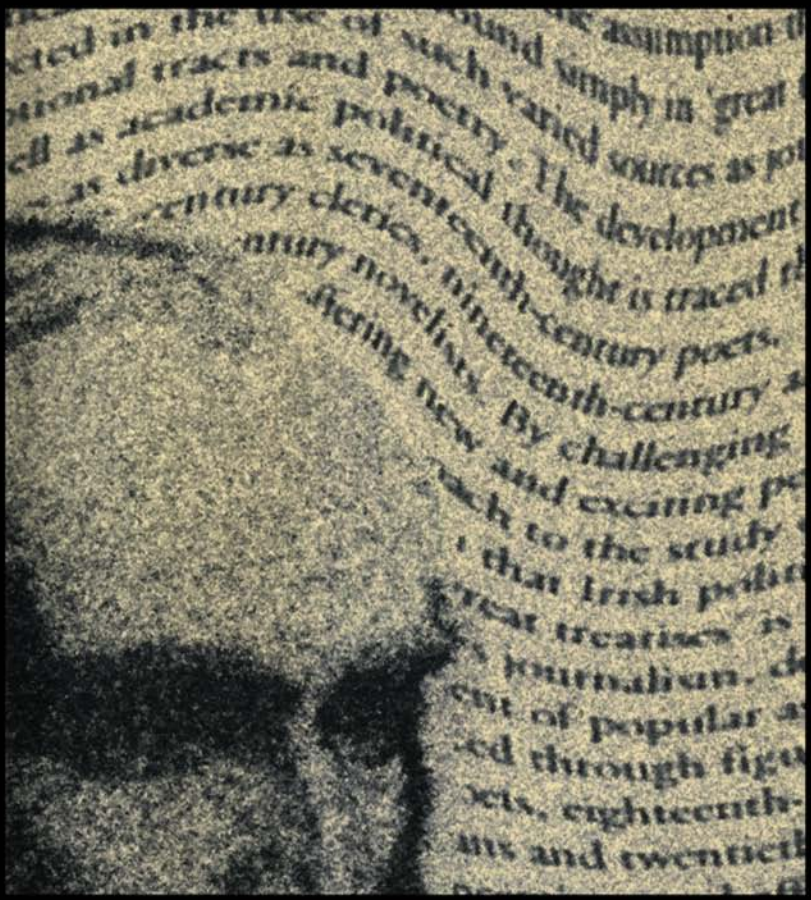
Political Thought in IRELAND

since the seventeenth century



edited by

D. George Boyce, Robert Eccleshall and Vincent Geoghegan

ROUTLEDGE

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Notes on contributors

D. George Boyce, who took his BA and Ph.D. at the Queen's University of Belfast, holds a personal chair in Politics at University College, Swansea. Among his recent publications are *The Irish Question and British Politics 1868–1986* (1989), *Nineteenth Century Ireland, the Search for Stability* (1990), and *Nationalism in Ireland* (rev. edn, 1991).

Robert Eccleshall, who received his BA and Ph.D. from Hull University, is Professor and Head of the Department of Politics at the Queen's University of Belfast. His recent publications include *British Liberalism* (1986) and *English Conservatism since the Restoration* (1990).

Richard English, who was educated at Keble College, Oxford and the University of Keele, lectures in Politics at the Queen's University of Belfast. He is author of *History of Ireland* (1991) and co-editor with Cormac O'Malley of *Prisoners: The Civil War Letters of Ernie O'Malley* (1991). His Ph.D. thesis is to be published by Oxford University Press as *Radicals and the Republic: Socialist Republicanism in the Irish Free State, 1925–37.*

Vincent Geoghegan, Reader in Politics at the Queen's University of Belfast, received his BA and Ph.D. from Newcastle University. He is author of *Reason and Eros: The Social Theory of Herbert Marcuse* (1981) and of *Utopianism and Marxism* (1987), and has recently written articles on Golden Ages, the Irish Owenite Community at Ralahine, and the Irish Jacobite, James MacGeoghegan.

Ian McBride is a graduate of Jesus College, Oxford and University College, London, where his doctoral thesis was on Ulster Presbyterianism in the late eighteenth century. In 1992 he was elected to a research fellowship at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London.

