CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

| | |
|---|---|
| Title | "Cheap and common animals": The English anatomy of Ireland in the Seventeenth Century |
| Authors | Coughlan, Patricia |
| Publication date | 1990 |
| Original Citation | Coughlan, P. (1990) '"Cheap and common animals": The English anatomy of Ireland in the Seventeenth Century', in Healy T. and Sawday, J. (eds), Literature and the English Civil War, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 205–223. isbn 0-521-37082-5 |
| Type of publication | Book chapter |
| Rights | © Cambridge University Press 1990. |
| Download date | 2026-11-02 23:33:42 |
| Item downloaded from | https://hdl.handle.net/10468/15626 |

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

PATRICIA COUGHLAN

# 11 'Cheap and common animals': the English anatomy of Ireland in the seventeenth century

IRISH HISTORY, while profoundly influenced at every turn by that of its neighbour, nevertheless does not answer very well to English periodisation. The dynamic is different. At the outset of the English Civil War Ireland contained plantations less than fifty years old, and while it had in the east and in the towns an ancient and sophisticated legal and political culture based on the English model, other areas of the country preserved in varying degrees of strength the still older native forms of political behaviour. Thus in the 1630s Strafford's Irish policies were an attempt to institute thorough centralising control over a society which was divided in quite other ways, and over issues quite different, from those which preoccupied contemporary England. Questions of church government and royal prerogative were heavily inflected in Ireland by ethnic power struggles, not merely by differences of religious or political principle or class tensions. But Irish divisions are not readily to be understood as simple ethnic polarities. Paradoxically a common religion uneasily united the 'Old English' elite – Catholics of Norman origin – with the native aristocracy in resistance to Strafford's autocratic tactics. Later, in the 1640s, the Irish wars were fought in patterns formed very much in that country, and with constant and bewildering shifts of allegiance, and are no more than 'inconvenienced' with English interventions on different scales until Cromwell's definitive 1649 expedition. And even then, the development of factions during the 1650s among apparently unified interest groups complicates the effects of the Cromwellian conquest. The 'new English' – the group of pre-1649, largely Elizabethan and Jacobean settlers – have by 1660, before the Restoration, come quietly into possession of the land and power so patently in the hands of the radical Cromwellians a decade before.

The study of English writings about Ireland in these two decades is complicated not only by these sharp differences from the familiar and prevailing English modes of understanding the period, but also by the brute facts of current historiography. While the interesting texts of the period in England have long been known, though not always studied sufficiently in relation to their context, there are as yet no synthetic

accounts of the body of writings either in or about Ireland in the period. Historians have occasionally put to use particular texts (for example Petty's *History of the Down Survey*, published in 1852) as sources of factual information, and it is conventional to notice the influence of the 1641 massacre-descriptions on English public opinion. But there has not yet been any significant attempt to investigate the various writings of the period in themselves as symbolic representations (as distinct from seeing them as relatively inert and transparently readable pieces of evidence for the views or political positions of various factions). The unfamiliarity of the material which results from these considerations means that it must be approached very differently from well-known writings such as *Areopagitica*, Marvell's 'Horatian Ode', or even Lucy Hutchinson's work. I have therefore sometimes found it necessary in the case of the least known texts to offer a descriptive as well as an analytic account. Equally, the detail of contemporary Irish, as distinct from English, history needs to be recalled before the possible significations of a work totally imbricated in it can be at all usefully explored.

There is also, however, a sense in which the approach of this book appears in Ireland less surprising or new than it may do to those accustomed to English literary or historical perspectives. Irish experience has preserved quite unbroken the connection between history and literature, rhetoric and action, which has in England become problematic – though it was not so in the seventeenth century. To Irish consciousness the mutual interpenetration of texts and events is a given, not the perhaps slightly threatening and radical postulate it is in England. Because of its close and nervous relation to the ideology actually seen to govern political actions, colonial discourse shows with particular clarity a general dependence upon shared representations. These representations – for instance, of the roles of coloniser and colonised, and of socially desirable goals – cut across the generic boundaries between literary texts and other kinds of writing.

Seventeenth-century writings about Ireland did not, of course, construct their representations of the Irish *ab initio*. They worked by modifying and adjusting as seemed necessary those views about the Irish arrived at in earlier periods. There is not scope here to rehearse the long process of construction of these stereotypes, effected by the centuries-long interaction of prejudice and experience in the power relations of Irish and English.[1] The particular background against which the thought of mid-seventeenth-century writers was formed was that of the intensive phase of Elizabethan and Jacobean colonisation, which produced the classic expressions of early modern Anglo-Irish colonist ideology, among them the writings of Spenser and Sir John Davies. Spenser's *View of the Present State of Ireland* (written in 1596, though not published until 1633) is indeed

the founding text of modern English discourse about Ireland, and was a specific influence in the civil war decades on Englishmen's approach to Ireland. It affords a particularly appropriate source for a summary account of those received representations which are the basis of seventeenth-century English thought and action in respect of Ireland.[2]

Spenser's images of the Irish, like those of his fellow-colonist writers, are based on the more general Renaissance typology of the wildness outside civil society, a set of representations which has been well described by Hayden White. As such they resemble those prevailing in other colonial situations in the period – for instance in Spanish interpretations of South American indigenes in the context of their rule over them – and can also be paralleled in English accounts of North American Indians. In spite of the major actual differences between these various places and peoples, their colonising interpreters came to them equipped with more or less the same model of civility versus barbarity formed in the tradition of European classical and Christian thought.[3]

Bearing in mind these pre-formed notions about the incivility of those without a native urban culture, in Spenser's attitude to Ireland and the Irish one may identify a negative and a positive moment, of which the negative is dominant. In the *View* it consists of an assumption that the Irish are a 'salvage' nation, who represent an irredeemable otherness and are impermeable to civility. They are sly, dissolute, fickle and imponderable. The only way to deal with them is by ruthless suppression and if necessary by eradication.[4] The territory of Ireland is presented as a hostile wilderness, alien to civilised understanding, in which these savage and implacable enemies fleetingly appear and disappear. It consists of 'great mountains and waste deserts full of grass', whose inhabitants are 'Scythian' in their propensity to wander with their cattle-herds from place to place and thus defy the imposition of civil order. There runs through the *View* a series of antitheses between these Irish, who 'swerve', 'straggle', 'miche in corners', 'wander loosely', are 'ydely roguing', and the English policy which is intended to repress such qualities, and which will have them 'shortly to be brought in by the ears', feel 'the bitternesse of the marshall lawe', and so forth.[5] The countryside too must be controlled, shut down, contained, by means of clearings, bridges and forts.

