for the promotion of the sectional ambitions of their community. After the success of emancipation, Daniel O’Connell proceeded to set up the Repeal Association in 1840 with the aim of repealing the Union of 1801. The main weapon in O’Connell’s armory was the show of Catholic numerical strength exhibited during “monster” rallies that appalled the British establishment. Irish politics under the Union was henceforth captured by rival constituencies seeking four opposing goals: durable integration under the existing Union; devolution to an Irish parliament in which Protestants would predominate; the re-establishment of an Irish government in which Catholic fortunes would steadily rise; and the separatist rejection of any link to Britain at all.²⁹ Taken together, these options looked forward to a variety of arrangements, spanning unionism, various forms of federalism, assorted schemes for self-government, and republican separatism.³⁰ Through the nineteenth century, three methods were employed for advancing each of these causes: constitutional politics, agitation, and violence.³¹ The outlook for each political program

and the popularity of the range of methods available to achieve their respective goals depended on political developments in the United Kingdom as a whole. The Irish Famine and electoral reform proved to be the major determinants.

The experience of mass starvation combined with extensive emigration between 1846 and 1852 had a decisive impact on social and political relations in Ireland.³² By the autumn of 1845, a potato blight had spread through northern and central Europe. Within a year, the devastating effects of the infestation were felt among broad sections of the Irish population dependent on the potato crop as a staple. Between famine, disease, and emigration, the population of Ireland decreased by approximately three million in the space of a decade. Emigration continued over the decades that followed, with the result that the population had fallen to four and a half million by the 1911 census, nearly half the number that had been reached at the outset of the Famine.³³ Over the same period, despite repeated attempts on the part of the British government to improve social conditions among Irish tenant farmers, along with other schemes for winning the allegiance of the Catholic population, turmoil continued to afflict political relationships in Ireland. In July 1848, under the influence of campaigns for national freedom on the European continent, members of the Young Ireland movement staged an abortive rebellion against British rule in Ireland that revived the tradition of insurgent separatism inaugurated in 1798. In the aftermath of this failure, the Irish Republican Brotherhood was formed, dedicated to provisional republicanism in Ireland. Provisionalism was committed to popular sovereignty through revolutionary means. In practice, at least down to 1867, this meant pursuing a program of revolutionary vanguardism: the ideal of democratic self-government was to be implemented by a provisionally unaccountable administration in anticipation of the consent of the people in whose name power was meanwhile exercised.³⁴ The 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin, when a rebellion organized by seven members of the military council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood was staged against British rule in Ireland, counts as one of the more successful examples of provisional democracy in history: an insurgency was planned by revolutionary partisans in the absence of popular consent, although their actions then won overwhelming support over the course of the years that immediately followed.

The idea of provisional democracy has always been challenging, beginning with its invocation under the French Convention Assembly in 1793. On October 10 of that year, it was declared by deputy Louis Antoine Léon de Saint-Just that “the provisional government of France is revolutionary until there is peace.”³⁵ In other words, democratic constitutionalism would be suspended during the provisional reign of emergency power. Revolution in Ireland in 1916 drew on the same principle: it was assumed by the leaders of the Easter Rising that popular endorsement for a constitutional regime could be claimed by anticipating ratification by the people. Of course, the British government adopted a comparable position at this time. Devolved self-government or “Home Rule” for Ireland had been agreed

by regular constitutional procedure in 1912 and was expected to reach the statute book in September 1914, but the provision was suspended in the face of the emergency presented by the First World War. As it turned out, after the War, Irish support for the measure had effectively disappeared under the influence of separatist aspirations represented by Sinn Féin. As a consequence of the general election of 1918, Sinn Féin completely supplanted the Irish Parliamentary Party as the voice of the Irish electorate in all provinces outside Ulster. By this point, northern unionists had already asserted the right to govern their own destiny with a show of plebiscitary and military strength in September 1912. Six years later, two prospectively self-governing communities occupied the island of Ireland—a southern community, overwhelmingly Catholic, that supported the assertion of statehood in arms; and a northern community, predominantly Protestant, that claimed the freedom to pledge its loyalty to the Union.

