

University of Rhode Island

DigitalCommons@URI

Senior Honors Projects

Honors Program at the University of Rhode
Island

6-2006

In a Short Time There Were None Almost Left: The Success and Failure of the Tudor Conquest in Ireland

Sean McIntyre

University of Rhode Island

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/srhonorsprog>



Part of the [European History Commons](#), [International and Area Studies Commons](#), and the [Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McIntyre, Sean, "In a Short Time There Were None Almost Left: The Success and Failure of the Tudor Conquest in Ireland" (2006). *Senior Honors Projects*. Paper 3.

<https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/srhonorsprog/3>

This Article is brought to you by the University of Rhode Island. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact digitalcommons-group@uri.edu. For permission to reuse copyrighted content, contact the author directly.

In a Short Time
There Were None Almost Left
The Success and Failure
Of the Tudor Conquest in Ireland

By: Sean McIntyre

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Scott Molloy

Abstract

There are few periods in the history of any nation as tumultuous as the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries in Ireland. The following paper examines the social and religious upheavals of this period and identifies an emergent national identity among 'Gaelic Irish' and 'Anglo-Irish' Catholics. Although English forces defeated the Irish 'rebels' in the two major military conflicts of the period, the Desmond Rebellion (1579-84) and the Nine Years' War (1595-1603), the means employed by England to achieve victory, cultural continuity among the Irish (and Gaelicised English), as well as the conflict over religion throughout Europe ensured that Ireland would remain a point of resistance to colonialism and the reformation. The pages below question the historical orthodoxy surrounding the 'Elizabethan conquest' and explore Ireland during those years in terms of a nation being created rather than destroyed.

Keywords:

Counter Reformation; Desmond Rebellion; Early-Modern Ireland; Elizabeth I; Gaelic Poetry; Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone; Nine Years' War.

*For ne'er before war's scowling tempest broke,
From out yon angry North with louder peal,
And ne'er with rougher tongue in battle spoke,
Tyr-Owen's rage and ne'er did foemen reel*
-John O'Neill, Hugh O'Neill the Prince of Ulster; A Poem.

*In course of time the forest fell before the axe-depriving the wolf, which was
the pest in Ireland in the olden time, of his lair, and the wood-kern of his
haunt. The marsh was drained...The land had been allowed to rest while
Death applied his sickle on the grim harvest-field of war.*
-Richard Cunninghame, The Broken Sword of Ulster.

A Note on Language:

As this is a study of Irish, rather than of English history, Irish sources were consulted in its preparation. Regrettably, the author's proficiency in the Irish language leaves something (indeed almost everything) to be desired, and thus all Irish sources were consulted in their English translation. That being said, any distinctly Irish words that were anglicized, either in the contemporary moment or later in historical writings, appear first in their original form, followed by the anglicized version in parentheses: i.e. Breitheamh (Brehon). This has been done in order to instill in the reader a sense of the difference between the Irish and English during the period addressed, and as a reminder that most dialogue between speakers of the respective languages occurred through an interpreter.

I. Introduction

When did England firmly establish its dominion over Ireland? Answers to this question range from '800 years ago' to 'never'. The Norman Conquest (1166-1170) was swift and decisive, but it was completely reversed in the following centuries. Parliament crowned Henry VIII Ireland's King in the early-sixteenth century, but he was content to rule in a manner 'founded in law and reason, rather than by vigorous dealing...or enforcement by strength or violence.'¹ Henry's daughter, Elizabeth I, engaged in more 'vigorous dealing' with Ireland and its rebellious subjects during the late-sixteenth century. Hence, upon the Queen's death, only days before the end of the Nine Years' War (1595-1603), King James VI of Scotland inherited three kingdoms, ruling Ireland more completely than any previous English monarch. However, during the period that is somewhat misleadingly remembered as the 'Elizabethan Conquest', English colonialism met a new spirit of resistance--a spirit that was far from extinguished by 1603.

While England succeeded in pacifying the Irish with 'fire and sword' during the Desmond Rebellion (1579-1584) and again in the Nine Years' War, its success came at an enormous cost, both in terms of lives and coin.² Furthermore, the goal of 'reforming' Ireland religiously, socially, and agriculturally--so frequently expressed in contemporary English writing--was not achieved in any meaningful or lasting way during this period. Rather, a new Irish nationalism, based on the Catholic religion and resistance to

¹ Henry VIII to Lord Deputy Surrey, 1520, *State Papers, Henry VIII, Ireland, II*, 52.

² The term fire and sword was coined to describe Sir Arthur Baron Grey de Wilton's method of spoiling the countryside and creating famine, as well as executing rebels after their surrender during the Desmond Rebellion; see section III.

England's colonial efforts began to emerge, even as Ireland's political system and its most charismatic leaders disappeared.

How was it that a society as fragmented as that of early modern Ireland united to the degree it did in opposing England during the Nine Years' War (1595-1603), and rose again in later conflicts after such a decisive defeat? Surely, men like Aodh Uí Néill (Hugh O'Neill) and Aodh Ruadh Uí Domhnaill (Red Hugh O'Donnell) were interested in preserving their own power, and their intelligence and charisma helped to unite so many behind them. There were, however, more permanent factors that made the Nine Years' War Ireland's first 'national' conflict. Not least among them was the bloody example of the Desmond rebellion, and similar events on a smaller scale in Connacht, which contributed to a collective memory of the English invaders as incorrigibly greedy and barbaric. Also, there was the specter of Spanish aid and with it the possibility of a fully united, Catholic Ireland. Finally, the appointment of English deputies and officials in areas of entirely Irish population, the seizure of land (often through fraud), and the occasional enforcement of laws demanding the adoption of English dress and language united many in opposition.

Although the Nine Years' War ended in defeat for the Irish and in the destruction of the Gaelic political system, a certain sentiment and impulse to resist survived and even grew as England sought further control and planted vast areas of Ireland with Scotch and English settlers. Ironically, the ever increasing colonial pressure and the decline of ancient traditions coincided with a flowering of Irish poetry and scholarship in the seventeenth century. These works affirm what the subsequent three centuries of history have told us: in breaking a series of lordships, England created a nation.

II. Pre-Elizabethan Ireland

By the early sixteenth century Strongbow's alliance with Dermot McMorrogh, the Norman conquest of Ireland, and England's brief dominion over the entire island were distant memories. The English military presence in Ireland nearly vanished during the War of the Roses, allowing the native Irish to complete their reclamation of all but a tiny area around Dublin city, the area known as the Pale. As York and Lancashire battled over the rule of England, Irish and Anglo-Norman lords grew in strength and severed their ties to Dublin and London. By the time crown forces ventured outside the Pale under Henry VIII, the Ireland they encountered was wholly foreign and unwilling to submit to English rule. Theirs was a cautious entry 'into a world as strange as the Indies were to Columbus.'³

Nevertheless, Ireland was a wilderness that England was determined to conquer. In the early 1600s, an English observer noticed that

*In Summer it hath lesse heat than England.... Again in winter by the humiditye of Sea and land, Ireland is less subject to Colde than England, so the Pastures are greene, and the Gardens full of Rosemary, laurel and sweete hearbes, which the Colde of England often destroyeth. It passeth England in Rivers, and frequent lakes abounding with fish and could be made profitable if the Inhabitants were industrious to get them for foode and traffique.*⁴

Ireland could provide England with fish, meat, corn, lumber, and above all land. But England's first and most troublesome colony was not only strange and different, it was also dangerous. The always eloquent (and in this case accurate) Irish nationalist John

³ Sean O'Faolin, *The Great O'Neill; A Biography of Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1970), 5; O'Faolin goes on to quote Speed's map of 1610 which describes the islands off the west of Ireland as 'full of angels, some full of devils, some for male only, some for female, some where none may live, some where none can die.'

⁴ Graham Kew, ed., *The Irish Sections of Fynes Moryson's Itinerary* (Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1998), 82-83; Two parts of the original Latin Manuscript survive in the British Library, Harlein MSS, 5133, and Harlein Additional Manuscript, 36706. The first English translation appeared in 1617.

Mitchel, looking back on the time of Henry VIII's rule, mused that 'the far greater portion of this island owed no allegiance and paid no obedience to the king or laws of England'.⁵ Indeed, if England ruled Ireland in the early sixteenth century, it was on parchment alone.

In a 1515 account, one English observer noted that 'there be more than sixty counties called Regions in Ireland, inhabited with the King's Irish enemies'. However, these 'Irish enemies' seldom concerned themselves with the King. Rather, it seemed to the English that the each of the Irish tiarni (chieftains) was free to 'maketh war and peace for himself...and obeyeth no other person, English or Irish, except only such persons as may subdue him by the sword.' A century later, Sir John Davies remarked that every landowner 'termeth himself a lord and his portion of land his country'.⁶ Irish lordships were held by force rather than by any divine right, and the chieftains made certain they were feared. Poets and historians reinforced their patrons' power, referring to different areas in their writing according to the names of the ruling families; i.e. Oireacht Ui Niell (O'Neill's Country) and not Cenel Eghoin (Tyrone).