Very occasionally, however, in *The Faerie Queene* (especially I.vi and IV.iv) Spenser does invent some 'salvage' characters about whose development to fully human status he can express a sense of possibility, and who are basically benign in spite of living outside the bounds of normal society. The Irish landscape, too, is sometimes assimilated imaginatively to an ideal order, for instance in the Faunus and Diana episode of the Mutabilitie Cantos. This episode reconstructs the Munster countryside as

an ideal territory, to which the beauty of perfect order is imputed by the genial personification of local mountains and streams (VII.vi.46–55). This impeccably Ovidian fable has also strong echoes of Irenius' policy programme for Ireland in the *View*.

Finally, when in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* (1591), Spenser attempts to bring together both the moments of his vision of Ireland, the result is uneasily paradoxical and confusing, and strains the pastoral form. To Colin, Ireland is both a beautiful, fertile, fictionally native land, and a 'waste desart' full of human and inhuman horrors, 'the griesly famine and the raging sweard', 'wayling' and 'wretchednesse' (lines 91, 184, 312–19). In this uncertainty of perspective we may identify a characteristic which is of central importance in English writing about Ireland in the succeeding century. Ireland in the poem is being made to pose for Arcadia, but even in the transforming mode of pastoral poetry it cannot be made altogether to fit the role, any more than it will be readily accommodated to the new Utopian (rather than Arcadian) formulations of some seventeenth-century 'projectors'.

In spite of the rebarbatively negative tone of Spenser's version of Ireland in the *View*, it was nevertheless already being naturalised or refunctioned as distinctively Anglo-Irish discourse when it was first published in Sir James Ware's version, *The Historie of Ireland* (Dublin, 1633). Ware, a Protestant of English stock, embodied in his own repertoire of social roles the doubleness or multiplicity of perspectives often entailed upon those publicly active in colonial situations. He was, on the one hand, a trusted office-holder in Strafford's divisive and autocratic regime, and on the other an extremely important antiquarian, historian and collector of ancient Irish manuscripts, who maintained cordial communications with contemporary Gaelic poets and was responsible for the survival of precious early works.[6] His version of the *View* makes systematic and highly significant textual modifications to the original, all tending to a considerable softening of Spenser's harsh judgements about the native Irish and particularly the Old English. He further affects readers' reception of the *View* by reprinting along with it the rivers passage from *Faerie Queene* IV and the Mutabilitie Cantos, the two passages of Spenser's text which most idealise and offer a benign transformation of the Irish landscape. Ware also adds an eirenic preface which expresses (optimistically) his sense of an Irish unity now achieved.[7] A major shift of emphasis has occurred between Spenser's unbending condemnation of Irish actuality – delivered in the context of rebellion and confiscation – and Ware's foregrounding of the *View's* historical and antiquarian aspect, which can hardly have been in the 1590s the most salient part of the text.

An interesting contrast with Ware's refunctioning of Spenser is provided by James Shirley's play *St. Patrick for Ireland*, produced in Dublin

on the eve of the Civil War, during the 1639–40 theatre season.[8] The piece presents Patrick's conversion of the pagan Irish as a civilising enterprise. The foreign arrival Patrick, who is 'of Brittaine, sir' (I.i.175), is made responsible for initiating Ireland's medieval glories of faith and learning in the teeth of the sullenly resistant, bloody and duplicitous Irish king and pagan priests, whose barbarism is strongly reminiscent of that attributed by Spenser in the *View* to the vengeful, blood-drinking, 'Scythian' Gaels. The play ends with an outward capitulation by the native king, but he is covertly determined to carry on a diehard opposition. This may well represent, in a manner gratifying to Strafford and his regime, the crass stubbornness of current Irish resistance to centralising English rule and the wisdom of treating cautiously any apparent native submission. Thus by a curious reversal of the legend's cultural significance *to the Irish*, the civilising influence Patrick represents comes to stand for that currently being exercised by the English. This would make the Irish (shown as stubbornly refusing enlightenment by Patrick) responsible for their own imputed barbarity, a condition already detailed in Spenser and other writings and vividly present to the English popular imagination since Elizabethan times.[9] In the context of the Caroline court, Shirley may appear to have had reservations about absolutist royal policies, but it would be as incautious to apply this as it would be many other English-based presumptions, without careful modification, to his stance in Ireland.[10] On a personal and professional level, certainly, the sour tone of Shirley's Dublin Prologues suggests an impatience with the Irish and their cultural limitations which lead to a refusal or an incapacity to support the drama adequately. Furthermore, there is no obvious evidence that his Catholicism had any moderating effect on his hostility to these – no doubt largely Old English and Catholic – audiences.[11] The most positive aspect of native Ireland in the play is perhaps the 'Bard', who, while primarily a comic figure, is nevertheless benign and ultimately willing to be converted and to follow Patrick. But on the whole, one can find little in Shirley's version of Ireland in this play which would reveal the development of any insight into the situation of the colonised in that country. Nor is there a capacity to apprehend the place from anything other than a strictly colonising viewpoint.

Understanding the possible political and wider cultural meanings of Shirley's text is a complex matter. Yet, though I wish to stress the absence of an enlightening vision of Irishness in Shirley, and set his work against Ware's in that respect, one must bear in mind that the two are products of the same cultural milieu, however different they are in character. This fact returns us to the observation I have made at the outset of a simultaneous continuity and tension within the surviving body of seventeenth-century Anglo-Irish texts.