Breandán Ó Buachalla, a Member of the Royal Irish Academy, took his MA and Ph.D. at University College, Cork. Formerly a lecturer in Celtic at the Queen's University of Belfast, he is now Professor of Modern Irish Language and Literature at University College, Dublin. His publications

include *I mBéal Feirste Cois Cuain* (1968), *Peadar Ó Doirnín: amhráin* (1969), *Nua-Dhuanaire II* (1975) and *Cathal Buí: amhráin* (1976)

Margaret O'Callaghan, who lectures in Politics at the Queen's University of Belfast, was educated at University College, Dublin and St John's College, Cambridge. Formerly a Fellow of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge and university lecturer in Modern British History, she is preparing her doctoral thesis, *Crime, Nationality and the Law: The Politics of Land in Late Victorian Ireland*, for publication.

Jennifer Todd, who received a BA from the University of Kent at Canterbury and a Ph.D. from Boston University, is a lecturer in Politics at University College, Dublin. She has written articles on aesthetics and politics as well as the Northern Ireland conflict. She is completing a book on the Northern Ireland conflict and preparing another on political ideologies in Northern Ireland.

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Introduction

The history of political ideas in Ireland is largely unwritten. A fairly standard canon of 'major figures' has emerged, including Jonathan Swift, Henry Grattan, Edmund Burke, Thomas Davis and Arthur Griffith. But these all too often set the boundaries of such attention as the subject receives. 'Lesser mortals' are usually ignored; and some political traditions, conservatism for example, are regarded as either of no great importance as a subject for analysis, or as (in the case of socialism, at any rate before James Connolly) marginal to the political development of Ireland.

One reason is that Irish historiography has been little affected by recent methodological developments in intellectual history. From the perspective of the classic texts approach – the search for the Irish *Leviathan* which, once found, is to be carefully dissected in the hope of discovering the essence of the human condition – Ireland, along with many other societies, has comparatively little to offer the historian. During the last two decades, however, there has been a move away from regarding political texts as embodiments of eternal truths to a more contextual approach: one in which political theory is regarded not as the rarefied speculation of isolated individuals, but as a social activity conducted by numerous people using a variety of linguistic conventions. The effect has been dramatically to extend the canon of works to which attention can be legitimately devoted. In Ireland political thought is to be found in myth, law, literature, theology, folklore, in ballads, newspapers, parliamentary debates, pamphlets and sermons, as well as in the conventional texts. Furthermore, Ireland's political thinkers have displayed great heterogeneity, encompassing, for example, seventeenth-century bishops and poets; professors and conspirators in the eighteenth century; improving landlords, urban artisans, journalists in the last century; and politicians and *literati* in this. Yet Irish historiography has remained largely unaware of the rich pickings offered by a more contextual approach to political ideas.

Instead, emphasis is still placed upon men or women of action. Attention focuses on the origins and development of political movements; on

struggles for power, rather narrowly conceived; on the doings of government, especially British government; on the administrative process; and on political violence and its consequences. All of these are of course of great importance, but Irish history – more charged than that of most countries with the ferment and clash of ideas – is then seen as a struggle to seize or for that matter retain power. And so the search is made for those who organized, brought pressure to bear on government, and established themselves in the place of British administration.

Yet the study of power-seeking cannot be separated from the study of ideas. And not only of the ideas of those who followed the great banners of unionism and nationalism – important though these are – but of those who sought ways of justifying what they were doing, even if they failed in the end to do it; and of influencing others, even if in the end they failed to achieve this purpose. Peripheral individuals, failures, even what in retrospect look like eccentrics, all are the stuff of the historian of political thought.

An exploration of the thinking of these latter figures exposes a common assumption about political ideas in Ireland: that they are all too frequently written about, and are all too easily understood. Caricature is an ever-present danger. Protestants are unionists, or at least crypto-unionists, and have always been so. Roman Catholics have been nationalists without qualification, and always will be. Seventeenth-century Catholics were separatists in the making; eighteenth-century Protestants were all 'Colonial Nationalists'. An investigation of Irish political ideas reveals their complexity and their constant ability to surprise. Moreover, when the dominant ideologies are examined more closely, they show a tendency to defy easy categorization. Unionism cannot be reduced to a simple basis of fundamentalist religious belief, nor to a bourgeois ideology aimed at saving unionist businessmen from the consequences of class conflict. Nationalism cannot be simplified into ultramontane Catholicism, nor into Ireland's version of nineteenth-century liberalism. Ideologies varied according to time, circumstance and place: the view from nationalist Dublin was not the same as the outlook from nationalist Skibbereen; unionist North Down did not necessarily share the same outlook as unionist Dungannon.