Furthermore, 'the few Anglo-Norman families that had got footing' in Ireland had 'blended with the Irish tribes' and 'forgot their language and their very names'.⁷ The first Earl of Desmond presents a clear example of this phenomenon. Despite maintaining political ties to England (in addition to maintaining his earldom he served as Justiciar of

⁵ John Mitchel, *The Life and Times of Aodh O'Neill, Prince of Ulster; Called by the English, Hugh, Earl of Tyrone. With some Account of his Predecessors, Con, Shane, and Tirlough* (Dublin: James Duffy, 1845), 15-16.

⁶ Kenneth Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1972), 21-22.

⁷ See note 4 above.

Ireland from 1367 to 1369), Fitzgerald was deeply immersed in Irish culture, and was renowned by his neighbors as a composer of Gaelic poetry.⁸

The MacWilliam Burkes, of what is now county Mayo, quickly lost their cultural and political ties to England. Descended from the De Burgo's, one of the original families of Norman invaders, the Mac-William Burkes became Clann Uilliam Iachtar within two generations. They levied tributes and upheld their law in the traditional Gaelic fashion. Not surprisingly, they also adopted local dress, ceremony and language.⁹ By contrast, their cousins the Clanrickard Burkes were more conscious of their English roots and served on the side of the crown during the Nine Years' War. Their loyalty was later cast aside when the Lord Deputy, Sir Thomas Wentworth, confiscated vast tracts of Clanrickard lands in the 1630's. Adding insult to injury, Wentworth entered the Earl of Clanrickard's house uninvited and made himself comfortable in the earl's bed without troubling to remove his muddy boots.¹⁰ United by their religion and their ill-treatment, both the houses of Burke opposed the English in the Confederate wars of the 1640's.¹¹

The ancient Breitheamh (Brehon) law presented one of the strangest elements of Irish society to the sixteenth century English. One account of the legal system in

⁸ Nicholls, 163; the house of Fitzgerald originally held palatine jurisdiction over present day county Kildare. During the late fifteenth century, the period known as the Geraldine supremacy, the Kildare Fitzgeralds ruled Ireland as kings in all but name until the institution of 'Poyning's Law' in 1494, which severely circumscribed the power of Ireland's independent parliament. The Desmond Fitzgeralds were enemies of their Kildare cousins and less influential in the Pale. However, the house of Desmond also enjoyed palatine status in their earldom which spanned parts of present day Limerick, Kerry, and Cork, owing only token allegiance to the crown.

⁹ Elizabeth FitzPatrick, 'Assembly and Inauguration Places of the Burkes in Late Medieval Connacht', in Patrick J. Duffy, David Edwards, and Elizabeth FitzPatrick, *Gaelic Ireland; c. 1250-c. 1650* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 357-375.

¹⁰ The Four Masters, *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland from the Earliest Period to the Year 1616*, vol. 5, edited and translated by John O'Donovan, (Dublin: Hodges, Smith, and Co., 1856)vol. VI, 2233; I am grateful to professor Ciaran O'Murchadha at NUI Galway for sharing this anecdote with me.

¹¹ Clann Uilliam Iachtar, however, was greatly reduced at the hands of Sir Richard Bingham during the composition of Connacht; see section IV.

Kilkenny, written in 1537, illustrates both the Gaelicisation of the Anglo-Irish and the English distaste for the Irish legal system. The author writes that

*Upon every murder committed, the whole kindred of the party murdered do use to compel the whole kindred of the murderer to come before the said Irish judge, and then the judge will compel the defendants each of them to be contributors to such a sum of money as shall be adjudged by him, and two parts thereof to be paid to the principal captain of the plaintiffs, and the third part thereof to the next of the blood of the party murdered.*¹²

This tradition was known as cin comhfhocuis (kincogish), or joint family responsibility. Rather than receiving a punitive sentence, thieves, arsonists, and even murderers were compelled only to make restitution to the family of the injured party, with the appropriate lord also receiving a substantial share.¹³ Perpetrators were seldom executed, as this would have benefited no-one. The English saw no wisdom in this, and Justiciar Thomas de Rokeby declared in 1351 that Kincogish, and Brehon law in general ‘ought not be called law’ at all, making its use officially illegal in Kilkenny and all of Ireland. Of course, this meant nothing in the areas outside of crown control; which was practically everywhere¹⁴.

Henry VIII attempted to extend that control through the policy of ‘surrender and regrant’. With insufficient resources for a military campaign in Ireland, the King convinced several Gaelic chieftains to forfeit their jurisdiction without a fight and thereafter pay a nominal tribute to the crown. In return, they immediately received back their lands and were granted feudal titles (earl, baron, etc.), but were expected to adopt English dress and law, as well as to allow English officials into their lands. Several lords submitted during the Henrician period; including Mac Gilla Phadruig, who became

¹² Kenneth Nichols, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1972), 55; Kilkenny, like most towns in sixteenth century Ireland, contained a primarily Anglo-Irish population.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

Fitzpatrick; O'Brien, taking on the title of the earl of Thomond; and Inis-Hy-Quin, whose descendents were called Inchiquin and were perpetual allies to the crown.

The most historically important submission occurred at Henry's palace at Greenwich in 1541, when Conn Bachach O'Neill knelt before the King, renounced his Gaelic title through an interpreter, and rose as the first earl of Tyrone. One contemporary English author noted that Henry VIII sent the newly appointed earl back to Ulster 'richly plated' in gold and satin.¹⁵ While O'Neill, and others who submitted, were satirized by contemporary poets and chastised by later Irish nationalists for accepting 'barbarian Anglo-Saxon title[s]', their submission was far from complete.¹⁶ The house of O'Neill would remain a thorn in the British side for generations to come, and descendants of most of the lords who submitted to Henry would take up arms against Elizabeth.

III. Shane the Proud

To an English observer, the Irish custom regarding inheritance must have seemed as strange as Brehon law. Unlike the English system of primogeniture, in which a lord's eldest son would automatically inherit his father's property and his title, Irish chieftains passed on their lands and titles through the system of tanaiste (tanistry). In Gaelic Ireland, any male descendant within four generations, legitimate or otherwise, could become the next tiarna of his clan. As one might imagine, this often led to violent disputes between

¹⁵ Edmund Campion, *Historie of Ireland* (Delmar, N.Y.: Scholars' Facsimilies and Reprints, 1940), 181; this submission was also important at the time, as Conn Bachach was the one of the most powerful lord in Ireland, commanding the respect and allegiance of his Ulster neighbors as well as multiple septs of the highland and island Scots.

¹⁶ Marc Caball, *Poets and Politics; Continuity and Reaction in Irish Poetry, 1558-1625* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998), 41; Mitchel, 19 (quote).

prospective heirs. The most famous and historically pivotal dispute was the war over the title of O'Neill at the end of Conn Bachach's reign. Conn had appointed Matthew, his illegitimate son by a Dundalk blacksmith's wife, as his successor. However, Matthew's other son Shane, remembered as Shane the Proud, killed Matthew and his son Brian, claiming the title of 'the O'Neill' for himself in 1562.¹⁷

This Shane governed Cenel Eghoin fiercely, and scoffed at the English incursions into his land that his father had tolerated. One contemporary Englishman's observations suggest that the nickname 'Shane the Proud' was more than fitting:

*When he saw that he was able to levy of his own followers one thousand horse and four thousand foot, he disdained, in barbarous pride, all...honourable titles in comparison of the name of O'Neill, and vaunted himself among his own people to be the king of Ulster.*¹⁸

Shane had no interest in becoming the second earl of Tyrone, nor did he intend to accommodate Elizabethan interests in his territory in any way. Remembering its precarious hold over Ireland at the time, it is no surprise that England feared Shane and held him in awe.

After all, Shane O'Neill was arguably the most powerful man in Ireland. He directly controlled more land than the crown, owned over a hundred thousand heads of cattle, and kept a vast cellar filled with two hundred tons of wine. Wild (though not necessarily untrue) legends about Shane captivated the English imagination. He was said to have kept his mistresses chained in a cellar, to have fathered swarms of illegitimate children, and to have occasionally buried himself neck deep in sand in order to 'cool his mad blood'.¹⁹ Thus, when he marched into London escorted by a band of Scottish mercenaries 'armed with battleaxes, bareheaded, with flowing curls...whom the English

¹⁷ Matthew's other son, Aodh (Hugh), survived.

¹⁸ William Camden, *Q. Elizabeth*; Quoted in Mitchel, 33.