After the Irish rising which began in October 1641, however, there appears a strain of English writings about the Irish which are of an alarming simplicity. The problem of what actually happened in 1641 is one of the most vexed questions in Irish historiography and political mythology, and I shall not attempt to examine it here.[12] But the *representations* of 1641 greatly influenced English thinking about Ireland for some time afterwards. The intention of the original Commissions of Enquiry was to record the quantity and value of money and property stolen from Protestants, but within a few weeks an equal or greater emphasis was being laid on the alleged atrocities committed.[13] Stories about the wholesale massacre of Protestants began to circulate in the early months of 1642, and the English Commons commissioned reports by Irish Protestant spokesmen such as Henry Jones, then Dean of Clogher, who had himself been a refugee from the rising. Jones's pamphlet *A Remonstrance*, published in March 1642, is relatively restrained compared to the subsequent lurid pamphlet literature on the subject, of which the classic example is Sir John Temple's prurient and repetitive *History of the Irish Rebellion* (1646). Jones's text nevertheless shows the qualities familiar from other contemporary atrocity stories, rehearsing many times a series of incidents which form a fixed repertoire of symbolically arresting and evocative horrors: stripping naked, dashing out of the brains of infants on stones, burial alive, mockery and trampling of the sacred book (in one case 'causing the bagpipes to play the while') and 'ripping up', especially of preguant women.[14] These images passed into the popular propagandists' minds, and recur countless times in the news-sheets of the following decade or more, where they are used to whip up indignation against the 'bloody inhumane savages' in Ireland who were at war throughout the 1640s with parliament. The few protests against this dominant attitude – by some Levellers and by figures such as Henry Marten and Thomas Walwyn – have been detailed by historians of the radical opposition in England.[15] But for the duration of the wars and commonwealth the prevailing image in England was dominated by grotesque stereotypes: monsters of cruelty, living subhumanly in bogs and wielding 'skeines' (Irish *scian*, long knife), often by a scornful metonymy themselves labelled 'trowses' after Irish traditional warriors' dress. It is a picture not confined to the popular newsbooks; it is recognisable in several passages of Milton's writings, particularly (but not exclusively) in his *Observations Upon the Articles of Peace* (1648), the extraordinarily bitter and vituperative pamphlet written to attack the Irish royalist leader Ormond and the 'blockish' Belfast Presbyterians on the occasion of Ormond's truce with the Irish rebels.[16] Throughout the 1640s, any mention of the Irish seems to require an epithet such as 'bloody', 'cruel' or 'inhuman' to be communicatively effective. In the 1660s popular literature begins to find it possible again to include a more positive, though

scarcely more nuanced, image of Ireland in its vocabulary. Brome's collection of *Rump Songs*, for example, contains several jolly national medleys each of which mobilised Irishmen along with the Scots and Welsh, and sometimes with the French and Dutch too, in a vague and wish-fulfilling proto-imperialist praise of Britain.[17]

There are few texts from the 1640s written in English from the perspective of the Catholics in Ireland.[18] One particularly interesting and specifically literary example is, however, Henry Burkhead's *Cola's Fury Or Lirenda's Miserie* (Kilkenny, 1646), whose subject is the Irish war, and which shares with the Protestant 1641 propaganda the quality of extreme emotional intensity. Burkhead, a Bristol merchant, was a Catholic, and his play is written from the royalist viewpoint. From 1642 to 1649 the Leinster town of Kilkenny was the headquarters of the Assembly of confederate Catholics, the coalition of native and Old English Catholics which had been formed to carry on the war in the name of the king against the English parliament. During the early 1640s this confederacy carried ont a prolonged series of negotiations with the king's agents, trying to gain guarantees of religious liberty in return for promises to support Charles with their forces in the English Civil War. Burkhead's play may be dated between June 1645 and very early 1646.

*Cola's Fury* may be called a tragi-comedy, since it ends with the proclamation of a 'cessation' of fighting, and near the end of the piece fair portents are presented to the good characters. But its form seems barely able to contain its subject-matter, and is visibly strained by the burden. The play tries to account for the current Irish war in two ways at once, ways which are largely incompatible. At the start of the play the war is presented as a comprehensible political conflict about power, possession of territory and religious differences. But it later becomes apparent that the Angoleans' commander, Sir Carola Cola, is in the grip of a dementia, the 'fury' of the title, which is represented as rationally inexplicable and which causes him to multiply senseless cruelties against the Lirendeans.[19] In the character of Cola, Burkhead seems to suggest a transcendent intervention in human political affairs. Near the end the spirit of Revenge begins to haunt him, promising his imminent destruction, and when he is soon after shot dead, the hand that eliminates him is understood by the reader to be providentially guided.[20] By resorting to the formal resources of masque – dance, superhuman apparitions, an enchanted sleep – Burkhead conjures a magical resolution of the play's conflict in place of the political one he could not, within the given framework of actual history, find a way to envisage.[21]

One might read this recourse to a wished-for transcendence as the relinquishing of the Catholics' politically hopeless position to fate, the equivalent of an inarticulate cry as if at the dismemberment of a body politic. The

parallel with Spenser's idealising escape tactic in the Mutabilitie Cantos is striking. Though from politically opposite perspectives, the intractable matter of political actuality is, so to speak, converted into metaphysical energy so that it can fuel the desire for an order stably established. The difference between Spenser's and Burkhead's gestures is a reversal of direction: in Burkhead the Irish are the victims rather than the exemplars of inexplicable irrationality, subject to, not the originating subjects of, insanely destructive behaviour. Providential sanction is invoked by Spenser for the work of Lord Deputy Grey and English authority, and equally by Burkhead for the allied Catholic and Irish resistance to that authority, as embodied in 1645 by the London Parliament.

