

# Political Ideology in Ireland



Political Ideology in Ireland:  
From the Enlightenment to the Present

Edited by

Olivier Coquelin, Patrick Galliou  
and Thierry Robin

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SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

Political Ideology in Ireland: From the Enlightenment to the Present,  
Edited by Olivier Coquelin, Patrick Galliou and Thierry Robin

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword .....	ix
Richard English	
Introduction .....	1
Olivier Coquelin, Patrick Galliou, Thierry Robin	
<b>Part I: Ireland Before Partition</b>	
<b>Chapter One: Ireland and the Enlightenment</b>	
Balance and Paradox: Jonathan Swift and the Rhetoric of Irish Politics.....	8
Robert Mahony	
Charles O’Conor: History and Reconciliation.....	27
Claire Dubois	
Grattan’s Parliament (1782-1800): Myth and Reality .....	42
Olivier Coquelin	
<b>Chapter Two: The Anglo-Irish Union</b>	
Robert Owen and Ulster .....	54
Vincent Geoghegan	
Exploring Daniel O’Connell’s Political Ideology.....	68
Laurent Colantonio	
Cultural Nationalism and the ‘Cashless Bard’: Class and Nation in the Poetry of James Clarence Mangan.....	82
Ciara Hogan	
Political Ideology in the Studio of the Irish Sculptor in the Nineteenth Century .....	103
Paula Murphy	

Oscar Wilde's Critical Ideology .....	119
John Sloan	

James Connolly: Nationalism and Socialism.....	130
Sophie Ollivier	

Sean O'Casey and the Dream of a New Republic .....	145
Christopher Murray	

## **Part II: Ireland After Partition**

### **Chapter Three: Independent Ireland**

Flann O'Brien and the Concept of Ideology.....	162
Thierry Robin	

Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour: A New Hegemony? .....	180
Kieran Allen	

Sinn Féin and Socialism: A Historical Tradition? .....	196
Agnès Maillot	

From Enhancement to Investment: Political Discourse on Culture in Ireland since 1922 .....	211
Alexandra Slaby	

### **Chapter Four: Northern Ireland**

Unionist Politics and the Suffocation of O'Neillism .....	230
James Greer	

'Stickies' and 'Provos': Confusion Within Irish Republicanism, 1969-1975 .....	241
Kacper Rekawek	

'Divided Loyalties': Faulkner Unionists and the Ulster Workers Council, 1974 .....	258
Shaun McDaid	

‘Casualties of War’ or ‘Agents of Change’: Irish Republican Prisoners, Maze/Long Kesh Prison, 1972-2000 .....	274
Laurence McKeown	
New Pluralism or Old Ideological Certainties? Examining the Extent of Ideological Change among Republican and Loyalist Former Prisoners in Northern Ireland .....	283
Jonathan Tonge, James W. McAuley and Peter Shirlow	
‘Still Marching After All These Years’: Orange Ideology and the Culture War in Northern Ireland .....	299
James W. McAuley and Jonathan Tonge	
From the Myth of the Battle of the Boyne to the Boyne Meeting in May 2007: Unionism at the Crossroads?.....	317
Yann Bévant	
Redefining Republican ‘Terrorism’ Post-9/11 .....	332
Jessie Blackbourn	



# FOREWORD

## RICHARD ENGLISH

If the study of Ireland is to flourish in an intellectually serious manner, then it is vital that the subject is approached *internationally*. This involves a number of challenges, including the need to explain Irish experience in relation to the world-historical forces which have moulded it, and also the need for scholars who are not based in Ireland to engage fruitfully with those who are. This book—subtly put together by its editors, Olivier Coquelin, Patrick Galliou and Thierry Robin—makes a tremendous contribution to this process. It brings together a wide range of scholars from varying disciplines, at various stages of their careers, and from various University settings within and beyond Ireland. It addresses a markedly diverse range of subjects: from Jonathan Swift to the Provisional IRA, and from Daniel O’Connell to the twenty-first-century War on Terror. And it does so at a very high level of scholarship.

The book’s title—*Political Ideology: From the Enlightenment to the Present*—reflects the very ambitious intentions behind the volume, and behind the excellent Conference in Brest which first generated it. The editors are explicit about their desire to understand twenty-first-century Irish complexity better through an interrogation of long historical experience, and their book achieves this goal very well. Legacies are directly considered, as in Olivier Coquelin’s thoughtful point concerning the parallels between different periods of Irish nationalism, each with its tensions between revolutionary and constitutional poles, or in the lessons to be drawn from Vincent Geoghegan’s intriguing and original engagement with the early Irish working class. There is an impressive sophistication of analysis in the book, as in Robert Mahony’s brilliantly nimble treatment of Swift’s rhetorical complexity, or in Laurent Colantonio’s wide-ranging reassessment of the political ideology of Irish nationalism’s greatest figure, Daniel O’Connell.