Irish political ideas were shaped by the circumstances of Ireland's geography, history and society. That is obvious and applies to the making of any country's political traditions. But Ireland is an island behind another island, separated by a few sea miles from Great Britain. And this proximity and distance help explain both the similarities and the remarkable differences between the political ideas of the two places. Ideas which took their root in England, or in continental Europe, found their way to Ireland quickly enough. Issues of political obligation, a state church, legitimacy of the sovereign or of the state, democratic reform,

social equality, political sovereignty, personal liberty, all were debated as hotly in Ireland as elsewhere in the British Isles.

But Irish history and society invited a different response. Ireland never discovered the settled constitution that her neighbour evolved after the revolution of 1688. There was a fundamental difficulty in translating the benefits of revolution – a balanced constitution, religious toleration, a religious establishment, personal and political freedoms within the law – into a country whose history was marked by the growing realization of the fact that one party's hope must encompass another party's despair. This of course applied, though to a lesser degree, across the water, but the difference was that England sustained a very different social structure. Her Anglican establishment was more numerous, more secure than its opponents, whether Roman Catholic or Dissenter. Ireland's political and religious establishment had to remember that its fight for life was only narrowly won; Catholic and Dissenter might try another contest. Moreover, the events of 1688–90 reinforced Protestants in their belief that Irish Roman Catholics were a threat, not only to the Anglican ascendancy, but to the whole stability of the two kingdoms of England and Ireland. Irish Jacobitism held that the Catholic nation might yet be restored to power and prosperity. England might, over time, forget this – at least until the 1715 and 1745 risings in Scotland reminded them that such threats could indeed occur again, albeit from a different quarter. Protestant Ireland could not forget its narrow escape. And relations between Catholic, Anglican and Dissenter were characterized by divisions deeper and more dangerous than those across the water.

This sense of danger was not allayed by the events which immediately preceded the Act of Union of 1800, and the union itself. Radicalism in England might threaten the monopoly power of the political establishment. In Ireland radicalism might, indeed almost certainly would, necessitate a renegotiation of the whole question of who constituted the 'Irish people' in the first place. Moreover, this constitutional change revealed another aspect of the different contexts in which British and Irish political thinkers worked. The question of the state involved matters to do with getting or losing power, and of winning or failing to win the attention and support of a government under which Irishmen and Irishwomen lived, but over whose conduct they had only a very imperfect influence. How could the state be manipulated? How could it be opposed? How could it be transformed into an Irish state? How could such a transformation be frustrated? What if it were removed; what would replace it if it were removed? Irish political ideas were deeply influenced by the peculiar institution of the Union Parliament, in which Irish members sat, but whose government they could never constitute, and hardly ever substantially modify.

This produced an anxiety which at times came near to desperation in Irish political thinking. If the purpose of political writing is to persuade

– and it is hard to see why else it was ever written – then the task confronting the Irish theorist was a formidable one. Irish thinkers had not only to persuade their own constituency (and perhaps, if possible, other Irish constituencies); they had also to respond to their powerlessness in the British state, and seek to catch and hold the attention of a busy and often oblivious British public. This resulted in a kind of schizophrenia, as Irish political thinkers used words, terms, concepts that were in common use in England – obligation, public opinion, democracy, establishment – but which in Ireland carried a very different meaning because of the intense suspicion and tensions which existed in a country where the numerical majority did not, until 1921, constitute the political nation.

Irish thinkers also engaged in a debate aimed at creating new relations between these groups of people, and establishing new social and political constructs. The divided nature of Irish society and the alarming prospect, which reared its head from time to time, of outright sectarian war, pushed thinkers into seeking alternative ways of creating political consensus in Ireland. Indeed, the search for consensus is as significant a part of the Irish political tradition as the quest for differences. Some socialists, for example, sought to create a nation out of the various classes in Ireland, and to reconcile them to each other. Then there was the search for national unity: this might be found, as in the late eighteenth century, through political radicalism, with its strong Protestant overtones and its affinity with the European Enlightenment. Or it might be sought through the creation of an elite-led public opinion, anti-democratic in tone, but seeking to give Ireland the kind of political leadership that only her educated Protestant middle classes and gentry could supply. The working man might be integrated into a political movement, which would smash the Protestant and Catholic middle classes. Tenant farmer might combine against landlord, irrespective of religion. Or perhaps a Jacobin state might be created in twentieth-century Ireland, if only republican socialism could get it right. Or a cultural revival might be inaugurated which would eventually encompass all Irish people, encouraging them to seek common ground in their great historical and literary traditions. All might be possible; all might not. Yet the thinkers who explored these possibilities have a right to our attention, even in failure.