After Cromwell's Irish expedition in 1649, however, invocations of transcendence cease to consist in turning to a metaphysical elsewhere. Nothing is plainer than the strong sense of Providential mission felt by many of the godly "49 men', but there is a very particular relation of pragmatism to piety in the applied Protestantism of Ireland's governors during the 1650s. Divine approval is something to be actively achieved in the here and now, by the vigorous exercise both of force majeure and intellectual acumen. Thus new post-Baconian endeavours to increase the sum of knowledge, such as the Boate brothers' *Irelands Natural History* (London, 1652), went forward with two intriguingly mixed motives: the conviction of a Providential appointment to eradicate the bloodthirsty and oppressive powers of Catholicism, and an impulse further to colonise and exploit more efficiently the natural resources being described and enumerated. The *History* was to be a new full and empirically based description of Ireland, which was enthusiastically promoted by Samuel Hartlib, in whose Puritan and post-Baconian projects the Boates, scientists of Dutch origin, were partakers.[22] One might imagine extravagantly emotional outbursts to be almost programmatically excluded from the actual text of a Baconian scientific work such as the *History*; but in practice this is not so. Its promise of scientific detachment is misleading. Written in the later 1640s, it shares with *Cola's Fury* and the 1641 texts a high degree of emotional intensity. The circumstances of its composition help to explain this charged atmosphere, while not abolishing the implicit contradiction between it and the Baconian programme of objectivity. The Boates were close to a group of 'new English' settlers in Ireland – chiefly to the former ruthless chief justice and acquisitive planter Sir William Parsons (probably the character called Pitho in *Cola's Fury*) who had been 'driven thence' by 'the bloody combustions' of 1641.[23] So even though the *History* was intended to confine itself to the noteworthy *natural* characteristics of Ireland – harbours, climate, the potential of the woods and mines – and not to discuss the people till a later section, nevertheless it repeatedly breaks out in expressions of violent revulsion against the

native Irish, 'a nation extremely barbarous in all the parts of their life', who have resisted all the 'great pains taken by the English, ever since the Conquest, for to civilize them, and to improve the Countrie'.[24] The spectres of 1641, no doubt raised by the Parsons, the Boates' informants, are often in evidence. The depredations of 'that horrible Rebellion of the bloody Irish' upon the fair improved lands of English and Ulster Scots are repeatedly described. Further, having poured scorn on the alleged inaccuracies of fact in earlier historians of Ireland such as Giraldus Cambrensis and Camden, the Boates themselves employ representations of the Irish at least as stereotyped, and (ironically, considering their commitment to a Baconian instauration) perhaps actually deriving from such earlier accounts. Thus they say that Ireland's mineral seams have been under-exploited, because the Irish – 'one of the most barbarous Nations of the whole Earth' – have been 'so far from seeking out' any such enterprise, that only the 'New-English' have begun this task. Here the Baconian enthusiasm for discovering the resources of the earth and putting them to use has coalesced with a traditional element of the Irish stereotype – ineradicable laziness.[25] And in 1641 this pathological sloth was compounded with wanton destruction, as in the story of the wrecking of a silver mine in County Tipperary:

> not content to lay wast the Mine, and to demolish all the works thereunto belonging, [they] did accompany this their barbarousness with bloody cruelty against the poor workmen . . . the which some of them being English and the rest Dutch (because the Irish having no skill at all in any of those things, had never been imployed in this Mine otherwise than to digg it, and to doe other labours) were all put to the sword by them, except a very few, who by flight escaped their hands.[26]

One is prompted, against the Boates' evident intentions, to wonder whether the very lack of a stake in the mine was not more potent than the imputed barbarous ignorance in bringing about its destruction. Thus even in a discourse which avowedly concentrates on the material features of the country, the Boates' fevered prejudices about human nature in Ireland are quite manifest. They apply even more absolutely than Spenser an essentialist model of ineradicable Irish wickedness, and (perhaps unsurprisingly, given their political allegiances) they place all faith for the country's future in a complete transfer of control to the new English.

But the Boates are minor figures by comparison with the main bringer of the new empiricist approach to Ireland, William Petty. Petty, born in 1623, was a self-made man and a polymath: Marx called him the founder of political economy, and he was a distinguished mathematician, inventor, anatomist, surveyor and cartographer, and a pioneer of statistics. In his youth Petty had lived in Holland and France, where he knew Descartes

and the Mersenne circle, and assisted Hobbes during the writing of his *Opticks*. They studied anatomy jointly, and Petty was subsequently professor of anatomy at Oxford. He came to Ireland in 1652, when he was appointed Physician to the army there, but by December 1654 he had been appointed to carry out the 'Down Survey'.[27] This was to ascertain, in the wake of the recently completed Cromwellian conquest, the exact boundaries of those lands which were to be forfeited by all those deemed not of 'constant good affection' to the parliamentary forces during the 1640s.[28] Petty himself became an Irish landowner, acquiring vast territories in South Kerry in payment for his work on the Survey, and retained them at the Restoration, setting up an iron-works and a pilchard fishery on them.

Petty's writings about Ireland are of great interest from our present perspective because they differ so markedly from most earlier colonist writing, showing a steady pragmatism, a determined lack of interest in controversy or recrimination, and a peculiar, vivid practicality of style. They include his documented *History of the Down Survey* (*c.* 1659), several pamphlets on Ireland's economy and administration, and many brief notes and speculations, composed up to the last years of his life, in the 1670s.[29] Petty's first published work – the *Advice to Hartlib* (London, 1648), a Baconian essay on a reformed educational system – predates his association with Ireland. But it clearly limns the outlines of his lifelong intellectual project, which he set out to bring to bear upon Ireland. These are the impulse towards quantification, or some other exact fixing, of the matter to be dealt with, and the accompanying concept of the division of labour in executing a project, and a determination to privilege things over words and the objects of the material world over rhetoric. There is a resulting emphasis on empirical acquaintance with the object of study, which one must examine, as he says, *per autopsiam* – as in a modern anatomy, not merely in theory or relying on a textbook, but for oneself, materially and in practice.[30]

As we have seen, in the 1641 narratives endlessly recurring 'ripping up', tearing and dismembering are represented as the characteristic action of the Irish upon the bodies of the English settlers; the Cromwellian reconquest and the ensuing transplantation plans (which depend on the Down Survey) are specifically conceived as turning back upon the Irish all that violent cutting up. For an anatomy to be performed, the body in question must first be dead, and therefore totally available to the wielder of the knife: to the anatomist, such as Petty had been, it is as new material upon which to practise. If one considers Petty's surveying work on Ireland as an anatomy, the precedent killing has been carried out by the Cromwellian military campaigns, and when Petty came, just over a dec-

ade later, to write his major discussion of Ireland, he called it a *Political Anatomy*.