Other stellar characters are re-appraised (as with John Sloan’s serious assessment of Oscar Wilde’s radicalism), and there is also a chance to hear the voices of a striking new generation of scholars. This is true of Kacper Rekawek’s powerfully provocative re-reading of the Official and

Provisional IRAs, and their many similarities; of James Greer's lucid thoughts on O'Neillism; of Jessie Blackbourn's impressively forensic study of the recent evolution of Irish republicanism against an international context partially transformed by 9/11; and of Shaun McDaid's very careful analysis of the divisions within Ulster unionism in 1974.

Sharp-edged topics are met head-on. Agnes Maillot and Laurence McKeown write very impressively about aspects of modern-day Irish republicanism, while Jonathan Tonge and James McAuley write with critical empathy and authority about the Orange Order, but also about former loyalist and republican prisoners from the Northern Ireland conflict.

In all of this, dialogue has been established between scholars from different disciplines, based in different locations, and addressing interwoven matters of Irish political ideology. It is a rare achievement to produce a book of such consistently compelling quality, and to do so over such a wide range of subjects, traditions and settings. The book will be of huge value to very many people, and I hope that it is widely read.

**Queen's University,  
Belfast  
February 2009**

# INTRODUCTION

OLIVIER COQUELIN, PATRICK GALLIOU  
AND THIERRY ROBIN

## Introduction

The concept of ideology first appeared in 1796 within the circle of French philosophers answering to the name of *Idéologues*. In the wake of the Enlightenment, the *Idéologues* set themselves the objective of emancipating humanity from obscurantism through a “science of ideas”—from the etymological sense of the word after which they were named—at the time regarded as “the single science (of which) all the other ones are, without exception, but (the) applications.”<sup>1</sup> As time went by, however, the notion of ideology was to take on a syncretic dimension as regards its semantic content to designate notably a cluster of ideas, opinions and beliefs of varied nature (philosophical, economic, religious, political etc.) peculiar to a given era or social group. In the political field, this present-day authoritative meaning implies a particular representation of public affairs from an organizational and cultural standpoint, and an exploration of the practical means to be implemented to build up the ideal socio-political order.

Whilst using the latter definition as a conceptual referent (see in particular Laurent Colantonio, “Exploring Daniel O’Connell’s Political Ideology”), the present collection does not lose sight of the deep roots of the term “ideology”—with a view to establishing chronological limits—dating from the 1790s *Idéologues*, themselves inspired by the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophers, starting with John Locke who was also the mentor of one the greatest figures in Irish political and ideological history—William Molyneux. And as Molyneux’s magnum opus, *The Case of Ireland Being Bound by Acts of Parliament in England*, published in 1698, is generally perceived as the first theoretical and practical

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<sup>1</sup> Antoine-Louis Destutt de Tracy, *Mémoire sur la faculté de penser et autres textes* (Paris: Fayard, 1992, orig. 1796), 37–38.

expression of protest in the record of modern Irish nationalism—in this case guided by the Lockean principles of the compact between government and governed—is examined, as a historical starting point, an Enlightenment era the inception of which is quite often traced to the 1688-89 Glorious Revolution. In so doing it is reminded that, beyond nationalism, the Enlightenment actually witnessed the germination of all the inherent ideologies of contemporary Ireland. The latter were to take form and blossom throughout the 1801-1922 Anglo-Irish Union to eventually become ubiquitous after the division of the island into two distinct entities. Such was the case of republican separatism—mainly epitomized nowadays by Sinn Féin and the IRA (see in particular the chapter written by the former IRA volunteer and prisoner, Laurence McKeown, “‘Casualties of War’ or ‘Agents of Change’: Irish Republican Prisoners, Maze/Long Kesh Prison, 1972-2000”—the founding fathers of which were indisputably the 1790s United Irishmen; of unionism and loyalism drawing their origins notably from the sectarian and counter-revolutionary spirit at work within an Orange Order founded in 1795; or of constitutional nationalism born out of a “Patriot Party” resorting to parliamentary agitation, from 1759 onwards, in order to fulfil their non-subversive national aspirations...

The present collection is therefore based on the idea of questioning history so as to better understand the complexity of the ideological and political situation in early twenty-first-century Ireland. And in so doing, the different chapters try to analyse some of the multiple persuasions within the gamut of Irish political ideology, not only through the above-mentioned notion of descent and / or that of taxonomy but also through their dialectical relationships, epitomized notably by the following divides: separatism / unionism; constitutional nationalism / revolutionary nationalism; national revolution / social revolution; parliamentary agitation / armed struggle; autonomy / independence; constitutional monarchy / republic; irenism / sectarianism...

Of course, the various analyses do not fail to highlight the theoretical and / or the practical forms of a human expression, originator of political ideology and viewed in its collective dimension (association, movement, trade union, party, parliamentary group, militia, secret society, cooperative ...) and / or its individual dimension. An individual dimension which is found in political, socio-economic and religious circles—from Henry Grattan to Gerry Adams including Charles O’Conor, Theobald Wolfe Tone, Daniel O’Connell, James Connolly, Eamon de Valera, Ian Paisley, etc.—as well as in the realm of visual arts (see Paula Murphy, “Studio of the Irish Sculptor in The Nineteenth Century”) and literature.