Both communities were more generally mobilized in the context of the extended franchise created by British parliamentary reforms in 1867 and 1884. Mass enfranchisement empowered the electorate in Britain and Ireland to assert in practice what the people had already enjoyed as a theoretical entitlement: sovereignty over the disposal of its powers. These developments took place alongside further schemes for social and constitutional reform. They comprised, first, the succession of land acts passed between 1870 and 1909, which sought to stimulate national allegiance by bestowing greater security on the tenancy rights of smallholding Irish farmers; and, second, the sequence of bills intended to provide Home Rule for Ireland. These changes were intricately interrelated because, from 1879 onward, agrarian grievances were increasingly inseparable from political mobilization: on the one hand, social protest organized around tenurial rights became a national issue; on the other, political activism aiming at constitutional reform could not avoid the controversy over land.³⁶ This process is illustrated by the emergence of successive agrarian organizations allied to constitutional campaigns between the end of the 1870s and 1898—from the Land League to the National League and the United Irish League.

It was first argued around the middle of the seventeenth century that a revolution in politics would follow a revolution in property holding: systems of government, in other words, could be expected to reflect the distribution of goods.³⁷ For most of its history Ireland was largely an agricultural country, with larger scale manufacturing being confined to the northeast of the island. The balance of property therefore substantially consisted of the distribution of land. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, this distribution was affected by the rapid increase in population that took place over the previous fifty years.³⁸ Numbers at the less prosperous end of the scale continued to expand down to the 1840s, with the result that a considerable proportion of the agrarian community subsisted on twenty-acre farms, while a significant percentage also survived as smallholders, laborers, and cottiers. Over these stood a concentration of landlords and large

farmers whose property rights were gradually challenged in the decades after the Famine. Tithe obligations, the welfare of tenants, and pressure on land from tillers and graziers had long triggered agrarian disturbances in Ireland.³⁹ Yet conflicts developed and sharpened from the middle decades of the nineteenth century, descending into a “land war” from the end of the 1870s and persisting into the period after the Civil War of 1922–1923, down to the 1930s and beyond.⁴⁰

The roots of unrest lay in the dearth of larger “improving” estates combined with the lack of wherewithal among smallholders to upgrade their stock. Obstacles in the way of landlords keen to capitalize on their estates was the focus of legislative intervention in 1848 and 1849 in the form of the Encumbered Estates Acts. But from Gladstone’s 1870 Land Act down to the Conservative and then Liberal measures introduced in the first decade of the new century, attempts were made to enable smaller tenant farmers to raise their profits by themselves. This was originally to be achieved by giving what was known as the Ulster Custom the force of law, which in practice meant extending to tenants the possibility of selling their interest in their holdings, a right to fair rent, and fixity of tenure.⁴¹ Yet by the time these measures had been fully achieved in 1881, the Land League under Michael Davitt was demanding the right of outright proprietorship. Vigorous campaigning ultimately bore fruit in the form of a series of major legislative provisions, introduced between 1885 and 1909, which established ownership among tenant farmers by accelerating assisted purchase schemes. In bringing to an end the figure of the landlord in Irish history, this sequence of transfers proved to be perhaps the most significant social change in the country since the 1840s, matched only by the transformation in the standing and roles of women from the middle of the twentieth century.⁴² It would also determine the significance of constitutional reform as this began to be introduced from 1886.