In his Preface, Petty explicitly says he is using the 'judicious Parallel' made by Bacon between the body natural and the body politic. He continues:

> Furthermore, as Students in Medicine, practice their inquiries upon cheap and common Animals . . . I have chosen Ireland as such a Political Animal, who is scarce 20 years old; where the Intrigue of State is not very complicate, and with which I have been conversant from an Embrion . . . 'Tis true, that curious Dissections cannot be made without variety of proper Instruments; whereas I have had only a commin Knife and a Clout. (Hull, I, p. 129)

This was written in 1672; the '20 years' run from the Act of Settlement in 1652, which as we have seen was also the year of Petty's arrival in Ireland to be physician to the army. The passage reveals his sense of the difference of the Cromwellian intervention from all previous ones. Politically and intellectually, the work of the 1650s is continuous, in his mind, with that to be done in subsequent decades, but it constitutes a break with Irish history before 1649.[31] Petty would not have been alone in expressing such an opinion in the 1650s, when the sense of a fresh start, and the use of such images as a clean slate or a white paper was common among the Cromwellians in Ireland, full of the 'moral energy' which had driven the bloody reconquest.[32] Henry Cromwell's chaplain, Thomas Harrison, expressed a common feeling when he called Ireland 'clay upon the wheele, ready to receive what forme authority shall please to give it'.[33]

But despite the initial similarity, Petty's sense of a break with the past has a different quality from that of these godly witnesses in two main ways, one a positive quality, the other an absence. First, the emphasis on newness is part of the utopian character of his thinking: 'Ireland is as a white paper', he wrote (Hull, I, p. 9). Looked at positively, from Petty's viewpoint rather than that of those dispossessed, the Down Survey, too, has an utopian character in the completeness of its working upon the forfeited lands of Ireland; it is named from the fact that unlike previous surveys it not only lists the territories but puts them *down* on new-made maps. The existing civil bounds and Catholic proprietorships are rendered null and by that means the country as previously named becomes a nowhere, literally an utopia. The second differentiating feature of Petty's expression of newness in Ireland is its striking secularity: it is the result of a fresh political, rather than divine, dispensation and the attendant promise of rationalising reforms. For all his early participation in and patronage by the Hartlib group, for whom, as we have seen, millenarian religious feeling was closely linked with Baconian projections for Ireland's future and with colonist personal ambition, Petty very rarely manifests on his

own account any specifically religious aspirations, as distinct from scientific, intellectual and political ones. His contact as a young man with Hobbes, who was the reverse of an enthusiast in the religious sense, no doubt influenced the formation of his disenchanted attitude; in his later manuscript writings he emerges as a Lockean sceptic and a latitudinarian, perhaps even a deist, for whom religion is primarily a matter of social custom.[34] In this connection, his attitude to 1641 is highly unusual. The *History of the Down Survey* contains none of the customary execrations of those events, and compared to the attitudes of Milton, Cromwell, or the Boates, Petty appears in general extraordinarily dispassionate. In later writings, he distinguishes himself explicitly from such anger as theirs, and perhaps Cola's, in Burkhead's play:

> Some furious spirits have wished, that the Irish would rebel again, that they might be put to the Sword. But I declare, that motion to be not only impious and inhumane, but withal frivolous and pernicious even to them who have rashly wish'd for those occasions. (Hull, I, p. 155)

He nowhere engages in ritual expressions of abhorrence at the massacres, raising the topic only in order to suggest a division by at least four of the numbers alleged to have been killed (Hull, I, p. 150). About the whole period of the wars, he suspends judgement: 'But as for the Bloodshed in the Contest, God best knows who did occasion it'. He makes no exalted claims about the rights or moral mission of the English in Ireland, as his choice of metaphor shows:

> But upon the playing of this Game or Match upon so great Odds, the English won and have (among, and besides other Pretences) a Gamester's Right at least to their Estates. (Hull, I, p. 154)

Given the self-righteousness of other colonists' rhetoric and the feverishness of the usual 1641 references it is difficult not to find such distance a relief and be tempted to accept empirical method at its own valuation, as a wholly progressive invention. Petty's mathematisation of the world, and specifically of Ireland, is part of a process of rationalisation. His cool, detached style is a respite from the often fulminating succession of English discourses on Ireland, and sometimes he pinpoints the underlying cause of a problem with insight, economy and wit.

Quantification is Petty's dominant tactic in his dealings with the multifarious particulars of social life; he constantly uses it to resist merely interested argument and looks for 'some Rule in Nature whereby to value and proportionate the Lands of Ireland' (Hull, I, p. 180). All his texts tend towards tabulation and listing, in accordance with his assertion that 'Arithmetick and Geometry' are 'the best grounded parts of Speculative knowledge' (*Advice*, p. 7). As the following typical passage from the *Pol-*

*itical Anatomy* shows, statistical description becomes a dominant method of procedure in his writings:

> Now in Ireland a Milch-Cow . . . breeds upon two Acres of Pasture, and with as much Hay as will grow upon Half an Acre of Meadow, will yield 3 Gallons of Milk for 90 days . . . and one Gallon at a Medium for 90 more . . . Wherefore it follows, that such a Cow upon such Feeding, gives above one Tun and a half.
> (Hull, I, pp. 172–3)

In his own thought we can see a kind of division of labour operating. He sees himself as engaged in a new kind of planning and description, which is meant to escape entanglement in the Irish melee of competing interests and factions. He declares that 'I profess no Politicks', and 'I never intended to complicate Religion with the Matters of this Essay', which may be interpreted merely as pragmatic attempts to assure his current position, but are also characteristic expressions of a coherent intellectual programme (Hull, I, p. 129; II, p. 578). The problem is to be simplified so that it may be discussed. He tries to remove from his consideration all the vexed questions of Irish history – land ownership, religion, ethnic origin, power, usurpation – thinking of the resultant passions as 'a mere Caprice and Perverseness', things not rationally explicable and therefore imponderable. Sometimes he has an air of cutting the Gordian knot, as when he classifies the present inhabitants of Ireland not in the usual categories of native Irish, Old English, and pre- or post-1649 arrivals, or 'much less' as 'Protestants and Papists, and such who speak English, and such who despise it', but as soldiers, landowners, tenants, labourers, etc. Thus he substitutes economic and therefore in his eyes rational differences for the irrational, factional ones actually functioning to make for Irish 'intrigue' and 'complication' (Hull, II, pp. 562, 576).