Among the earliest great individuals included in the latter category is Jonathan Swift, author of ideologically- and politically-imbued satires and pamphlets (see Robert Mahony, “Balance and Paradox: Jonathan Swift and the Rhetoric of Irish Politics”). Other Irish writers were subsequently to follow suit. Some famous examples, examined in the present collection, are James Clarence Mangan’s commitment to Young Ireland ideology, Sean O’Casey’s involvement within the Irish Citizen Army, Flann O’Brien’s sceptical not to say anti-ideologist and sarcastic diatribes against the recently established Irish nationalist élite; not so well-known may be Oscar Wilde’s writings standing for an individualistic vision of socialism, through which he was to be counted among the icons of some Irish anarchistic trends (see John Sloan, “Oscar Wilde’s Critical Ideology”)... Here too, some of the chapters attempt to identify the dialectical causes of all the above-mentioned authors’ ideological and political commitment, and emphasize their contribution to Irish ideological and political history. And whilst scrutinizing these authors’ works, the reader will be led to question the often problematic or even tantalizing relationship between art and politics, pre-empted, matter-of-fact discourses and actual aesthetic creation, proselytising and freedom, to name but a few of the complex questions arising from the study of political ideology in an Irish context often strongly reminiscent of the dilemma of the Yeatsian man who must choose between life and work, action and thought, experience and creation.



**PART I:**

**IRELAND BEFORE PARTITION**



# CHAPTER ONE:

## IRELAND AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

# BALANCE AND PARADOX: JONATHAN SWIFT AND THE RHETORIC OF IRISH POLITICS

ROBERT MAHONY,  
CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA,  
WASHINGTON DC, USA

Jonathan Swift's contribution to Irish political ideology was significant primarily because it was rhetorical. The importance of rhetoric is not often enough heeded; but if political ideas are not framed memorably, they are the more likely to fail, in articulation and effect. Consider, for instance, two seventeenth-century Irish treatises weighing the English parliament's claim of authority to legislate for Ireland, "a major issue during the whole period of English rule in Ireland."<sup>1</sup> Patrick Darcy's *Argument* (1643) is a lawyer's brief, a tally of precedents, crowded with Latin legalisms, precise but graceless, with no appeal to eloquence or memory.<sup>2</sup> Darcy takes a systematic, if inevitably tentative approach to Ireland's place in the political system of the three kingdoms, but while "the consciousness of the equality of Ireland's parliament with that of England was never far from the surface" of his work, he was hardly intending "to assert the legislative independence of Ireland from England."<sup>3</sup> It is hardly surprising that Darcy's *Argument* was no rallying cry in its time or afterwards. William Molyneux's *Case of Ireland*. . . (1698) is forthright by contrast about Ireland's legislative independence, with an approach more historical than

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<sup>1</sup> Deane, Seamus, ed. *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (Dublin: Field Day, 1990) 1: 862.

<sup>2</sup> *An Argument* delivered by Patricke Darcy, Esquire, by the Expresse Order of the House of Commons in the Parliament of Ireland, 9 June 1641. Printed at Waterford by Thomas Bourke, Printer to the Confederate Catholicks of Ireland, 1643, and Dublin, Reprinted by G. F., 1764.

<sup>3</sup> M. Perceval-Maxwell, *The Outbreak of the Rebellion of 1641* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 173.

legalistic, and occasionally even graceful.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, his phrases are hardly stirring; his summation, for instance, is limp, almost apologetic:

“I think it highly *Inconvenient* for *England* to *Assume* this *Authority* over the *Kingdom* of *Ireland* . . . . If *England* *assume* a *Jurisdiction* over *Ireland*, whereby they think their *Rights* and *Liberties* are *taken away*; *That their Parliaments are rendred meerly* [sic] *nugatory*, and that their *Lives* and *Fortunes* *Depend* on the *Will* of a *Legislature* wherein they are *not Parties*, there may be ill consequences of this . . . .”<sup>5</sup>

Darcy is still an obscure figure, while Molyneux gained some notoriety in his time because the authorities condemned his work: long-established legend had it that the pamphlet was burnt by the public hangman. But we don't remember Molyneux's phrases. We do remember Swift's. He certainly advanced Molyneux's ideas, and was quoted apocryphally as holding that Molyneux's pamphlet should be “printed in letters of gold,”<sup>6</sup> but if they had been, their brightness as a curiosity would outshine their rhetorical brilliance.<sup>7</sup>

Noticing a couple of the more famous utterances, we can certainly see how Swift's rhetoric is memorable:

I heard the late *Archbishop* of *Tuam* mention a pleasant *Observation* of some *Body*'s; *that Ireland would never be happy* “*till a Law were made for burning every Thing that came from England, except their People and their Coals.*”

And:

Were not the people of *Ireland* born as free as those of *England*? . . . Are they not subjects of the same King? Does not the same Sun shine upon them? And have they not the same God for their Protector? Am I a freeman in *England*, and do I become a *Slave* in six hours by crossing the *Channel*?

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<sup>4</sup> Molyneux William, *The Case of Ireland's Being Bound by Acts of Parliament in England, Stated* (Dublin: J. Ray, 1698).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 171, 173.