Initially, constitutional change was to take the form of a subordinate legislative parliament as advocated by the Irish Parliamentary Party under the leadership of Charles Stewart Parnell along with influential elements inside the British Liberal Party. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Irish Party exercised considerable leverage over the imperial parliament in holding the balance between Britain’s mainstream parties. Under this conjunction of forces, Home Rule bills were introduced in 1886 and 1893, polarizing unionists and nationalists in Ireland. This contributed to a crisis of national will, culminating in the conflicts of 1912–1923. At the end of this period, in his Nobel Prize acceptance lecture delivered on December 15, 1923, W. B. Yeats described the era after the death of Parnell in 1891 as a time of “gestation” in Irish life. An “event,” Yeats suggested, was then “conceived” that was soon marshaled and advanced by the world of culture as embodied, for example, in the Gaelic League, the National Literary Society, and the Irish Literary Theatre.⁴³ The event Yeats had in mind was the Anglo-Irish War of 1918–1921, during which the Irish “race” was taken to have realized in practice the national vocation that had first assumed a purely imagina-

tive shape in the wake of Parnell.⁴⁴ Yet despite Yeats's retrospective formulation, there had not in fact existed a shared conception of the Irish future that animated the population of the island of Ireland between 1891 and 1912. Instead, a diversity of aspirations found expression in the period. Moreover, in political terms, these had yet to be definitively formed.

It was not the pre-formed characteristics of a "race," to use Yeats's term, that propelled Protestants in Ireland towards an integrated Union. As a matter of fact, before long, the majority would seek a federated arrangement between Britain and Ireland as changing circumstances dictated. Equally, there was nothing integral to Irish Catholic "identity" that drove its protagonists to embrace a particular allegiance. Over the course of a generation, most members of this constituency shifted ground fairly dramatically from endorsing various manifestations of self-government under the Union to supporting competing visions of the separatist ideal.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, the trials of the first decades of the twentieth century terminated in the formation of two rival jurisdictions. The partition of Ireland was introduced under the 1920 Government of Ireland Act. Civil War then followed in the South as opinion divided over the terms of the 1921 Treaty designed to replace the 1920 Act. At the same time, in the North, the new Prime Minister, James Craig, moved to consolidate the position of the new six-county polity.⁴⁶ These developments gave birth to two opposing and introverted cultures that dominated their respective societies in the North and the South. The Southern government, presiding over what was now termed the "Irish Free State," achieved fiscal autonomy under the provisions of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. This led in the 1930s to the adoption of a policy of economic protectionism that pitched Ireland into conflict with British trade.⁴⁷ The policy impacted negatively on industrial growth in a society dominated by its agricultural sector. Through the 1940s and 1950s, national income lagged conspicuously behind the European average. It was not until the 1960s that the economy began to expand and the first bids to join the European Economic Community were made. During the same period, the standard of living in Northern Ireland rose in step with British levels of prosperity. Economic subvention from London eased the blow of industrial decline.

Over the past three hundred years, toleration, prosperity, and population growth have commonly been accepted as indices of a flourishing state of society. Both Irelands—the North and the South—have had interesting difficulties with each of these indicators.⁴⁸ In the North since 1920, trade and manufacture underwent decline, forcing the economy into dependence on the British exchequer. At the same time, population increase, instead of boosting assets and promoting optimism, caused alarm about the sectarian demographic balance in anticipation of a rising Catholic vote. Finally, toleration among Catholics and Protestants in the North never became a cherished public virtue, as nationalists resented curtailment of their civil rights while unionists feared a future at the mercy of Catholic democracy. This fear has had two bases: the waning of the British commitment to

the permanent survival of the Union and the persistence of Southern claims to the integrity of an island polity. The Southern claim seemed all the more menacing in the context of its enduring culture of religious intolerance, which was not alleviated by the decline in population and relative wealth.⁴⁹ In the Republic of Ireland, much like Northern Ireland, moral dogmatism proved a popular habit.⁵⁰ Among the Catholic majority on the island, attitudes to sex, gender relations, and ecclesiastical authority bred conformity, submission, and tenacity. A backlash against discrimination followed in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵¹ Because, in general terms, liberalism and democracy have enjoyed distinct though overlapping histories in the West, it is perhaps unsurprising that they can be found in tension in both jurisdictions of Ireland.⁵²