¹⁹ O'Faolin, 9.

followed with as much wonderment as if they had come from China or America', Shane's demands of non-interference were met. He was 'sent home with honour' to govern his country autonomously. The Queen even paid for his passage back to Ireland.²⁰

This diplomatic respect offered to Shane O'Neill was catalyzed by fear alone, and the terms of the agreement were not kept by either side. English adventurers increasingly pressed upon Ulster, while Shane continued to 'yolke and spoyle at pleasure' in and around the Pale.²¹ By dealing with Shane O'Neill as a foreign Prince rather than as a rebellious subject, England kept him at arm's length and avoided a war it was not prepared to fight. Nevertheless, after Shane was murdered in 1567 by a band of Antrim Scots, whose lands he had also continually raided, the English administration proudly displayed his head on a spike atop the gates of Dublin.

As Shane O'Neill met his end, so too did a distinctive era in Anglo Irish relations.²² Elizabeth's government dealt with Shane in the Henrician fashion, and had he not continued to raid the Pale and nearby English settlements, may have been content to allow him his autonomy. However, as we will see, the English approach to governing Ireland had already begun to change. At the same time, Shane himself was one of the last of his kind: an Irish chieftain who governed entirely by the sword and sought the allegiance of his neighbors through intimidation rather than through compact. He lived in a rapidly changing world, one he refused to adapt to. As England began its 'conquest' in the late-sixteenth century, most Irish either capitulated or found new ways to resist.

Shane resisted in the old way, the only way he knew how; completely and audaciously.

²⁰ Camden, *Annals* (1615), 178; Quoted in G.A. Hayes-McCoy, 'The Tudor Conquest; 1534-1603', in T.W. Moody and F.X. Martin, eds., *The Course of Irish History* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 2001), 145.

²¹ *Ibid.*.

²² For an analysis of pre-Tudor Ireland, see Art Cosgrave, 'The Gaelic Resurgence and the Geraldine Supremacy', in Moody and Martin, 125-138.

Observing what he saw as the collapse of his world, Shane was ‘sayd to have cursed his people at his death, if any of them should builde houses, or sowe Corne, [or] to invite the Englishmen to live among them.’²³ In the years surrounding Shane O’Neill’s murder, the situation in Ireland became more complex in ways that only later generations could understand and respond to.

IV. Rebellion, Plantation, and Composition 1565-1595

At the beginning of his term as Lord Deputy, Sir Henry Sidney insisted that England reach beyond the Pale to defend the peace inside of it. Sidney’s predecessor and father in law, the Earl of Sussex, had argued for similar measures in 1562, but Sidney’s influence in the Queen’s Privy Council meant that his program was put into effect. His broadly ambitious actions would embitter his relations with many of the lords and political elite, as well as with the Queen herself. However, Sidney’s deputyship ultimately set the tone for England’s government in Ireland over the next forty years.²⁴

An example of Sidney’s audacity is the granting of lands within the Ormond palatinate (present day county Tipperrary) to Sir Peter Carew.²⁵ The Duke of Ormond was incensed by this, and used his influence with the Queen and Privy Council in London to bring Sidney’s actions in Ireland under close scrutiny (though he never got back his lands). This episode, though marginal in terms of its immediate effects, began two

²³ Fynes Moryson, *An History of Ireland, From the Year 1599, to 1603. With a short Narration of the Kingdom from the Year 1169. To which is added A Description of Ireland*, 2 vols. (Dublin: Angel and Bible, 1735), vol. I, 111.

²⁴ Nicholas Canny, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: A Pattern Established 1565-76* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1976), 44-48.

²⁵ Colm Lennon, *Sixteenth Century Ireland: The Incomplete Conquest* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan Ltd, 1994), 183-184.

important trends; the decline of the status of the Anglo-Irish, and the Dublin Government's colonial zeal extending beyond the wishes of London.²⁶

Despite all suspicion and disapproval, Henry Sidney continued to institute confrontational policies for the 'reform' of Ireland. In a dispatch to the Privy Council, Sidney proudly wrote of how he had brought several Gaelic Chieftains 'to surrender all their lands and take it of her Highness againe, and yield both rent and service'.²⁷ Sidney's intent was to break the power of the lordships, eliminating 'all forms of feudal excess' and 'lewd Irish customs'.²⁸ Of course, his more vigorous policies were ultimately meant to yield substantial revenues.²⁹ They also angered powerful Irish and Anglo-Irish Lords, whose sovereignty they threatened. This anger would have serious (and possibly hoped for) repercussions.

Both the London and Dublin governments were uneasy in their trust of the Anglo-Irish, who were primarily Catholic. Their double-allegiance to London and Rome had been problematic since the days of Henry VIII. It was made much more so in 1570, when Pope Gregory I proclaimed Queen Elizabeth a heretic, calling all Catholics to unseat her from the throne. Still, most Anglo-Irish remained loyal to the crown. Sidney and his successors put their loyalty to the ultimate test, and for some the pressure was too great.

On the 18th of July, 1579, James Fitzmaurice Fitzgerald landed on the Dingle peninsula, declaring a holy crusade against England. He was joined in rebellion by John,

²⁶ Both trends would increase during the following decades, the latter reaching its peak during the Nine Years' War and the former in the Cromwellian confiscations.

²⁷ *Calendar of the Patent and Close Rolls of Chancery in Ireland from the 18th to the 45th of Queen Elizabeth*, vol. 2 (Dublin: Alexander Thom, 1862), 137.

²⁸ Canny, *The Elizabethan Conquest*, 50.

²⁹ Lennon, 241; For an examination of how Sidney's ideas and policies conflicted with those of earlier administrators and prominent Palesmen, see Canny, 'The Formation of the Old English Elite in Ireland', *O'Donnell Lecture, delivered at University College, Galway, 6 September, 1974* (Dublin: 1975).

the Earl of Desmond's brother. The Earl, Gerald Fitzgerald, initially opposed the rebels and professed his loyalty to England and the Queen. However, after bringing 'systematic destruction' to Desmond's lands and being refused total control over putting down the rebels, the Lord Justice of Munster, Sir William Pelham, proclaimed Fitzgerald a rebel. The Queen, with some hesitation, seconded Pelham's proclamation, declaring the Earl's lands forfeit.³⁰ Having nothing to lose, Fitzgerald reluctantly threw in his lot with the rebels, assuming a leadership role after James Fitzmaurice was killed.

This was not the first time Gerald Fitzgerald had been at odds with the English Government. In 1574, his kinsmen, 'followers, friends, and servants' had compelled him neither 'to consent nor yield' to the wishes of the crown's agents and to 'to defend himself from the violence of the Lord Deputy', which he did.³¹ Thus, although he had little choice but to join the rebellion, he had both reasons for and support in doing so, and is remembered as a valiant and willing leader.

In the ensuing conflict, Lord Deputy Arthur, Baron Grey de Wilton and his officials used 'scorched earth' tactics to subdue the rebels, causing widespread famine and heavy civilian casualties across the Munster countryside. In one contemporary estimate, 30,000 perished within a six month period in 1582.³² For the first time, famine and slaughter were considered necessary aspects of warfare, and employed by both sides, though much more effectively by Grey and Pelham than by the Geraldines. If Ireland was to be conquered and reformed, the English believed that its native inhabitants must be brought to complete, unconditional submission. According to the renowned contemporary poet, Edmund Spenser, this is exactly what had occurred in Munster by

³⁰ Lennon, 223-224.

³¹ *Calendar*, 109.

³² Lennon, 227-228.

1584. Though gruesome, Spenser and other influential Englishmen believed that Grey's policy of total war was the only way to lasting success in Ireland. Shortly after the conclusion of the war, Spenser wrote:

Out of every corner of the woods and glynnes they came creeping forth upon their hands, for their legges could not beare them; they looked like anatomies of death, they spake like ghosts crying out of their graves; they did eat of the dead carrions, happy where they could find them, yea, and one another soon after, insomuch as the very carcasses they spared not to scrape out of their graves; and, if they found a plot of water-cresses or shamrocks, there they flocked as to a feast for the time, yet not able long to continue therewithal; that in a short space there were none almost left, and a most populous and plentifull countrey was suddainely left void of man and beast; yet sure in all that warre, there perished not many by the sword, but all by the extremitie of famine, which they themselves had wrought.³³

The Irish annalists catalogue the effects of the war in a similar way, declaring that by 1584 'a general peace was proclaimed throughout all Ireland...after the decapitation of the Earl of Desmond'. The defeat of the rebels was so decisive that 'there was not a single individual of the race of Fitzgerald able to bear arms', and Munster was a barren wasteland.³⁴ Though devastating in its visible effects, the Desmond Rebellion presented the English with an excellent opportunity to 'reform' its recalcitrant colony, enriching themselves in the process.

The Government commissioned a group of surveyors under Sir Valentine Browne to take an account of all the rebel lands declared forfeit.³⁵ In 1586, Browne began

³³ Edmund Spenser, *A View of the State of Ireland*, eds. Andrew Hadfield and Willy Maley (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 101-102; The first printed edition of Spenser's *A View*, edited by Sir James Ware, was published in 1633, a year before the completion of Geoffrey Keating's monumental *Foras Feasa Eirinn* (A History of Ireland) and three years before *The Annals of the Four Masters*. However, *A View* was first entered for publication in 1598, and was influential and widely read in manuscript form some time before that date.