<sup>6</sup> Advertisement in ‘T. Taylor,’ *Lucas Refuted: Or Liberty Supported . . .* (Dublin: H. Garland, 1749), 15.

<sup>7</sup> The tradition of political thought represented by Darcy, Molyneux, Swift and others is outlined succinctly by S. J. Connolly, “Precedent and principle: the patriots and their allies,” in Connolly, ed, *Political Ideas in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 130 – 58.

The cogency of the first quotation here, from the *Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture* (1720) is owing to its pretended indirectness: that it isn't Swift's own aphorism masks the boldness of the "Observation of some Body's" just enough that he can call it "pleasant," which invokes irony, without insisting upon it: such masquerading has the effect of endorsing the sentiment all the more emphatically. The second quotation, from the third *Drapier's Letter* (1724) mixes simplified political theory, religious belief and natural observation in a jumbled list; because it isn't stated, we almost miss the focus upon fairness common to the group. Listing is a common enough rhetorical device, but here the mix of questions about fairness evokes the notion of moral accountability, implicitly invoking the concept of divine justice—but not overtly: the progression here from king to sun to God to justice just skirts rhetorical excess. Syntactically it is framed as a question, as is the last sentence, again curbing the intensity of the diction ("freeman," "Slave"), but only just. Swift's rhetorical acuity in these passages is designed clearly to stir resentment and thereby arouse an audience, but it had the further consequence of breaking the ground for a new ideology, an effect he may not have anticipated, for he was truly conservative. Most of his political ideas, like the notion that the English Parliament had no authority to legislate for Ireland, are traditional and expressed by earlier writers, as this one was by Molyneux. But he saw that issue primarily as a moral one, as a matter of fairness, rather than in historical or legal terms; the Irish were not represented in England's parliament, so for that assembly to enact legislation governing Ireland was forthrightly unfair. Or, as Swift puts it in the fourth *Drapier's Letter*: ". . . in *Reason*, all *Government* without the *Consent of the Governed*, is the *very Definition of Slavery*."

With such phrasing Swift casts as an axiom, a "moral" so to speak, the old argument that the English parliament had no proper sway over Ireland; rhetorical vitality awakens a moral force latent in this diction, rendering it memorable, but also open to further development. The basis of that argument was that while both countries shared the one monarch (whoever had the Crown of England), each had its own parliament: thus Ireland was not represented in the Westminster parliament, and had no right to oversee Westminster legislation, and the Irish felt the same should apply to England's parliament—that it should have no power to legislate for Ireland. This simple argument for fairness and balance was buttressed by Ireland's historic special relationship with the monarch derived from its mediaeval history as a lordship of the Crown, a dependency that under Henry VIII became a distinct kingdom. Each of Henry's kingdoms had him as monarch, and its own elected parliament. Power in England during

the seventeenth century shifted between Crown and parliament, gravitating ultimately to Parliament, and Westminster proceeded to exercise the authority to make laws binding Ireland. In pressing the point that the English parliament had no right to do so, Swift was implicitly refusing to recognise that the monarch had in fact lost traditional powers, yet what actually evolved from his phrasing was not that power in Ireland should have been retained by the king, but rather that Ireland's parliament should exercise that power—which came to underlie a new ideology of separatism from England. Gaining pace especially toward the close of the eighteenth century, this major ideological development was very much facilitated by Swift's rhetoric.

For, apart from outliers like Darcy and Molyneux, Irish political thought before the eighteenth century focussed narrowly upon the monarchy of England: whether absolutist or aristocratic, Catholic or Protestant, political ideology was royalist. Separation from that Crown was not thinkable, however desirable may have been parliamentary autonomy under the umbrella of a shared monarchy. Swift himself held for a lifetime the moderate Whig principles that the Revolution Settlement in 1689 confirmed: in politics, monarchy limited by a number of the prerogatives of an aristocratically-controlled parliament, especially the power to finance government; and in religion, an established Christian church supported by enforced levies or tithes upon the whole population, with variously restricted toleration in law, but no state support, for some other forms of Christianity. Such principles to his mind applied not only to England but to Ireland as well, since both populations were subjects of the king, though the two countries had distinct parliaments. During his lifetime the English parliament gained certain powers—between 1688 and 1707 determining that the crown be offered to William of Orange and stipulating its course thereafter; and occasionally before 1720 exercising and in the Declaratory Act of that year asserting its right to legislate for Ireland. Whiggish in its elements as Swift's own political thinking was, he was loath to accept that these expansions of English parliamentary authority effectively subordinated Ireland to Westminster, which was in fact their effect. It wasn't an effect, though, that the Irish welcomed, and in Swift's writings on Irish affairs he gave voice to their resentment at English ministerial government for its neglect, oppressiveness, arrogance or incompetence, becoming thereby “the creator of public opinion in Ireland,”<sup>8</sup> for that was unmeasured and indeed hardly noted before Swift's

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<sup>8</sup> W. E. H. Lecky, *The Leaders of Public Opinion in Ireland* (London: Saunders, Otley & Co., 1861), 59.

time. Given his own royalism, it is paradoxical that his articulation of resentment against London became instrumental in formulating a nationalist ideology of separatism from England that Swift would hardly have welcomed; and perhaps paradoxical again that a similar resentfulness at London government also features prominently in Irish unionist ideology, which with Swift could well have been more comfortable.