That tension came to a head in Northern Ireland between 1966 and 1972. In the mid 1960s, moves to improve relations between the Northern and Southern governments provided leaders of intransigent opinion in the North with an opportunity to resist. Inter-communal hostility became manifest in 1966 surrounding the commemorations of 1916. Within two years, clashes between the authorities and the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland were politicizing society at large. By the summer of 1969, the contest between police and protestors had generated more widespread confrontation. The North soon descended into factional strife. Civil war ensued, lasting for thirty years, contained by the overwhelming force of the British army. By the time that a settlement was agreed to in 1998 among the party and paramilitary leaderships, the desire for peace was matched by a mood of recrimination among the electorate. The long-drawn-out process of implementation bore witness to an attitude of persistent bitterness. By now, the economy had come to flourish in the South, only to be compromised by the credit crisis that unfolded after 2008.⁵³ Yet under conditions of both boom and bust, suspicion among Northern Protestants for the institutions of the Republic remained entrenched. A jurisdictional war had occurred leaving all jurisdictions intact. In Northern Ireland, the system of government had been reconfigured and the mode of representation reformed, though animosity persisted on the ground. The hope was that, over the longer term, collaboration in government would lead to attitudes among voters beginning to soften.

In a series of lectures delivered in the early 1820s that were then published in 1851 under the title of *The History of the Origins of Representative Government in Europe*, François Guizot marveled at the reconstruction of Europe in the aftermath of the barbarian invasions that destroyed Rome. The central achievement of this protracted process, he believed, was the creation of a collection of “mighty states.” The history of modern Europe, he went on, was centrally determined by the “destiny” that shaped these potent political structures.⁵⁴ The historical consummation that he had in mind was the gradual modification of centralized power by the reassertion of primitive liberty in modern constitutional forms. The con-

stitutional arrangement that particularly absorbed Guizot was the system of representative government, originally perfected in England and now at last being established in France.⁵⁵ This vision would exercise a conspicuous influence on the subsequent writing of European history, which has largely focused on three preeminent themes: state formation, the balance of power, and domestic social and political revolution. Although these dominant narratives have certainly captured discernible aspects of the European past, they were particularly well suited to organizing the histories of England, France, and Spain. At a stretch, Germany and Italy could be fitted into the same mold, albeit as strangely late developers who had been forced to travel along a special path. In each of these cases, the emergence and consolidation of state sovereignty has constituted the central object of historical analysis. The subsidiary themes of the contests between states and the various struggles within them followed as a matter of course. Compared to these leading processes, other developments began to appear peripheral, and their histories have consequently been relegated to the margins. Accordingly, the shifting fortunes of central Europe and the island of Ireland have seemed tangential.

However, instead of viewing the history of Europe in terms of the formation of discrete national units, one might equally see its progress as governed by the inconstant fate of fluctuating empires. From this perspective, volatile frontiers constitute as central a focus as orderly consolidation. It is useful to examine the history of Ireland in this more flexible and complex framework. This reorientation helps us move beyond attempts to plot the story of Ireland as one of trauma or victimhood, both of which assume the existence of a continuous national personality that bore the brunt of this affliction. It also enables us to jettison accounts that depict Irish history as an exception to a norm, most usually portrayed as a case of failed or inadequate modernization. In place of these oversimplified chronicles, a more variegated process comes into view, based on precarious consolidation and oscillating frontiers. From this vantage, states, national rivalry, and revolutions continue to play an important role, but so too does conquest, settlement, and strife as well as diaspora, secession, and partition.⁵⁶ This volume throws light on this assortment of topics in a series of chapters that combines fresh insights with sharp analysis and exposition. Although the principal objective of the book is to chart the main lines of development in Irish history, in addition it seeks to present the results of accumulated research while also clearing the ground for new departures.