³⁴ *Four Masters, 1843-47* This was not entirely true, as several members of the house of Fitzgerald participated in Baltinglass revolt in and around the Pale

³⁵ Browne first received this commission in 1582. When the commissioners entered Munster on September 1st, 1584, few preliminary surveys had been made. Thus, the surveys were arduously and imperfectly conducted over the following two years. The valuations of eighty three estates survive, and it is testament

recruiting undertakers for the settlement of confiscated lands. The Munster plantation, as it is remembered, was executed under direct government supervision, with the recent failure of Sir Thomas Smith's Ulster plantation, and other private plantations in mind.³⁶ Each undertaker received a grant of 12,000 acres, which he was expected to populate with ninety families 'of English birth'. The latter is significant in that it groups the Anglo-Irish with the 'mere Irish' as undesirables, which must have reinforced the pan-Catholic, anti-English sentiment already so clearly expressed in the Desmond Rebellion.

Browne and his team projected a 720,000 acre plantation, to be divided into sixty seignories of 12,000 acres. Due to flaws in the survey, the actual plantation covered a mere 300,000 acres and the seignories were not adjacent, nor was each managed by a separate undertaker. In fact Sir Walter Raleigh, the adventurer famed for bringing both the first potatoes and the first tobacco to Ireland, secured for himself an estate of no less than 42,000 acres in what is now County Cork, which he could neither populate nor make profitable.³⁷

The only existing records of the plantation and the management of the seignories are those submitted by the undertakers themselves, and they suggest that the aim of creating a 'little England' in Ireland was not reached. In 1589, Christopher Hatton reported that his seignory contained twenty five Englishmen, eight English women, and admittedly, fifty three 'Irish people of English descent'.³⁸ A far cry from the ninety English families required to set a good example for their Irish neighbors.

to the high casualties of the Desmond Rebellion that only twenty of the eighty three owners of these estates were still living; see McCarthy-Morrogh, 5-9.

³⁶ Ibid., 46.

³⁷ Ibid., 52.

³⁸ Ibid., 108-110.

The plantation did enjoy a brief period of economic prosperity before it was 'swept from the ground virtually without a fight' by Owney ogO'Moore in 1598. Lord Mountjoy's secretary later attributed the ultimate failure of the plantation to the settlers: 'Papists' and 'men of disordered lives' who made Ireland 'the sink of England'.³⁹ In other words, the settlers were more concerned with their own immediate profit than with representing the emerging renaissance of Elizabethan England.

Nevertheless, it seemed that Munster was at last completely pacified, and that the Government could focus on other areas. Ulster was still seen as Ireland's impenetrable fortress, and the province of Connacht was an easier and less expensive tiger to tame. England expected the submission of the Connacht lords, however, to be nearly as lucrative as the Munster Plantation. One must remember that the image of Connacht as a poor and under-populated backwater comes from the nineteenth century, and that in earlier times it was as productive and powerful as Leinster and Munster, especially given the precedence of husbandry over tillage.

The composition of Connacht resembled the earlier system of surrender and regrant, combined with heavy taxation and knight's service. Many of the Lords submitted willingly, such as Donall Reogh McNeMarrae, who was 'seized of his inheritance' and 'holden of the queen by knight's service' in 1585.⁴⁰ The Lord President, Sir Richard Bingham, dealt harshly with others who resisted.⁴¹ The Four Masters relate one incident in which 'two thousand were slain in a midnight attack in Sligo'.⁴²

³⁹ Canny, *Making Ireland British*, 162-164.

⁴⁰ *Calendar*, 136-137.

⁴¹ The Lord Presidencies of Connacht and Munster (alternately referred to as Lord Justices) were posts created by Sidney in order to break the power of the lords and end 'all forms of feudal excess'. The Lord

In another example, after an unsatisfactory round of negotiations, Bingham ordered ‘seventy men and women [to be] put to death’ including the son of MacWilliam Burke.⁴³ The use of ‘fire and sword’ to subdue Connacht is confirmed by many contemporaries, including Bingham himself. Composition was justified as a means of liberating ‘freeholders’ from ‘the cesses and oppressions of all sort of men of war herefore laid upon them’.⁴⁴ The surviving composition agreements are filled with this type of language. In reality, they were little more than state sanctioned extortion, and encouraged many to take up stock with the Ulster Earls in the impending conflict, especially as an Irish victory began to appear probable.⁴⁵

V. The Great O’Neill

*Hugh O’Neill is carried away in a vision from the Island in Lough Neagh to the foot of Slieve Bloom in Leinster...After O’Neill’s address, St. Colmkille gives him his solemn mission, and departs leaving him to contemplate the closing scene of the Geraldine War.*⁴⁶

Hugh O’Neill, the second Earl of Tyrone, was one of the most important figures in Ireland (and in Europe for that matter) during and following the Nine Years’ War.

Remembered as ‘The Great O’Neill’, many believed that he intended to make himself king of all Ireland. Some even believed that he planned to invade and conquer England.

Shortly before O’Neill’s death in Rome, Conde Francisco Ruiz De Castro wrote to King

President enjoyed unprecedented power within the provinces, including the ability to declare marshal law; see Canny, *The Elizabethan Conquest*, 50; Bingham was appointed Lord President of Connacht on 21 June 1584 along with Sir John Perrot as Lord Deputy of Ireland.

⁴² Four Masters, 1843-47.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1843-1847.

⁴⁴ A. Martin Freeman, ed., ‘The Indenture of Thomond’; *The Compossicion Booke of Conought* (Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Office, 1936), 15.

⁴⁵ For a closer examination of the compositions and their long term effects, see Lennon, Ch. 9, especially 249-263.

⁴⁶ John O’Neill, Hugh O’Neill, *The Prince of Ulster. A Poem; Canto the Second, or, The Mission* (Dublin: McGLashan and Gill, 1860), 7.

Felipe III of Spain that ‘the Earl is a great nobleman and Your Majesty owes much to his devotion and loyalty’.⁴⁷ Earlier, Lord Mountjoy’s secretary, Fynes Moryson, considered O’Neill’s leadership in comparison with Desmond’s, writing that

*the Earl of Desmond, flying into the Woods, was there in a Cottage killed, his Head cut off, being, as the say, betrayed by his own Followers, wherein the Ulster Men challenge an Honour of Faithfulness to their Lords, above those of Munster; for in the following Wars none of them could be induced by Fear or Reward, to lay Hands on their revered o Neal.*⁴⁸

This same secretary, in the pay of O’Neill’s worthiest adversary, noted that the Earl possessed a ‘high, dissembling, subtile, and profound Wit’ and was ‘of strong Body, able to endure Labours’ and ‘manage great Affairs’.⁴⁹ O’Neill’s charisma and leadership have compelled British and Irish historians alike to misleadingly refer to the Nine Years’ War as ‘Tyrone’s Rebellion’. In fact, though his background and personality gave him a greater agency in dealing with the English than other Irish Lords, O’Neill, like them, only acted in response to a rapidly changing world.

We know remarkably little about the man himself and the nature of his ambitions. After his father’s death, the young Hugh O’Neill became a ward of the state and was educated in Dublin and London. He may have even lived in Sir Henry Sidney’s house for a time. At a rather young age (approximately eighteen), he was created Baron of Dungannon and given a sizeable estate in Tyrone. In exchange, he was expected to aid the Queen’s forces in Ireland, which he did during the Desmond Rebellion.⁵⁰ At this stage, it was also evident that he was pursuing the title of ‘the O’Neill’ and seeking the alliance of the noble families in Ulster, the most powerful of which were the O’Donnell’s of

⁴⁷ Micheline Kerney Walsh, *Destruction by Peace; Hugh O’Neill After Kinsale* (Monaghan: R. & S. Printers, 1986), document 154.

⁴⁸ Moryson, *History*, 8-9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

⁵⁰ O’Faolin, chapters 1-2.

Tirconnell, who were traditional enemies of the O'Neill's. O'Neill had already married Siobhan O'Donnell in 1574, and in 1587 gave his daughter Roseto be wed to the young tanaiste, Aodh Ruadh (Hugh Roe), who as 'the O'Donnell' would become his most valuable ally.

In 1588, several Spanish Armada ships foundered off the coast of Ireland. Most of the survivors, who were enemies of England, were treated as enemies by the Irish as well. However, some Irish harbored Spanish soldiers and even helped to secure them a passage home. It was alleged that the Baron of Dungannon had done so. Thus began the collaboration between Spain and Ireland, and England's paranoia regarding the same.