My purpose in a book some years ago was to trace the path of such formulations, which was laid for the most part after Swift's death.<sup>9</sup> This essay is intended instead to notice how Swift's rhetoric, in responding to Irish conditions, proceeds from two factors: Christian morality and the paradoxical condition of Ireland. In the first instance, Christian morality underlies Swift's political rhetoric. Jonathan Swift was a Christian minister, and even those in his own lifetime and since who have questioned his belief in Christian doctrine accept that he was a conscientious clergyman, a custodian of Christian tradition faithful to the devotional practice and the moral emphases of the Church of Ireland, the official church of the state, "as by law established." His surviving sermons—for which, to be sure, he had little regard—<sup>10</sup> indicate a lack of interest in theology that verges upon an almost risible anti-intellectualism. For instance, his sermon for Trinity Sunday addresses the knotty subject of the Trinity as a mystery, long recognised by the Church, greatly to be respected however difficult to explain. Had he stopped there, few could complain, as the doctrine of the Trinity has a less secure foundation in Scripture than many Protestants have found comfortable; but Swift holds that those who have reservations about the Trinity are to be suspected as free-thinkers concealing their more comprehensive lack of belief in God altogether. For him to dismiss as mischievous, and even immoral, difficulties with a point of Christian belief that had troubled theologians for centuries, demonstrates a very unsound grasp of history and philosophy. But the subject is theological, and after two centuries of religious contention, persecution and even warfare the attitude had grown common in Protestant Europe that theology is less important to the Christian pastor than morality. The belief certainly shines from his other sermons that morality is the essence of Christian practise and teaching, a position that enables him to identify and warn against a good many threats

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Mahony, *Jonathan Swift: The Irish Identity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

<sup>10</sup> The Earl of Orrery, *Remarks on the Life and Writings of Dr. Jonathan Swift* (London: A. Millar, 1752), 289, records Swift's offering a group of sermons to his friend Revd. Thomas Sheridan with the comment "they may be of use to you, they have never been of any to me."

to living a soundly moral life. Hence also his defence of a church establishment, for the lack of an established church, an atmosphere of state neutrality about the belief-systems of the public, fosters too wide a range—not merely in theology but, of greater import socially, in moral practice as well. Thus his stance on the Trinity makes more sense: the established church holds the doctrine dear, so an attack on the doctrine becomes an attack upon the Church, and therefore upon the moral foundations of society.

Because Swift prefers to understand Christianity as a moral system, moreover, fairness or balance constitute the most prominent virtues in his Irish political writing, whether about relations between Britain and Ireland, or among the social and religious groups within Ireland. And not only in his writings on Ireland; his sermon “On Mutual Subjection” is about what we might term Christian balance as a means towards social contentment:

. . . if the Poor found the Rich disposed to supply their Wants; if the Ignorant found the Wise ready to instruct and direct them; or, if the Weak might always find Protection from the Mighty; they could none of them with the least pretence of Justice lament their own Condition.

Similarly, his sermon “On Brotherly Love” stresses the value of moderation, another kind of balance, with very much an establishmentarian character:

A Man truly Moderate is steady in the Doctrine and Discipline of the Church, but with a due Christian Charity to all who dissent from it out of a Principle of Conscience; the Freedom of which, he thinketh, ought to be fully allowed, as long as it is not abused, but never trusted with Power. . . . He hateth no Man for differing from him in Political Opinions; nor doth he think it a Maxim infallible, that Virtue should always attend upon Favour, and Vice upon Disgrace.

Swift preferred the establishmentarian stance, the defence of the centre position, because he considered himself a moderate, despite the radical potential in his rhetoric. His was very much a conservative radicalism, after all: in attacking William Wood’s project for minting copper coins for Ireland, Swift is indeed standing up for the rights of the Irish parliament, the Irish establishment, as against the English ministry, but this is a defence of custom, for in the seventeenth century the Irish parliament had taken the responsibility for coinage, whereas the Walpole ministry had awarded the minting patent to Wood without even consulting the authorities in Dublin. This showed a lack of respect, but in the wake of the Declaratory Act of 1720 it could also be perceived as yet another instance of the London government’s forthrightly accelerating its control of Ireland

at the expense of the local establishment. So Swift could be considered as defending that establishment from the encroachments of a rapacious government in London.