For Petty, divisive political passions are bound up with the defects of language. He sets the project of 'a Political Arithmetick and a Geometricall Justice' against the errors of the world, which cannot be mended by 'Wit', 'Rhetoric', or 'Interest'. Here 'Wit' and 'Rhetoric' – the stuff of words – are linked with 'Interest' as equally incapable of remedying the defective facts of actuality (Hull, I, p. 240). In the *Advice*, he says learning to read should come only after an intimate acquaintance with material objects and tools, which is the means of acquiring a more rational and purposive form of knowledge than that normally imparted: 'it would be more profitable . . . to spend ten or twelve years in the study of Things . . . then in a rabble of words' (p. 8). This Baconian idea of a struggle in the mind between things and their names finds a particularly interesting application in Petty's thought about Ireland. In his work on the Down Survey he projects an effective eradication from the material terrain of Ireland of the 'meer Words and Chymaerical Notions' which have given it its outlandish

and incomprehensible names and articulated it in the minds of its native inhabitants. He complains about the traditional methods of naming lands in Ireland:

> For as a Territory bounded by Bogs, is greater or lesser as the Bog is more dry and passible, or otherwise: so the Country of a Grandee or Tierne [Irish: *tiarna*, lord] in Ireland, became greater or lesser as his Forces waxed or weaned . . . The limits of their Land-agreements were no lines Geometrically drawn; but if the Rain fell one way, then the Land whereon it fell, did belong to A., if the other way, to B, & c. (Hull, I, p. 206)

Such procedures he sees as irrational, subject to wholly imponderable shifts in power, fluid and impermanent as bogs and rain. The adequacy of these arrangements for the earlier Irish cattle-herding society practising seasonal nomadism and organized according to clan or sept simply does not enter into Petty's frame of thinking. Such indeterminacy to his mind must entail confusion and probably knavery. For Englishmen in Ireland, of course, the relation between words and things, names and the people or places they attach to, had always a peculiarly problematic status, because the names themselves were alien and offended by their incomprehensibility. The 1665 Act of Explanation contained a royal order that the 'barbarous and uncouth names of places' be changed for new, English ones. Like most of his countrymen Petty experienced this difficulty; probably much more than most, because of his work in the survey. He calls the old names 'uncouth, intelligible' (Hull, I, p. 208). But having said that 'the various spellings of Names not understood' must be 'prevented' and 'set out by Authority to determine the same for the time to come', he nevertheless remarks that:

> It would not be amiss if the significant part of the Irish Names were interpreted, where they are not, or cannot be abolished. (Hull, I, pp. 207–8)

It is Petty's distinction that he can see that the Irish names *have* a 'significant part'; here one might say that the names have as it were become things, potential objects of study, part of knowledge and not of that confusion which in his eyes is its antithesis. When, in his late work *A Treatise of Ireland*, Petty proposes a total union of the two nations, and a 'transmutation' of the Irish into English, he argues from the dispensability of mere names:

> Now if the two Nations be brought into one, the Name of the lesser Nation must needs be abolished, whilst the Thing and Substance is exalted. (Hull, II, pp. 577–8)

What matters is not the name, but what he calls the 'Thing and Substance' – the material conditions of the people's lives: 'The Cabineers of Ire-

land . . . will be removed out of their wretched Beastlike habitations; unfit for making Merchantable Butter and Cheese' (Hull, II, p. 578). Not only will the names be altered, in Petty's proposal, but the things also, and for the better. The act of renaming is a response to a rational intention of improvement, not a destructive impulse.

It is by this eminently Baconian move of concentrating on material facts that Petty tacitly dismantles the stereotype of the Irish which had served most earlier English writers. He makes no apparent assumption of a *natural* inferiority in them; instead of their nature, he considers their circumstances. In his eyes their manners are environmentally produced – by a 'want of Imployment and Encouragement to Work' – rather than by any natural or moral deficiency (Hull, I, pp. 201, 202). It follows that they are alterable. Where Spenser and the Boates call the people 'barbarous' or 'uncivil', Petty says that '6 of 8 of all the Irish live in a brutish nasty Condition, as in Cabins, with neither Chimney, Door, Stairs nor Window'. The Hobbesian phrase is applied not to an inevitable, innate quality of the Irish poor, but to the state of their houses, which offends primarily because it runs counter to 'the advancement of Trade', for which Ireland is 'by Nature fit' (Hull, I, p. 156; and see pp. 170, 215, 217). This is a striking departure from the traditional colonist assumption of an innate and stubborn difference in the Irish, which drove Spenser and subsequent writers to think them sub-human, 'salvage'.

But the overall impression left by Petty's writings on Ireland is not an entirely positive one. The unfortunate prejudices he seeks to excise were rooted in Irish history before 1649, the only beginning Petty was prepared to acknowledge; and this refusal to attend to the 'Chymerical notions' of the past is gravely damaging to his projects. The Cromwellians' impression of newness – whether formed by the conviction of a divine mission to avenge the 1641 outrages, or produced by a prospect of progress in Ireland towards a more rationally organised society – was a misleading one, as subsequent Irish history showed; in the historian T.C. Barnard's words:

> Ireland was not *tabula rasa*. There were old institutions; there was a native population, both Protestant and Catholic, whose support was necessary to any regime's permanence.[35]

Even the Survey itself, for all its comprehensiveness, could not simply impose a completely 'new geography' (Hull, I, p. 6). This was not just because there had been some earlier surveys of parts of the country, but because in surveying civil, as well as natural, boundaries, Petty was obliged to accept earlier, Irish, cultural and social interpretation of the material landscape. There had to be someone to point out to the measurers in the field where the 'meres' or boundaries of the lands lay. Petty several

times makes it clear that these 'meresemen' were usually or always 'Irish Papists'. However clean a sweep the Cromwellian military activities had made, creating a civil administration totally *ab initio* was not possible. The forms in which Ireland had been moulded on previous potters' wheels, the history already inscribed in the social landscape, were far from utterly broken or erased.