It is interesting to note that the Irish historian Phillip O'Sullivan-Beare, writing in the seventeenth century, placed the beginning of the Nine Years War' at the time of the Armada wreck, referring to it instead as the 'Fifteen Years War'. Indeed, the O'Donnell's and the neighboring Maguire's (of present day Fermanagh) were soon engaged in open war with England. O'Neill officially remained loyal until 1595, though years later he would describe his campaign against England as the 'Eleven Years War', beginning at the time of Hugh O'Donnell's escape from Dublin Castle in 1591.⁵¹

Whether or not Hugh O'Neill already intended to make war on England, his movements were being watched very closely. In 1590, the Queen summoned O'Neill, whom she had created earl of Tyrone in 1585, to her court in London to answer those who accused him of treason, namely Lord Deputy William Fitzwilliam and the Dublin

⁵¹ Kerney Walsh, 228; The young O'Donnell was kidnapped and imprisoned in 1587, at the age of 15. The Four Masters attribute this to the Lord Deputy's 'fear of an O'Neill O'Donnell alliance', *Four Masters*, 1859; another Ulster Lord, Hugh Roe McMahan, was kidnapped and executed around the same time.

Government. Professing his loyalty to the crown, O'Neill apologized for any previous wrongs and agreed to

continue loyal and keep the Peace: To renounce the Title of o Neal, and all intermeddling with the Neighbour Lords... That he execute no Man except be it by Commission from the Lord Deputy, under the broad Seal of Martial Law, and that to be limited⁵²... to cause the Wearing of English Apparel, and that none of his men wear Glibbes [long Hair].⁵³

The Queen and her officials feared the Earl of Tyrone's expanding power and doubted his commitment to the English cause, yet still could not govern Ulster without him. His own intentions in the years preceding the war are unclear. What is clear is that Hugh O'Neill had a foot in two worlds at the moment they clashed. He spoke fluent English and had influential friends in London and Dublin. While his counter-part, O'Donnell, signed his letters to the Spanish court 'Aodh Ui Domhnaill', his letters were signed in his own hand 'O'Neill, H.,' or 'Tyrone'.⁵⁴ Even while plotting rebellion, he appears to have been more English than Irish. Yet, by 1595 he was the most powerful lord in Ulster, Gaelic Ireland's last stronghold. Throughout the war, he commanded the respect and allegiance of lords whose families had been at war with each other and the O'Neill's for generations. When Irish and Anglo-Irish lords in Connacht and Leinster received word that 'O'Neal requireth you in God's name to take Part with him, and fight for your Conscience and Right,' most joined with him, expanding the struggle across the entire island. Being assured that 'O'Neal will spend to see [them] righted in all [their]

⁵² This refers to the public execution of Hugh Gavalech McShane, the son of Shane O'Neill, by the Earl earlier that year. The McShane's challenged his claim to the title of 'the O'Neill', which he assumed after the death of his cousin, Turlough Luineach O'Neill in 1595.

⁵³ Quoted in Moryson, *History* 21 -22.

⁵⁴ Kerney-Walsh, Documents.

Affairs' they must have believed that his knowledge of the Protestant-English world would help protect them from its aggression.⁵⁵

VI. Aodh Ruadh

Red Hugh O'Donnell, also suspected by the English of desiring to be king of all Ireland, ruled Tir Chonnail (Tirconnel, present day Donegal excepting the Inishowen peninsula) in a more traditional fashion. A biography written shortly after his death describes him as

*a man who impressed fear and great dread of him in everyone far and near, and who had no dread of anyone, a man who drove out rebels, destroyed robbers, exalted the sons of life, and executed the sons of death.*⁵⁶

O'Donnell was known for his unparalleled generosity, his bravery in battle, and other characteristics befitting an Irish nobleman. Unlike O'Neill, Red Hugh made no pretence at capitulating to English rule, and while the former was as calculating a general and statesman as any in France or England, the latter more closely resembled the warriors of Ireland's heroic age.

Like all great heroes, O'Donnell fulfilled an ancient prophecy. A poem attributed to St. Colmcille declared that when two Hugh's ruled the house of O'Donnell consecutively, in the person of the second

*There will come a man glorious, pure, exalted,
Who will cause mournful weeping in every territory;
He will be the god-like prince,
And he will be king for nine years.*⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Quoted in Moryson, *History* vol. I, 133.

⁵⁶ Lughdaidh O'Clereigh, *Beatha Aodha Ruadh Ui Domhnaill*; The Life of Hugh Roe O'Donnell, Prince of Tirconnell (1586-1602), ed. and trans. by Rev. Denis Murphy (Dublin: Sealy, Bryers, & Walker, 1893), 327.

The English would have most likely been aware of this legend before kidnapping and imprisoning Hugh Roe, and would just as likely have written it off as Catholic (and perhaps even pagan) superstition. By the same token, they feared that the presence of a ‘storybook hero’ would further disrupt an already rebellious Ulster. The young Hugh Roe’s harsh treatment in and legendary escape from Dublin castle in the dead of winter, possibly with O’Neill’s aid, did more to disrupt Ulster and Ireland than any ancient text could have.

O’Donnell’s biographer, who according to the Irish custom would have been in the pay of his family, wrote that ‘it was known to the English of Dublin that O’Neill had entered into the confederacy of the Irish at the instigation and request of O’Donnell’.⁵⁸ It is more probable that O’Neill made his own decision. However, England’s treatment of the young O’Donnell, only nineteen years old at the time of his escape, must have assured O’Neill and others that Ulster’s autonomy would no longer be tolerated, and that their power was under serious threat.

Unlike the Celtic heroes of old, Hugh Roe O’Donnell fought for more than his valor and his family’s land and cattle. His was a battle to preserve a social and religious world that was increasingly precarious. Were he interested only in ruling Tir Chonnail, his overtures to Spain and his alliance with O’Neill make no sense. Something in the atmosphere of Elizabethan Ireland compelled him to risk everything, and to broaden his aims. In the face of total defeat following the battle of Kinsale, he traveled to Spain, hoping to enlist further troops. On behalf of all those in resistance, he wrote the following letter to Felipe II:

⁵⁷ Ibid., 5; Hugh Roe was born to Sir Hugh O’Donnell and Ineen Dubh in 1572.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 89.

*We merely beg Your Majesty with all humility to be pleased to give attention to this matter, for, since I have seen the royal presence of Your Majesty, we have more confidence in you for the benefit and advancement of our poor country, than in the whole world; and, provided the matter is attended to with required haste, I pledge my word to your Royal Majesty that, once landed there, we shall make the whole country subject to Your Majesty in a very short time. This I promise, knowing the state of the country at present. May God keep Your Majesty for many long years. From La Coruna on the last day of February, 1602.
Aodh Ui Domhnaill.⁵⁹*

Though the king expressed his support for Catholic Ireland, he delayed in sending an army. Remaining to plead his and Ireland's cause, Hugh Roe O'Donnell died at Simancas Castle on 10 September 1602, supposedly poisoned by an English spy. He was twenty nine years old.

VII. *Exactions and Rapines* The Wages of England's Victory

From the preliminary stages of the conflict in 1593, Spanish aid to the rebels was 'daily expected', and thus, the Nine Years' War took on a great international importance. Following the disaster of Sir Walter Devereaux's term as Lord Deputy,⁶⁰ his successor, Lord Mountjoy (Charles Blount), pledged in his oath of office to repress all 'rebels and enemies' and to preserve 'her majesty's peace'. Mountjoy had every reason to believe that the survival of England itself was being placed in his hands, and went about repressing 'rebels and enemies' of the Queen deliberately and severely.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Kerney Walsh, 17.

⁶⁰ Devereaux, the Earl of Essex, commanded an army of 17,000 in Ireland quite inefficiently. For this, he is remembered as 'The Earl of Excess'. The Irish joked that Essex 'never drew his sword but to make knights'. Most of his soldiers fell victim to disease while idling in camp.

⁶¹ *Calendar*, 29.

The Nine Years' War was generally 'a war of the frontier and the forest,' which played into the hands of the Irish 'kern'.⁶² At the battle of Yellow Ford, one of the only pitched battles of the war, O'Neill's rival and brother-in-law Sir Henry Bagenal met his death along with fifteen captains and more than three thousand men.⁶³ This decisive victory gave the Irish rebels considerable momentum. However, it was mismanagement and corruption from within rather than the strength of the opposition that caused Elizabeth's army the most difficulty.

In 1601, Mountjoy wrote to the Privy Council, complaining that the budget he was given to prosecute the war was 'totally inadequate'.⁶⁴ While this may have been true, there is ample evidence to suggest the funds that left London were more than sufficient to prosecute the war. The entire budget for the nine years war passed through the hands of the treasurer-at-war, Sir Henry Wallop (or Sir George Carey from 1599 on), both of whom gained 'private fortunes at the Queen's expense'.⁶⁵ On the micro level, the captains in Ireland, who were charged with distributing the wages on which their men were expected to feed and clothe themselves, 'raised the arts of deception and corruption to a level of efficiency that has perhaps never been attained in any sphere since'.⁶⁶ This made victory by conventional (and one might say honorable) means impossible.