Of course, from a perspective more sympathetic to Walpole's administration, the local Irish establishment was a bit of a sham. Twice in the seventeenth century, in mid-century and again a generation later, that establishment had been preserved from the resistance of Catholic Ireland by English military force, but still preferred to regard itself on a par with the political establishment in England, its parliament and local administration actually a charade which operated cumbersomely even when London respected it, and which, for instance, had done nothing in the face of a growing countrywide shortage of copper coinage. There is an historical paradox here, in that English governments over the years had defended with military force an Irish polity that they were by the 1720s happy to ignore—certainly in the case of Wood's coinage project. In that paradoxical light, Walpole was demonstrating "good government" by awarding the patent to Wood, however roughshod his overriding of Irish sensibilities might have been. Swift's rhetoric doggedly refuses to recognise this kind of paradox or charade, demanding instead respect for (and implicitly the preservation of) rights and customs traditional to the Dublin establishment. Thereby he signals his unwillingness to accept that real power in Ireland resides in London rather than Dublin, a shift that had taken place gradually and in stages but which the Whig ministry regarded as unquestionable. Consequently they insisted that the Irish government seek out the anonymous author and the printers of *A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture* and *The Drapier's Letters* on sedition charges for such a conservative stance.<sup>11</sup> In the face of that, by the time he produced the fourth *Drapier's Letter*, Swift was very willing to cultivate quite another paradox:

. . . next under God, I *depend* only on the King my Sovereign, and on the Laws of my own Country, And I am so far from *depending* upon the People of England, that, if they should ever rebel against my Sovereign (which GOD forbid!) I would be ready at the first Command from his Majesty to take Arms against them; as some of *my* Countrymen did against *theirs* at Preston.

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<sup>11</sup> Swift had published both works anonymously, as he did most of his literary and political output, and though his authorship was common knowledge, there was no formal accusation. In each case, however, the printer was subjected to prosecution.

The battle at Preston to which he almost certainly refers here saw the Hanoverians defeat a Jacobite force in 1715, but the notion not merely that Irish Protestants were not dependent upon England, but might happily fight the English given the right cause, might explain why the Walpole ministry could regard Swift's stance as seditious. From their point of view, whatever the paradoxes of history, the current fact of Irish dependence upon England presented an opportunity to maintain the tilt in the balance of power to favour the London government, and they were disinclined to regard as playful Swift's evoking that paradox by correcting that tilt (and implicitly reminding the Whigs—because there was also a Battle of Preston in 1648 won by Oliver Cromwell—that well before 1715, their ancestors were rebelling against Charles I when he was supported by an Irish royalist army). Swift's refusing to countenance that London perspective is a means of promoting balance and fairness, not least as between England and Ireland, avoiding extremes—the Whigs in London could be seen as representing extremism by virtue of their wishing to relax the Test Act in Ireland, which would empower Irish dissenters and undermine the Church of Ireland, which to Swift stood for moderation.

Paradox was, of course, part of the armoury of rhetorical devices available to Swift, and its potential for inversion enabled him in the passage above to strike a blow for fairness, and in the process “vex” the Whigs. But Swift's political rhetoric also shadows and occasionally articulates his recognition that Ireland was a theatre of paradox from the beginning of its political association with England, rather than fairness and balance. The Anglo-Norman invasion in the twelfth century was supposed to civilise the Irish and regularise their religious practice; but instead established an English colony which even though segregated was gradually compromised by the Gaelic culture it was meant to suppress. The Protestant Reformation in Ireland was supposed to convert the country from Catholicism, but was pursued with such a combination of ferocity and incompetence that most Irish people became the more fervently Catholic. Within Swift's own lifetime, the Williamite conquest in the early 1690s was supposed to secure the land for Irish Protestants, but English legislation kept them from prospering. Conformity with the Church of Ireland was necessary as a licence for holders of public office, but these same officials hampered the operations of that church. And finally, while Irish Protestants were supposed to be protected by their attachment to the British Crown, their dependence upon the Crown undermined their own well-being. The post-Reformation paradoxes here derived from the threat to Protestant survival in Ireland posed by the demographic preponderance of Catholics in the country. Well before the Reformation there was a

substantial population of “Old English” in Ireland, the descendants of the Anglo-Norman invaders of the twelfth century, a governing class who administered Ireland for the English Crown. The extent of their control was limited, since in practice most of the Gaelic Irish were ruled by their own aristocracy who gave their allegiance to the Crown with an implicit understanding that English customs and laws would not be applied over the part of Ireland they governed. Though the loyalty of the Old English to the Crown was far less conditional and was indeed among their greatest boasts, they had over the centuries secured their own survival along the eastern coastal region of Ireland by a policy of segregation, neither penetrating very deeply into Gaelic Ireland nor accepting many of the Gaels into their own territories. Thus what had begun as a process of civilising the Irish had made little more progress centuries later than the establishment of a colony.