Petty enumerates and quantifies to the point of political and ideological myopia. His resort in his works to 'Arithmetical and Geometrick' methods allowed him not just to achieve detachment, and a new precision of description, but, more problematically, to put a *cordon sanitaire* round whole areas of experience and edit them out of his discourse. Spenser's work on Ireland, dismayingly harsh and oppressive as it is, nevertheless is of a piece. He brings to bear on the problem the full vocabulary of Renaissance humanist forms, with their intimations of completeness: pastoral, allegory, political dialogue. However questionable one may find his political position, one cannot justly claim that he tries to suppress its practical implications in any part of his work. This very wholeness leads to the internal tensions and contradictions in his work which I have described. But Petty's discourse *is* partial. In the Survey, for instance, he can concentrate on his scientific and administrative project because, by a division of labour on the larger scale, the military basis for it has already been established. As his Victorian editor C.H. Hull says, it

> is not that he literally experimented upon Ireland himself, but that he examined by the best available means, the effects of such experiments as had been made there. (I, p. lxvi)

And in his later writings, by an application to Ireland's condition of the principles of exact and mathematical description, he sometimes achieves a clarification at the cost of missing the main point. The falseness of Petty's claim to completeness was discerned by Jonathan Swift when he chose Petty's style as his parodic model in *A Modest Proposal*. But in a longer perspective, that of the slow transformation of a specifically conquering and colonial ideology into an Irish national identity which during the succeeding century would come to define Ireland as an entity whose interests are not necessarily identical with England's, one might argue that Petty ought to join Swift as a founding figure: Petty's writings, for all their limitations, mark significant progress in the transforming endeavour to dismantle the inherited stereotypes, as do Ware's, while Spenser's afford the classic example of that which is to be transformed.

Such a formulation as this implies that this collection of texts can be divided more or less clearly into those which reinforce and seek to perpetuate the inherited, stereotypically negative, representations of the Irish, and those which, however partially and cautiously, seek to nuance, interro-

gate, escape, resist or at best discard them. This is one way to consider them. But it may be preferable to say that all the writings I have been examining are contributions to the continuing English discourse about Ireland in the seventeenth century, and are best considered together as a body of writings whose true anatomy can be discovered only by a careful attention to its internal relationships and mutual influences. The fundamental assumptions of the colonist position are held in common by all the writers I have discussed, except possibly by Burkhead. English rule and nationality are taken as preferable to Irish; it is assumed that the Irish would be better off by becoming English, where possible; and the rights of England to exercise authority and power in Ireland are not questioned. But once, within that general framework, one looks more closely, one finds major divergences in attitude, varying interpretations of the specific implications of the general position. Even in the brief period of the English Civil Wars themselves, a tension is apparent between the implied secularity and empiricism of the new science, which is to lead, in Petty's project, to different, more rational and distanced forms of colonial domination, and a quasi-apocalyptic vision of Irish evil destroyed by English righteousness.

## NOTES

I wish to acknowledge the generous assistance and encouragement I received in the conception and execution of this project from the following: Tom Dunne, Anne Fogarty, Maire Herbert, Trevor Joyce, Clare O'Halloran, and Dorinda Outram.

The research for this chapter was done with the assistance of a grant from the Faculty of Arts, University College, Cork.

1 See Joseph Leerssen, *Mere Irish and Fior-Ghael* (Utrecht, 1986). See also R.O. Bartley, *Teague, Shenkin and Sawney* (Cork, 1954), for specifically literary instances of sixteenth-century English stereotypes of Irishness.

2 Spenser's Irish writings 'touching the reduction of the Irish to civility' are approvingly mentioned in a letter of Cromwell's (*Commonwealth Book*, A/28, PRO, quoted in Pauline Henley, *Spenser in Ireland* (Cork, 1928), pp. 206–7); see also Vincent Gookin's 1655 pamphlets against transplantation.

3 See Hayden White, 'The Forms of Wildness: Archaeology of an Idea', in *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore, 1978), pp. 150–82, Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man* (Cambridge, 1982), Margaret Hodgen, *Early Anthropology* (London, 1964), and James Muldoon, 'The Indian as Irishman', *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 3, 4 (1975), 267–89. For a fuller discussion of Spenser's representations of Ireland, see Patricia Coughlan, ' "Some secret scourge which shall by her come unto England": Ireland and Incivility in Spenser', in

Patricia Coughlan, ed., *Spenser and Ireland: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (Cork, 1989).

4 See Nicholas Canny, 'The Ideology of Colonization in England and America', *William and Mary Quarterly* 30 (1973), 573–98, and 'Edmund Spenser and the Development of an Anglo-Irish Identity', *Yearbook of English Studies* 13 (1983).

5 See for example, *View* pp. 219–20. References are to the Variorum Edition, ed. E. Greenlaw *et al.* (Baltimore, 1949).

6 See T.W. Moody *et al.*, eds., *A New History of Ireland*, III (Oxford, 1976), pp. lvii, lx, 567–8.

7 His textual alterations are listed in the Spenser Variorum Vol. X, 519–23.

8 *St. Patrick for Ireland*, ed. J.P. Turner (New York, 1969). See A.H. Stevenson, 'Shirley's Years in Ireland', *Review of English Studies* 20 (1944), 19–28, and 'James Shirley and the Actors at the First Irish Theatre', *Modern Philology*, 37 (1942), 147–60; on Shirley's sources, see Turner, 'Introduction'.

9 See Bartley, *Teague, Shenkin and Sawney*, pp. 7–47; Leerssen, *Mere Irish and Fior-Ghael*, pp. 33–66, 85–99.

10 See Stephen Orgel, *Illusions of Power* (Berkeley and London, 1975), pp. 77–83, and Martin Butler, *Theatre and Crisis 1632–1642* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 236.

11 The Prologues are reprinted in his *Poems* (London, 1646); see pp. 38–49.

12 See Aidan Clarke, 'The 1641 Depositions', in Peter Fox, ed., *Treasures of the Library* (Dublin, 1986), pp. 111–20; Walter Love, 'Civil War in Ireland: Appearances Through Three Centuries of Historical Writing', *Emory University Quarterly* 22 (1966), 57–72; M. Perceval-Maxwell, 'The Ulster Rising of 1641 and the Depositions', *Irish Historical Studies* 83 (1979), 145–67.