NOTES

1. See chapter 11 by Richard Bourke.
2. See, for example, R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams (eds.), *The Great Famine: Studies in Irish History, 1845–1852* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1956), p. viii: “The political commentator, the ballad singer and the unknown maker of folk-tales have all spoken about the Great Famine,

but is there no more to be said?" This introduction was actually written by Kevin B. Nolan. For the production of the volume, see Cormac Ó Gráda, "Making History in Ireland in the 1940s and 1950s: The Saga of the Great Famine," *Irish Review* 12 (Spring–Summer 1992), pp. 87–107.

3. T. W. Moody, "Twenty-Five Years of Irish Historiography," in *Irish Historiography, 1936–1970* (Dublin: Irish Committee of Historical Sciences, 1971), p. 137.

4. J. C. Beckett, "The Study of Irish History: An Inaugural Lecture," in *Confrontations: Studies in Irish History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972).

5. See chapter 14 by Jill C. Bender.

6. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livius* (ca. 1517), in *The Chief Works of Machiavelli*, 3 vols., trans. Alan Gilbert (London and Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), vol. I, p. 200.

7. Brendan Bradshaw, *The Irish Constitutional Revolution of the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Ciaran Brady, *The Chief Governors: The Rise and Fall of Reform Government in Tudor Ireland, 1536–1588* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

8. The process of migration and castellation is recorded in Giraldus Cambrensis, *Expugnatio Hibernica: The Conquest of Ireland* (1189), edited by A. B. Scott and F. X. Martin (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1978).

9. The outcome of these developments was famously captured and criticized in Edmund Spenser, *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596), edited by W. L. Renwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

10. See chapter 1 by Jane Ohlmeyer.

11. Conrad Russell, *The Fall of the British Monarchies, 1637–1642* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); J.G.A. Pocock, "The British Archipelago and the War of the Three Kingdoms," in Brendan Bradshaw and John Morrill (eds.), *The British Problem, c. 1534–1707: State Formation in the Atlantic Archipelago* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1996).

12. Peter Heather, *Empires and Barbarians: Migration, Development and the Birth of Europe* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 2009); Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (London: Allen Lane, 1993).

13. Mark Greengrass (ed.), *Conquest and Coalescence: The Shaping of the State in Early Modern Europe* (London: Edward Arnold, 1991).

14. Charles W. Ingrao and Franz A. J. Szabo, "Introduction," in Charles W. Ingrao and Franz A. J. Szabo (eds.), *The Germans and the East* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2008).

15. R.J.W. Evans, *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1550–1700: An Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, second ed., 1984), chapters 2 and 6.

16. William Petty, *The Political Anatomy of Ireland*, (1672) in *The Economic Writings of Sir William Petty* (Fairfield, NJ: Augustus M. Kelly, 1986), pp. 157–159.

17. On the European context, see Ian McBride, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland: Isle of Slaves* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2009), chapter 1.

18. The dating here is according to the Julian calendar. The new style date is July 11, though the battle is usually celebrated on the twelfth.

19. Petty, *Political Anatomy*, p. 154.

20. See chapter 2 by Ultán Gillen.

21. George Berkeley, *The Querist* (1735–1737), in *The Works of George Berkeley*, edited by Alexander Campbell Fraser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1901), 4 vols., IV, p. 433: "Whether one may not be allowed to conceive and suppose a society, or nation of human creatures, clad in woolen cloths and stuffs, eating good bread, beef, and mutton, poultry, and fish, in great plenty, drinking ale, mead, and cider, inhabiting great houses, built of brick and marble, taking their pleasure in their parks and gardens, depending on no foreign imports either for food or raiment?"

22. On the intellectual culture of the period, see chapter 7 by Daniel Carey.

23. Edmund Burke to the Rev. Thomas Hussey, May 18, 1795, *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, edited by Thomas W. Copeland (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958–1978), 10 vols., VIII, p. 246.

24. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, edited by R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1976), 2 vols., II, p. 944.
25. Most recently in Paul Bew, *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity, 1789–2006* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
26. Gustave de Beaumont, *Ireland*, edited by W. C. Taylor (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 134.
27. On this distinction see, conveniently, Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), chapter 8.
28. See chapter 3 by John Bew.
29. See chapter 19 by Matthew Kelly. For the intellectual context, see also chapter 8 by David Dwan.
30. For nuances along the spectrum, see Colin W. Reid, “‘An Experiment in Constructive Unionism’: Isaac Butt, Home Rule and Federalist Political Thought during the 1870s,” *English Historical Review* 129: 537 (April 2014), pp. 332–361.
31. See chapter 16 by Marc Mulholland.
32. See chapter 17 by Ciara Boylan.
33. Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History, 1780–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
34. For the wider European context, see Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution: A History of Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth-Century Russia*, translated by Francis Haskell (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1960); Patrick H. Hutton, *The Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition: The Blanquists in French Politics, 1864–1893* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981).
35. Louis Antoine Léon de Saint-Just, “Rapport sur la nécessité de déclarer le gouvernement révolutionnaire jusqu’à la paix” in *Oeuvres Complètes de Saint-Just*, edited by Charles Vellay (Paris: Charpentier and Fasquelle, 1908), 2 vols., II, p. 88: “Le gouvernement provisoire de la France est révolutionnaire jusqu’à la paix.”
36. For differing accounts of the priority of economics and politics in the context of agrarian agitation in Ireland, see James S. Donnelly, Jr., *The Land and the People in Nineteenth-Century Cork: The Rural Economy and the Land Question* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975); K. Theo Hoppen, *Elections, Politics, and Society in Ireland, 1832–1885* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Philip Bull, *Land, Politics and Nationalism: A Study of the Irish Land Question* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1996).
37. James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656) in *The Political Works of James Harrington*, edited by J.G.A. Pocock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
38. K. H. Connell, *The Population of Ireland, 1780–1845* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950).
39. For an overview, see Maura Cronin, *Agrarian Protest in Ireland, 1750–1960* (Dundalk, Ireland: Dundalgan Press, 2012). On Irish ranch farming, see David Seth Jones, *Graziers, Land Reform, and Political Conflict in Ireland* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995).
40. Twentieth-century developments are traced in Terence Dooley, “*The Land for the People*”: *The Land Question in Independent Ireland* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2004).
41. See Joseph Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society, 1848–1918* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973), chapters 2–3.
42. See chapter 15 by Catriona Kennedy. For general comment on the change of women’s fortunes in the twentieth century, see Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost Further Explored* (1965; London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 269 ff.
43. For the Irish literary revival and its legacies, see chapter 9 by Lauren Arrington; for the Gaelic League, see chapter 13 by Vincent Morley.
44. W. B. Yeats, “The Irish Dramatic Movement: A Lecture Delivered to the Royal Academy of Sweden” (1923–1924), in William H. O’Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald eds., *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats III: Autobiographies* (New York: Scribner, 1999), p. 410.
45. See chapter 4 by Fearghal McGarry.
46. See chapter 5 by Niall Ó Dochartaigh.

47. See chapter 18 by Andy Bielenberg.
48. J. J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912–1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
49. See chapter 12 by Ian McBride.
50. See chapter 10 by Maurice Walsh.
51. See chapter 20 by Maria Luddy.
52. Richard Bourke, *Peace in Ireland: The War of Ideas* (London: Pimlico, 2003, 2012).
53. See chapter 6 by Diarmaid Ferriter.
54. François Guizot, *The History of the Origins of Representative Government in Europe*, edited by Aurelian Craiutu (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2002), p. 20.
55. Guizot, *History of the Origins of Representative Government*, pp. 13–15.
56. On the Irish diaspora, see chapter 21 by Enda Delaney.