Both groups remained largely Catholic during the sixteenth century, in good part because the integrity of each had been confirmed by structures of religious practice and thought that the Reformation promised to overturn; there were effectively two kinds of Catholic Church in Ireland before the Reformation, for instance, English and Gaelic, but the Church of Ireland was to be comprehensive. The resistance of the Old English in particular to the new religious arrangements made the London government suspect that they were susceptible to foreign Catholic blandishments and domestic treason, despite their affirmations of traditional loyalty to the English Crown. Hence Protestant settlers from England, and later from Scotland as well, were encouraged to settle in Ireland, where their leaders displaced the Old English from long-established positions of leadership. The clashes thus inevitable between Old and “New” English sharpened and broadened during the seventeenth century to pit Catholics in general against Protestants; the traditional animosities between the Gaelic and Old English aristocracies (in which the Old English had regarded themselves as representing civilisation and the Gaels barbarism) gradually blunted, as all became “Irish” and failed in common to preserve their old rights in a new colonial dispensation. But the “New English,” much more aggressive colonisers though they were in recognising no Gaelic preserves in the Irish hinterlands and overcoming repeated episodes of resistance and reaction from what was by the later seventeenth century simply Catholic Ireland, could not convert the majority of the Irish to the new faith. Their methods were hardly evangelical; religious coercion tended “to strengthen the belief of Catholics in Ireland that they could not be safe so long as

Protestants remained in charge,”<sup>12</sup> without displaying sufficient attractions in the new faith-system to draw in the adherents of the old. Even coercion was aimed mainly at the wealthy and socially prominent, since the penal legislation enacted against Catholic organisation and practice after the defeat of the Jacobite regime of 1689-90 gave more inducement to landowners than tenant farmers to embrace the established church. Catholics who owned land could keep estates intact by converting, but few enough of the landless found Protestantism attractive to make the Reformation in Ireland as successful as it was in Britain. Thus a settlement programme intended to secure the country for England produced a division between Protestants and Catholics during the seventeenth century that was costly in military and financial terms for both Ireland and Britain, and was not resolved, leaving the potential for further conflict, and thereby less security for Britain.

In pre-democratic society it is no paradox, and indeed is almost axiomatic, that the ruling group should be a minority, and across Europe there were instances of a peasantry governed by an aristocracy who differed from them ethnically or in religion. But this wasn’t the case in England, where master and man could worship at the same church of a Sunday. The forms that Catholic reaction and resistance took in seventeenth-century Ireland, moreover, had become confirmed in the Irish Protestant imagination as savagely threatening to the very survival of the New English. The longest period of Catholic resistance had begun in 1641 with widespread murders in Co. Armagh that were soon presented as a wholesale massacre of Protestants throughout the northern province of Ulster, providing the surviving settlers with a martyrology that could compare with John Foxe’s popular *Book of Martyrs* in England for its effect on forming Protestant consciousness. And the memory of 1641 was refreshed each year from 1662 with church services and popular preaching on 23 October, the date the Rising of 1641 began, devoted to memorialising the dead and endowing their descendants with a lively sense of deliverance, of their divinely-licensed continuance in Ireland.<sup>13</sup> The brief Jacobite régime in Ireland, lasting only about fifteen months between the landing of James II from France in March 1689 and his return there after his defeat at the Boyne in July 1690, was much less dangerous for Protestants, but their reaction against Catholics was sharper still than it had been half a century before. That might seem paradoxical, but that

<sup>12</sup> Harris, Tim, *Restoration: Charles II and His Kingdoms* (London: Penguin, 2006), 88.

<sup>13</sup> See T. C. Barnard, “The Uses of 23 October 1641 and Irish Protestant Celebrations,” *English Historical Review* 106 (Oct. 1991): 889-920.

disproportionate reaction had the effect of neutering Catholic resistance for the better part of a century.

What really delivered Irish Protestants in the early 1650s was, of course Oliver Cromwell, and in 1690, William III; and the gratitude to God expressed in October 23<sup>rd</sup> sermons was interwoven with the remembrance that England had supplied the military muscle to defeat Catholic resistance. But the different success of Protestantism in Ireland and England meant a difference in the perception Protestants in each country had of the threat Catholicism posed to the domestic hegemony of Anglican Protestantism. In England from the beginning of the eighteenth century that threat was mostly historical, with a rhetoric that emboldened a sense of superiority to Continental Catholic cultures and politics; this growing complacency was interrupted by the Scottish Jacobite risings in 1715 and 1745, of course, and the popular force of anti-Catholicism was starkly evident as late as the Gordon Riots of 1780, but the trend was definitely away from the white-hot demonisation of Popery seen in the middle of the seventeenth century. In Ireland Catholic political strength was obviously lacking, but was often enough understood as a threat to the Protestant Irish state in dormancy, and one easily evoked by reminders of the recent past. Catholicism was a more credible enemy in good part because the bulk of the population remained Catholic, unlike most of the population in Britain. This demographic fact was significant, thus, despite Ireland's pre-democratic condition, because the mid-seventeenth-century rising had manifested formidable, if also localized, popular violence; hence it became commonplace in Ireland to garrison troops in a number of country towns during the eighteenth century.