Regardless of the means, England emerged victorious. While Mountjoy's military prowess in strategically placing forts in and around Ulster and in forcing O'Neill and O'Donnell into a pitched battle at Kinsale should not be underestimated, these were not

⁶² O'Faolin, 154; kern traditionally refers to bowmen, but O'Neill trained his kern in musketry.

⁶³ R.B. Wernham, *The Return of the Armadas; The Last Years of the Elizabethan War Against Spain 1595-1603* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 284.

⁶⁴ McGurk, 202.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁶⁶ C.G. Cruickshank, *Elizabeth's Army* (Oxford, 1970), 139-40; *Ibid.*, 197.

the decisive factors in the war. In the absence of sufficient supplies, English soldiers raided and spoiled the countryside, often at the encouragement of their superiors. For example, in a letter to Henry Dowcra at Lough Foyle, the privy-council expressed its approval 'if any pray or cattle be taken from the enemy' in O'Neill's country.⁶⁷ Dockwra interpreted this as a license for his men to run amuck in Ulster, burning, robbing, and slaughtering civilians and livestock. Without such practices the death toll on the English side would have been even more astronomical than it was, and O'Neill and O'Donnell's armies would have been stronger by the time they arrived at Kinsale.⁶⁸ By the same token, Irish collective memory of the war might not have been quite so bitter.

England's conduct during the Nine Years' War was described by one nineteenth century Irish historian 'savage and impolitic in the extreme'.⁶⁹ Ironically, before her death, Elizabeth herself famously lamented of having 'sent wolves, not shepherds' to bring Ireland to order, and of them reducing her Irish subjects to 'ashes and carcasses'.⁷⁰ Shortly after the Queen's death, the same Irish subjects, rebellious and loyal, made a similar complaint to the Lord Deputy.

At the war's end, Mountjoy marched into Cork city, where the citizens made him aware of the 'miserable condition to which the country had been reduced by the long Desmond and Tyrone wars'. They 'entertained him with a show of ploughiron on both

⁶⁷ *Acts of the Privy Council*, xxx, 103, 'Instructions as to the plantation at Lough Foyle'; *Ibid.*, 205.

⁶⁸ Even at the decisive battle of Kinsale in 1601, where English deaths on the battlefield were very few, Sir George Carew wrote that 'Kinsale was bought at so dear a rate' that he would never again conduct a campaign in the winter with such a dearth of supplies.; *Calendar of the Carew Papers*, iv, 305, *Carew to Cecil, 11 August, 1602*; *Ibid.*, 246.

⁶⁹ Robert Holmes Esq., *The Case of Ireland Stated* (Dublin,: James McGlashan, 1847), 10.

⁷⁰ McGurk, 208.

sides of the street...intimating hereby that the soldiers by their exactions and rapines had wasted the country, making all the ploughs to be idle which should have maintained it'.⁷¹

VIII. A Catholic Nation

*During this tyme Religion first began in Ireland to be made the Cloke of Ambition, and...by Popish Combinations two great rebellions were raised.*⁷²

The residents of Cork city who expressed their discontent to Mountjoy after the Nine Years' War were ethnically English. Among the Anglo-Irish of the Pale, the corporate towns, and the lordships, the Earl of Desmond had been the exception and not the rule, and most remained loyal to the Tudor State during the sixteenth century. And yet, they unanimously rejected the new state religion. In the midst of the Elizabethan struggle to subdue Ireland, Fynes Moryson remarked that the people there continued to 'use generally the Rites of the Roman Church in which they persist with obstinacy', reserving a particular vehemence for 'the very English Irish remaining Papists'.⁷³

Those English 'Papists', who were drawn increasingly closer to the 'mere-Irish' in their status and sympathies by the end of the war, found their 'English' identity fading in favor of a Catholic identity. With Ireland supposedly subdued and ready for complete Anglicisation, the peace between Ireland's two religions was tentative.⁷⁴ England's state papers record that 'on receiving news of Elizabeth's death, all or most of the towns in

⁷¹ *Calendar of State Papers Relating to Ireland, of the Reign of James I. 1606-1608*, XLIX.

⁷² Moryson, *Itinerary*, 27; the two great rebellions were, of course, the Second Desmond Rebellion and the Nine Years' War.

⁷³ Moryson, *Itinerary*, 109.

⁷⁴ It is worth noting that the Anglo-Irish church (The Ecclesia Inter-Anglicos) and the Gaelic-Irish Church (Ecclesia Inter-Hibernicos), were still fairly distinct and separate at that beginning of the seventeenth century, though they combined over the next 30 years.

Munster, although faithful during the rebellion, with some insolence set up the public exercise of (Catholic) Mass,' whereas during her reign they had held mass in secret.⁷⁵ It seemed they were sending a message to their new King.

The effects of the Counter-Reformation and the colonial wars over religion (in which many Irish fought in as mercenaries for France and Spain) also bore heavily on the issue of religion in Ireland during and following the Nine Years' War. The Continental wars promoted unity among different groups who were traditionally indifferent or even opposed to each other. While contemporary English observers assumed Catholicism was merely the 'Clove of Ambition', and many historians have rather anachronistically assumed the same, upon closer examination it appears that Catholicism was a rallying point for resistance to English colonialism in Ireland. Indeed, some of those who cast in their lot with the Irish rebels on the grounds of their common religion had little to gain and everything to lose by doing so.

Captain Hugh (Hugo) Mostian, born to an English father and an Irish mother, was the Queen's governor of Athenry, fighting on the English side of the war for two years. In 1597, 'Considering that the war in Ireland was justified, [and] that it was approved by His Holiness...he left his governorship and the salary which he received from the Queen, and also his lands and possessions, in order to defend the holy Catholic faith'.⁷⁶ Here we see religion directly opposed to ambition, with the former taking precedence. After the end of the war, Mostian accepted a far less prestigious and lucrative position in the Spanish army.

⁷⁵ See note 71 above, xlv-xlv.

⁷⁶ Memorial of Captain Hugo Mostian to Felipe III, 12 August 1606; Kerney Walsh, 13-14.

Even more striking is the example of Captain James (Jacobo) Blount, Lord Mountjoy's brother. Blount accompanied Mountjoy during all of his expeditions in Ireland, as a member the Lord Deputy's personal entourage. Though openly a Catholic, James Blount enjoyed the trust of his brother and the Queen. However, following the war, he acknowledged having 'constantly given information to the Catholic earls O'Neill and O'Donnell regarding all the enemy plans and movements'. Blount sought refuge in Spain and spent the rest of his life in service of the Catholic cause.⁷⁷

While the alliance between Gaelic-Irish and Anglo-Irish Catholics near the beginning of the seventeenth century was in a sense one of necessity, it should not be written off as purely strategic. In 1607, the poet Tadhg Dall O'hUiginn legitimized the Anglo-Norman presence in Ireland by declaring

*Ar neach do shliocht Gaoidhil Ghlais
Na ceil gach iul da n-uarais,
Na ar Sheanghallaibh foid na bhFionn,
Ler cheanlamair oig Eirionn.*

*Conceal from the race of Gaoidheal Glas no
Knowledge that you have found, nor from the
Anglo-Normans of the land of the Fair, with
Whom we, the warriors of Ireland, have united.*⁷⁸

The sentiment of unity and continued resistance in this verse draws upon that of an earlier work by Eoghan O' Dubhthaigh, in which the Virgin Mary appears before officials of Dublin Castle, only to be beaten and insulted. The poet goes on to accuse the Government and the Anglican clergy of bringing misfortune on Ireland, declaring 'Dar

⁷⁷ Memorial of Captain Jacobo Blount to Felipe III, 2 December 1606; Kerney Walsh, Document 32.

⁷⁸ Caball, 101.

by God, ni rachaidh leo’ (by heaven, they shall not get away with it).⁷⁹ The doctrine of the counter-reformation was diligently at work in Ireland long before the Tridentine reforms were visible there.

Thus, in desperate pleas to the King of Spain during their decade of exile, Hugh O’Neill and Rauri O’Donnell⁸⁰ requested help in defending ‘the faith that the Catholics of Ireland had professed and upheld for thirteen hundred years’. Assuring the Spanish Monarch that the English would continue to ‘commit again the same excesses and atrocities’ they had in the past, Ireland’s most powerful men (even in exile) were prepared to offer their country, a country of Catholics, to a Catholic ruler.⁸¹

IX. Fubun fan gcuirt gan Bhearla **The Language of the Poets**

One of the greatest obstacles in writing the history a ‘conquered’ people is that most surviving descriptions of their world are written in the hand of the conqueror. Considering less than one hundred Irish-language manuscripts from the sixteenth century survive, Gaelic Ireland is not a radical exception to this rule. However, the Fileadha (bardic poets) of the Tudor and Stuart Period present the modern scholar with a fascinating perspective on the cultural continuity and emergent Catholic and anti-colonial identity in early modern Ireland.⁸²

The poets of the early Tudor Period were aware of the threat Henry VIII’s government posed to their patrons’ sovereignty. In the following verse, the Poet seems

⁷⁹ Ibid., 78.