13 Clarke, 'The 1641 Depositions', 112, 120.

14 Jones, *A Remonstrance* (London, 1642), pp. 8, 9, 48, 58–9, 61, 63, 68. On contemporary lists of atrocities attributed to Cavaliers in parliamentary propaganda, which employ a similar vocabulary or repertoire, see T. Corns *et al.*, 'Archetypal Mystification: Polemic and Reality in English Political Literature, 1640–1750', *Eighteenth-Century Life* 7 (1982), 3.

15 See Christopher Hill, '17th-Century English Radicals and Ireland', in P.J. Corish, ed., *Radicals, Rebels and Establishments* (Belfast, 1985), pp. 33–47; Norah Carlin, 'Ireland and Natural Man in 1649', in Francis Barker *et al.*, eds., *Europe and Its Others*, II (Colchester, 1985), pp. 91–111; and Chris Durston, '"Let Ireland be Quiet": Opposition in England to the Conquest of Ireland', *History Workshop Journal* 21 (1986), 105–12.

16 See *Church-Government*, III, p. 228; *Eikonoklastes*, V, p. 77, *History of Britain*, X, pp. 49 and 174 (references are to the Columbia edition).

17 *Rump Songs* (London, 1662), I, pp. 254, 258; II, pp. 112, 171ff.

18 Exceptions are the political pamphlets and arguments written by Old English Catholics, of which the lawyer Patrick Darcy's speech to the Irish Parliament in June 1641 (Waterford, 1643) is a fine example; so is the work of Nicholas French, Bishop of Ferns, composed in the 1660s. For the many works in Latin by Irish Catholic clerical controversialists, see Benignus Millett, 'Irish Literature in Latin, 1550–1700', in Moody *et al.*, *New History of Ireland*, pp. 561–86.

19 Cnla may be intended for Charles Coote, whose military ferocity was notorious; see T.P. Coonan, *The Irish Catholic Confederacy and the Puritan Revolution* (Dublin, 1954), pp. 125–7. See Patricia Coughlan ('Enter Revenge': Henry Bunklend and *Coln's Fury*', *Theatre Research International* 15 (1989), 1–4.

20 IV 46–7. Revenge is accompanied by 'three spirits in sheets'.

21 Greeted with very little enthusiasm by the Lirendean generals, the concluding cessation is for a year and a day, like the Ormond truce of 1643 which it clearly represents; on the disputes about its acceptability which divided the Confederates, see P.J. Corish, 'The Rising of 1641 and the Catholic Confederacy, 1641–5', in Moody *et al.*, *New History of Ireland*, pp. 289–316.

22 See Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine, and Reform (1626–1660)* (London, 1975), pp. 428–35; K. T. Hoppen, *The Common Scientist in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1970), pp. 11–15, 21.

23 Kearney, *Strafford in Ireland*, p. 174; and see Carl S. Bottigheimer, *English Money and Irish Land* (Oxford, 1971), p. 177.

24 Arnold Boate, 'To the Reader', sig. A7; *Natural Historie*, p. 185.

25 See Leerssen, pp. 48, 55–6; Gerald of Wales, *History and Topography of Ireland*, ed. J.J. O'Meara (Dublin, 1982), p. 103.

26 *Natural Historie*, p. 144. This incident is described, in a rather lower key, in Thomas Morley's otherwise sensationalist *Remonstrance . . . Of the Barbarous Cruelties . . . by the Irish Rebels* (London, 1644).

27 There are two biographies, Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice, *Life of Sir William Petty* (London, 1895), and E. Strauss, *Sir William Petty* (London, 1954).

28 See T.C. Barnard, 'Planters and Policies in Cromwellian Ireland', *Past and Present* 61 (1973), 33–69, and Carl S. Bottigheimer, 'The Restoration Land Settlement in Ireland: A Structural View', *Irish Historical Studies* 18 (1972), 1–21.

29 The *History of the Down Survey* remained in manuscript till it was published by T.A. Larcom (Dublin, 1851; reprinted in facsimile, New York, 1967); most of his other writings are in *Economic Writings of Sir William Petty*, ed. T.H. Hull, 2 vols. (London, 1898; referred to below as 'Hull'), or in *The Petty Papers*, ed. Marquis of Lansdowne (London, 1927).

30 See *Advice*, p. 21; *History of the Down Survey*, p. xvi.

31 See T.C. Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland* (Oxford, 1975), p. 246.

32 See Carl S. Bottigheimer, *English Money and Irish Land*, p. 27.

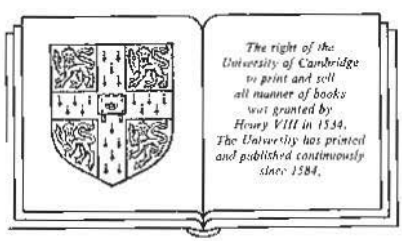
33 Cromwell himself said that Ireland after 1649 was 'as a clean paper'; Colonel John Jones, a Parliamentary Commissioner from 1650 to 1654, believed that the English were providentially in Ireland 'to frame or form a commonwealth out of a corrupt rude mass', and the chief justice of Munster, John Cook, likened Ireland to 'a white paper'. All quoted in Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, pp. 14, 268.

34 See *Petty Papers*, ed. Marquis of Lansdowne (London, 1928), I, pp. 117–18; in his will, dating from about 1685, he expresses 'my love and honour to almighty God, by such signs and tokens, as are understood to be such by the people with whom I live' (*Tracts* (Dublin, 1749), p. xii). And in the *Political Anatomy* he notes that the religion of the Irish poor is 'rather a Custom than a Dogma amongst them' (Hull, I, p. 200).

35 Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, pp. 14–15. The eventual passing of a great deal of the land allocated to the soldiers, and even to the Adventurers, into New English hands, is pointed out by both Barnard and Bottigheimer.

# Literature and the English Civil War

*Edited by*
THOMAS HEALY AND JONATHAN SAWDAY




CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
CAMBRIDGE
NEW YORK PORT CHESTER MELBOURNE SYDNEY