At the foundation of the paradoxes that Swift's rhetoric indicates so often is the propensity of violence, the sheer barbarism, for which the Irish were denigrated from well before the Protestant Reformation, a reputation refreshed by the level of violence during the Rising of 1641. It is the association of the Gaels with savagery, indeed, that enforces this paradox underlying all the others: the threat to civilisation posed by a people regarded as barbarous could only be eliminated by inflicting an even greater savagery upon that people. This was a common attitude among Europeans in the sixteenth century, and its consequence, perhaps unsurprising in retrospect, was understood as early as the commentary of Las Casas on the Spanish conquest of America: such aggression tends to render the aggressors themselves uncivilised. That Ireland was uncivilised was a truism in ancient times, as even before the Christian era the historian Diodorus Siculus and the geographer Strabo repeated older reports that the

Irish were cannibals.<sup>14</sup> Ireland had never been absorbed into the Roman Empire, and the residual imperial structures were so important to the Christian Church in Europe that even though the Irish were relatively early among peripheral Europeans to be converted to Christianity, their ecclesiastical organisation and devotional practices were sufficiently unlike the Continental to be liable to suspicions of unorthodoxy. Hence Pope Adrian IV could licence Henry II to invade Ireland and regularise its faith, a project Henry pursued indirectly as to the invasion, and negligently as to the regularisation. So under the English Crown Ireland remained obdurately uncivilised, except for the small colony along the eastern coast. The failure of the civilising project at the hands of these “Old English” was owing to their obstinacy in the Roman faith, according to some of the “New” English who displaced them from governance,<sup>15</sup> and were expected, thus, to hasten the conversion and Anglicisation of the Gaels. Yet the conflicts in the seventeenth century, if they underscored the susceptibility of the native Irish, and by extension Irish Catholics, to savagery, did no more by the end of that century than to hold such a propensity in check, for little progress was made in converting the natives to civilised Protestantism. In the years before 1720 Swift could deplore the “Barbarity and Ignorance, for which our Natives are so despised by all Foreigners,”<sup>16</sup> and early in his career had little respect for Catholicism as a system of Christian faith, as *A Tale of a Tub* demonstrates extensively; in his later years continued to support the legislation designed to eliminate its potential as a political force in Ireland. But he made no facile connection of Catholicism with cultural barbarism, and while he championed Protestantism, he was less given to anti-Catholicism than some of his contemporaries.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* (as *Diodorus of Sicily* [Loeb Classical Library], trans. C.H. Oldfather (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), 3.181; Strabo, as *The Geography of Strabo* [Loeb Classical Library], trans. Horace Leonard (London: W. Heinemann, 1923), 2: 259.

<sup>15</sup> John Hooker, who in 1586 translated the twelfth-century commentator Giraldus Cambrensis, notes that the “verie Cause” of the failure to civilise and properly to Christianise the Gaelic population of Ireland “proceeded and is continued for want of a generall reformation” among the Old English. See Raphael Holinshed, The First and Second volumes of *Chronicles* ([London], 1586, 2:253 (second pagination).

<sup>16</sup> “Causes of the Wretched Condition of Ireland,” *Irish Tracts and Sermons*, ed. L. A. Landa (Oxford: Blackwell, 1948), 202.

<sup>17</sup> For Swift’s attitude towards Catholicism, see two articles of mine, “The Irish Colonial Experience and Swift’s Rhetorics of perception in the 1720s,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 22, no. 1 (Feb 1998), 63-75 and “Protestant dependence

For much as the project for civilising Ireland appealed to Swift—indeed he seemed always keen to improve the manners of common folk—he was not particularly forward in the cause of civilisation, probably because he was conscious of the ambiguous morality of those promoting it. Early in his writing career he recounted the history of the licence to invade and civilise Ireland that Pope Adrian IV had granted Henry II in the twelfth century: Henry was a ruthlessly grasping prince, who had already cheated his younger brother out of his rightful inheritance with pontifical complicity, and found that he could convince the pope—the only Englishman to hold the office—of the virtue of conquering Ireland. For his part, the pope was hopeful that English administration of the church in Ireland would increase his own revenues from that church; neither man was particularly high-minded about power or perquisites. The motives of these agents of civilisation were immorally opportunistic, but Ireland nonetheless was in need of civilising:

Ireland was in that age a country little known in the World. The legates sent thither from the Court of *Rome*, for urging the payment of annats, or directing other Church affairs, represented the inhabitants as a savage people, overrun with barbarism and superstition: for indeed no nation of Europe, where the Christian religion received so early and universal admittance, was ever so late or slow in feeling its effects upon their manners and civility. Instead of refining their manners by their faith, they had suffered their faith to be corrupted by their manners; true religion being almost defaced, both in doctrine and discipline, after a long course of time, among a people wholly sunk in ignorance and barbarity. There seem to have been two reasons why the inhabitants of that island continued so long uncultivated; first, their subjection or vassalage to so many petty kings, whereof a great number is mentioned by authors, besides those four or five usually assigned to the several provinces. These princes were engaged in perpetual quarrels, in doing or revenging injuries of violence, or lust, or treachery, or injustice, which kept them all in a continual state of war. And indeed, there is hardly any country, how renowned soever in ancient or modern story, which may not be traced from the like original. Neither can a nation come out from this state of confusion, until it is either reduced under one head at home, or by force or conquest becomes subject to a foreign administration.

The other reason why civility made such late entrances into that island, may be imputed to its natural situation, lying more out of the road of commerce or conquest than any other part of the known world. All the intercourse the inhabitants had, was only with the western coasts of Wales