⁸⁰ Rauri O’Donnell assumed the title of ‘the O’Donnell’ after Hugh Roe’s death in 1602.

⁸¹ O’Neill and Rauri O’Donnell to Felipe III, 9 July 1608; Kerney Walsh, Document 69.

⁸² Caball, intro..

also to have identified a threat to Ireland's traditional culture implicit in English Colonialism:

*Fubun fan ngunna ngallghlas,
Fubun fan slabhra mbuidhe,
Fubun fan gcuirt gan Bhearla
Fubun seana Mheic Mhruire.*

*Shame on the grey foreign gun, shame on
The golden chain, shame on the court without
The language of the poets
Shameful is the denial of Mary's son.*⁸³

The 'golden chain' is clearly a reference to Con Bachach O'Neill's submission to Henry in 1541, and to English materialism and greed which many poets feared was contagious. In condemning the 'court without the language of the poet', the author of this verse expresses his distaste for the new English 'common law', and its supplanting of Brehon law in some areas. Finally, in cursing 'the denial of Mary's son', the poet registers his contempt for the 'heretical' new religion.

A poet's contempt was not something to be taken lightly in Gaelic Ireland. Describing his importance in Irish society, Kenneth Nicholls asserts that the file (poet) was 'a sacred personage, almost a priest or a magician'.⁸⁴ Indeed, the poet was a high ranking member of any lord's court, and though in the lord's pay, had no responsibility towards him. If he became displeased with his treatment, the poet was free to leave, or to write a satire about his unworthy patron. Even the most powerful of lords feared the latter, as a sharp satire could greatly reduce his standing among peers and ultimately threaten his power. Poets, as well as biographers and historians, naturally gravitated towards the most generous lords, and their works were written in praise of their patrons. With this in

⁸³ Ibid., 41.

⁸⁴ Nicholls, 89.

mind, the change that Irish bardic poetry underwent during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is all the more remarkable and important.

In examining poems from the late Elizabethan era, we notice what Marc Caball terms a ‘bardic reevaluation of political and social perceptions’ relating to the ‘cumulative trauma of Gaelic engagement with the Elizabethans’.⁸⁵ While by this point a major military conflict was inevitable, the Irish considered an English victory in that conflict unlikely. The bardic poets conceived of Ireland as a singular entity for the first time during this period, and viewed the Irish collectively as dominating, rather than being dominated by, the ‘foreigners’ in their midst. In an anonymous verse from 1589, the poet asserts that through the kindness of chiefs like Cu Connacht Maguire, the English are no longer treated as ‘foreigners’, nor ‘seen weak through the land of Ireland’.⁸⁶ It is not surprising that this confidence in Irish superiority translated into a general call to arms in the poetry of the war years.

Rather than reserving their praise for the exploits of powerful magnates like O’Neill and O’Donnell, the poets celebrated all Irish victories during the Nine Years’ War. Upon hearing of Feagh O’Byrne’s successful raid in Leinster, a Connacht poet styled O’Byrne, a rather obscure and insignificant figure, as ‘a moon rising in the east who will come to the lead of a beleaguered Ireland’.⁸⁷ With the progression of the war, the poetry grew more broad and insistent in its call to arms, and more romantic in its imagery. The following verse, written by Aonghus O’Dalaigh around 1600, illustrates this departure quite clearly:

⁸⁵ Caball, 38-39.

⁸⁶ Ibid..

⁸⁷ Ibid., 52.

*Dentar libh coingletic calma,
A bhuidhion armaghlan fhaoitioch,
Fa cheann bhar bhfearuinn duthchais,
Puirt urghoirt innsi Gaoidhiol.*

*Let you joyful and bright weaponed company,
Struggle bravely for your native land,
Homesteads of the fair field of the
Island of the Gaoidhil.*

Here we are presented with the image of fighting men as heroes ‘dying for Ireland’. John O’Neill’s canto ‘Hugh O’Neill, The Prince of Ulster’, written in the midst of the nineteenth century Fenian movement, bears a striking resemblance to O’Dalaigh’s in this sense. Considering the legacy of both the Great Lord and the common kern, O’Neill writes:

*Round thy visage, through the gloom of years
Unclouded hopes have never ceased to glow;
And oft hast though feeble grown in tears,
Baffled at Freedom’s call thine ancient foe.*⁸⁸

O’Neill’s poem displays a strong English influence in its rhythm and diction, as well as a fatalism that belongs to the modern Irish identity. More significantly, it also expresses a sense of continuity regarding the struggle inaugurated in O’Dalaigh’s era.

The Fileadha of the late sixteenth century often spoke of Ireland’s resistance to England and Anglicanism in ethnic terms. However, the work of Geoffrey Keating, known to the Irish as Seithrun Ceitin, suggests that O’Dalaigh’s ‘bright weaponed company’ included Catholics of Anglo-Norman blood. An ethnically English Catholic priest with a doctorate in divinity, Keating appropriated the Irish language and Irish history as his own. Written in the wake of the Nine Years’ War, Keating’s ‘Om sceol a ardmhagh Fail’ (At the News from Fal’s High Plain) contains both a cohesive sense of

⁸⁸ O’Neill, III, 1-4.

Irish identity and traces of the fatalism that would grow under further English subjugation.

Its final verse reads:

*Muna bhfoiridh ceard na n-ardreann pobal chrich Chuirc
Ar fhoirneart namahad ndana n-ullamh ndioltach
Ni mor narbh fhearr gan chaired a bhfoscaindiolaim
's a seoladh slan I bhfan tar tonnaibh Chliona.*

*If the Craftsman of the Stars protect not Ireland's people
from violent and vengeful enemies, bold and ready,
better gather and winnow them now without delay
and sail them out wandering safe over the waves of Cliona.⁸⁹*

X. *Mercie and favour* Ireland After 1603

Following the treaty of Mellifont (30 March 1603), Sir John Davies wrote that 'the submission of O'Neill seemed to be the last step in the subjugation of the native race, and his example was speedily and generally followed'. Thus, Davies believed that 'the whole island from sea to sea' was 'brought into his highness's peaceable possession.'⁹⁰ This was, of course, entirely untrue. In a document known as the 'Act of Oblivion', King James VI of Scotland (now James I of England), pardoned the leaders of the rebellion; provided they abandon 'adherence to all foreign Princes' and accept terms similar to Henry VIII's surrender and regrant.⁹¹ Davies and many other ambitious Englishmen were disappointed with the King's lenience, but they would soon have their day.

⁸⁹ Thomas Kinsella and Sean O Tuama eds. and trans.. *An Duanaire; Poems of the Dispossessed*, 1600-1900 (Dublin: Foras na Gaeilge, 1981), 83-87; 'Cliona' refers to the Atlantic Ocean.

⁹⁰ Sir John Davies, *Discovery of the true causes why Ireland was never entirely subdued...Until His Majesty's happy Reign* (London, 1612), 286.

⁹¹ King James I, *Although the Offenses Committed...*, 8 June 1601, National Library of Ireland, L.O. Folder 1/ 1. Microfilm P8376.

An uneasy peace settled over ravaged Ireland following the Nine Years' War. Many of the Irish Lords (including Rauri O'Donnell), now forced to adopt English dress and custom, fell deep into debt and struggled to adapt to their new position. Others, like Hugh O'Neill, were under constant suspicion and surveillance from a Dublin Government eager to levy accusations of further treason and confiscate their lands. It was in this climate of distrust and tension that O'Neill, O'Donnell, and several others set sail from Lough Swilly in September 1607, never to return to Ireland.⁹² In the Ulster lords' absence their lands were held forfeit and planted with English and Scotch settlers. Yet the specter of another Rebellion and possibly a Spanish invasion led by O'Neill loomed large, discouraging many would-be settlers. In fact, another rebellion did occur, though from an unlikely source.

Sir Cahir O'Doherty, known to his neighbors as 'the Queen's O'Doherty' for his loyal service in the Nine Years' War, entered into rebellion in 1609. In a siege of Derry, O'Doherty's foster brother killed the newly appointed lord president of Ulster, Sir George Paulet. During the same siege, O'Doherty's forces attacked the Protestant Bishop's house and set fire to his library, 'perhaps imagining that the books were as obnoxious as their owner'. In destroying them, they believed they had 'struck a blow at a hated heresy'.⁹³ The bardic poets could not have hoped to invent an act of greater symbolism.

Despite widespread and unexpected support for such an unpopular figure as 'the Queen's O'Doherty', his rebellion was put down rather quickly. Spanish aid never

⁹² For more information on the 'Flight of the Earls', a pivotal event in Irish history, see John McCavitt, *The Flight of the Earls* (Dublin: MacMillan and Gill, 2002).

⁹³ Richard Cuninghame, *The Broken Sword of Ulster; A Brief Relation of the Events of One of the Most Stirring and Momentous Eras in the Annals of Ireland* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, & Co., 1904), 177-182.

arrived, though O'Neill and others continually pleaded to Felipe III that Ireland's loss could be reversed 'with the greatest of ease'.⁹⁴ In the following decades, the Ulster Plantation did prosper and it seemed that Ireland had finally been subdued. All the while, resentment grew and the identity forged in the fires of the Elizabethan wars solidified until first Ulster, and then all of Ireland exploded into popular rebellion in October of 1641. England spent a decade suppressing this rebellion, which eventually took the form of a 'Catholic Confederation' with Papal support.

Conclusion

In hindsight, we may say that another Rebellion was inevitable. We may also say that although the worst atrocities of the Elizabethans were repeated and even surpassed by the Cromwellians in the seventeenth century, England's conquest of Ireland was *still* incomplete, and would always remain so. While the use of 'fire and sword' ensured military victory, it also ensured that future generations of Irish would look upon English rule with bitterness.

By the end of his life, Hugh O'Neill was convinced that 'under no circumstances do they (the English) wish to see the advancement of our country, and we know this with certitude through long experience.'⁹⁵ As their dispossession continued, increasing numbers of Anglo Irish Catholics who had once considered *themselves* English began to see Ireland as 'their country', adopting its 'long experience' as their own and harboring as deep a resentment toward England as the 'native' Irish.

⁹⁴ O'Neill to Felipe III, 13 September 1608; Kerney Walsh, Document 78.

⁹⁵ Ibid..

On 25 Mach 1603, Lord Mountjoy wrote to London, informing the Master Secretary of O'Neill's surrender. Notwithstanding the victory in his hands, Mountjoy was ill at ease. Regardless of the rebels' submission, he saw in Ireland a lingering tension, a rebellious spirit that was 'ready to swell or to infect the whole body of this Kingdom' at any moment.⁹⁶ Though he was one of the most aware and intelligent men of his day, Mountjoy did not, or could not identify the source of this tension. Only centuries later is it apparent; Ireland conceived of itself as a unified nation at the moment it was almost completely subjugated.

⁹⁶ Lord Deputy Mountjoy (Charles Blount) to the Master Secretary in England, 25 March 1603; Moryson, *History* vol. II, 294; On that same day, James VI of Scotland was made James I, King of England, Scotland and Ireland.

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Calendar of State Papers, Henry VIII, Ireland, II.

Calendar of the Patent and Close Rolls of Chancery in Ireland from the 18th to the 45th of Queen Elizabeth.

Calendar of State Papers Relating to Ireland, of the Reign of James I. 1606-1608.

Cunninghame, Richard. *The Broken Sword of Ulster; A Brief Relation of the Events of One of the Most Stirring and Momentous Eras in the Annals of Ireland.* Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, &Co., 1904.

Davies, Sir John. *Discovery of the true causes why Ireland was never entirely subdued...Until His Majesty's happy Reign.* London, 1612.

Freeman, Martin, editor. *The Compossicion Booke of Conought.* Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Office, 1936.

Kinsella, Thomas and O Tuama, Sean eds. and trans.. *An Duanaire; Poems of the Dispossessed, 1600-1900.* Dublin: Foras na Gaeilge, 1981.

Moryson, Fynes. *The Irish Sections of Fynes Moryson's Itinerary.* ed. Kew, Graham. Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commision, 1998.

---. *An History of Ireland, From the Year 1599, to 1603. With a short Narration of the Kingdom from the Year 1169. To which is added A Description of Ireland,* 2 vols. Dublin: Angel and Bible, 1735

O Cianain, Tadhg. *The Flight of the Earls.* ed. and trans. by Rev. Walsh, Paul. Maynooth: St. Patrick's College Record Society, 1916.

O'Clereigh, Lughdaidh. *Beatha Aodha Ruadh Ui Domhnaill; The Life of Hugh Roe O'Donnell, Prince of Tirconnell (1586-1602)*, ed. and trans. by Rev. Murphy, Denis. Dublin: Sealy, Bryers, & Walker, 1893.

O'Donovan, John, editor. *The Four Masters: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland from the Earliest Period to the Year 1616*, volumes 4 & 5. Dublin: Hodges, Smith, and Co., 1856.

Spenser, Edmund. *A View of the State of Ireland*. eds. Hadfield, Andrew and Maley, Willy. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997.

Stuart, James VI. *Although the Offenses Committed...*, 8 June 1601, National Library of Ireland, L.O. Folder 1/ 1. Microfilm P8376.

Secondary Sources:

Brady, Ciaran. "The Attainder of Shane O'Neill, Sir Henry Sidney, and the Problems of Tudor State Building in Ireland". In *British Interventions in Early Modern Ireland*, edited by Brady, Ciaran and Ohlmeyer, Jan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Canny, Nicholas. *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: A Pattern Established 1565-76*, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1976.

---. 'The Formation of the Old English Elite in Ireland', *O'Donnell Lecture, delivered at University College, Galway, 6 September, 1974*. Dublin: 1975.

---. *Making Ireland British 1580-1660*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Cruikshank, C.G.. *Elizabeth's Army*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970.

Duffy, Patrick J., Edwards, David and FitzPatrick, Elizabeth. *Gaelic Ireland; c.1250-c.1650*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001.

Holmes, Robert Esq.. *The Case of Ireland Stated*. Dublin: James McGlashan, 1847.

- Lennon, Colm. *Sixteenth Century Ireland: The Incomplete Conquest*. Dublin: Gill & MacMillan Ltd, 1994.
- McCarthy-Morrogh, Michael. *The Munster Plantation: English Migration to Southern Ireland 1583-1641*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986.
- McCavitt, John. *The Flight of the Earls* (Dublin: MacMillan and Gill, 2002).
- McGurk, John. *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland; The 1590's Crisis*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997.
- Mitchel, John. *The Life and Times of Aodh O'Neill, Prince of Ulster; Called by the English, Hugh, Earl of Tyrone. With some Account of his Predecessors, Con, Shane, and Tirlough*. Dublin: James Duffy, 1845.
- Morgan, Hiram. *Tyrone's Rebellion: The Outbreak of the Nine Years War in Tudor T.W. Ireland*. Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society, 1993.
- Moody, T.W. and Martin, F.X. eds.. *The Course of Irish History*. Dublin: Mercier Press, 2001.
- Nichols, Kenneth. *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1972.
- O'Faolin, Sean. *The Great O'Neill; A Biography of Hugh O'Neill Earl of Tyrone, 1550-1616*. Cork: Mercier Press, 1997.
- Walsh, Micheline Kerney. *Destruction by Peace; Hugh O'Neill After Kinsale*. Monaghan: R. & S. Printers, 1986.
- Wernham, R.B.. *The Return of the Armadas; The Last Years of the Elizabethan War Against Spain 1595-1603*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

The Ulster Plantation



bbc.co.uk/history/war/plantation/settlement/index.shtm

Aodh Ui Neill c. 1607



bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/empire/episodes/episode_03.shtml

The Act of Oblivion

By The King

Although the Offenses committed against the Queene our sister deceased, and the honour of her estate by the Earle of Tyrone, were such as all Princes ought to be very sensible of, and not by the impunitie of offenders in so high a nature, give way to others to attempt the like: Yet because we have understood that before the death of the Queene, the said Earle having expressed and made known to her, many tokens of an unfained repentance, had so farre moved her therewith, as she had given power to the L. Mountjoy her Deputie, and now our Lieutenant of that Kingdom, to receive him to mercie if he would seeke it, which her purpose, we cannot but commend, as being derived from the virtue of Clemencie, of no lesse ornament to Princely dignitie than is the rigor of Justice: And for that the said Earle hath not onely done no offence against us since our coming to this Crowne, but also, as we certainly informed by our Lieutenant, hath both abandoned his adherence to all foreign Princes, and offered himself in his owne person to doe service upon any other Rebels within that Realme of Ireland; Wee could not thinke him worthy of less favour at Our handes, then he had obtained at hers, against whom his faults wre committed. And therefore he being now admitted by our said Lieutenant, by virtue of the power first given by the Queene, and since confirmed by Us, into his State and condition of a good Subject, and in the rancke and dignitie of an Earle, And being also come over to this Realme to cast himselfe at our feete, and to testify by his owne wordes, his unfained sorrow of his former Offences, and earnest desire of our Mercie and favour : Wee have thought good to signifie to all men by these presents, that we haice received him into Grace and favour, and do acknowledge him our Subject, and a Noble man of such rancke and place as in that our Realme of Ireland hee is: And that therefore if any man shall by his wordes, or deed, abuse the sais Earle of Tyrone, or misbehave himself towards him, and not yield him such respect and usage, as belongeth to a person received into our favour and good opinion, wee shall esteeme it an Offence, deserving such punishment, as the contempt so expressely signified doeth deserve.

Given at our Manour of Greenwich the eighth day of June, in the first yeere of our Reigne.

God Save the King.

-National Library of Ireland, L.O. Folder 1/ 1. Microfilm P8376.