Irish historians could not avoid interrogating the past, or versions of it. Ireland was a country where conquest created a deep and lasting tension, sometimes dormant but never far from the public mind. The ruling Anglican elite of the eighteenth century had to repudiate the accusation that they had in some sense disrupted the continuity of Irish history. They responded by claiming that they had brought a barbarous society to civility as well as restoring the apostolic purity of the Celtic Church. But the ideal of a Celtic past would be put to other uses. The Romantic movement exerted a deep and lasting influence on Ireland, emphasizing as it did cultures and traditions that were supposedly auth-

entic in a way that modern, especially Anglo-Saxon, civilization was not. The past might be recalled to help shape the future. Ireland could be re-made, and some, like Douglas Hyde, even hoped that the new Celtic nation could be interpreted in such a way as to give Irish Protestants their due place: for, after all, had not the Celts inhabited Ireland long before the Roman Church won the battle for religious and cultural hegemony throughout the British Isles? History was a political weapon throughout Europe in the nineteenth century, but there can have been few places where it was deployed more persistently than Ireland: indeed, the prefix 're' is one of the most potent in the Irish political vocabulary.

Another peculiar characteristic of Irish political thinking is that issues had to be addressed in what was almost a laboratory atmosphere. Ireland lacked a settled society, a deep-rooted constitution, and a defined culture. It seemed, indeed, that Ireland could be re-made, the political system changed radically, and society recast in new moulds or in ones that could reverse the verdict of some previous historical contest such as the Battle of the Boyne or – since 'recent' had a different meaning in the Irish context – the Plantation. To make mistakes, to lose an argument, to fail to establish a point, all might have profound and immediate political consequences in Ireland. Isaac Butt, when debating with Daniel O'Connell in 1843 the advantages or otherwise of Repeal of the Union, was not merely seeking to win his case; he was endeavouring to save his people from the weight of Irish Roman Catholic populism and the end of Protestantism as a religious, political and social force in Ireland. In the background of Irish political ideas lurked a fear that the country might slip back – and quickly – into a state of nature, with political institutions toppled and the rival populations at each other's throats. The history of seventeenth-century Ireland proved as much. This gave an urgency to Irish political thought: there was always the suspicion that contingency plans were needed, that in the end each side must look to its own survival.

The result was that Ireland asked searching questions about the issues that engage the attention of political thinkers. Concepts such as 'civility' as against 'barbarism', nationhood as against sectionalism, radicalism as against conservatism, socialism as against all other 'isms', gathered a cutting edge in the world of Irish politics. In Ireland the role of political thinkers was as important as it could be, even when their ideas were swept aside. Debates about power, sovereignty, political obligation, freedom, the use of force, were not matters of abstraction: they shaped the behaviour of ordinary people, justified what they did, helped them to win, or lose, in a political world where winning and losing could bring with them the most dire consequences.

The following chapters do not constitute a comprehensive history of Irish political thought. Instead, they explore some features of a largely untrodden intellectual terrain. The hope is that these pioneering essays

will show that there has long been a vigorous tradition of political thinking in Ireland, even if until now ignored by academic students of political ideas.

1 James our true king

The ideology of Irish royalism in the seventeenth century

Breandán Ó Buachalla

I

The notion of change pervades seventeenth-century Irish literature. From the opening decade of the century to the last, even a superficial reading of the literature – particularly of the poetry – reveals common themes enunciating again and again that Ireland had changed, that old ways were being forsaken, that new fashions and new classes were in the ascendant, that Ireland was under attack, in danger of being submerged, her future uncertain. It was such common sentiments which led and which still lead modern scholars to interpret the cataclysm of the seventeenth century solely in terms of despair and terminal decay. A typical illustration is the last chapter of Flower's *The Irish Tradition*, significantly entitled 'The end of the tradition':

> By the beginning of the seventeenth-century Ireland lay exhausted and panting and what seemed the final blow to all her hopes and to the old order of things under which the poets had flourished was dealt by the mysterious flight of the two Northern Earls, Tyrone and Tyrconnel in 1607, an event that led directly to the plantation of Ulster and as an inimitable result to the rising of 1641. . . . One of their poets has expressed all that this fateful moment meant for those to whom the old Irish order was the only way of life they had known and who were now to see that order crumbling into ruins about them.
>
> This night sees Ireland desolate
> Her chiefs are cast out of their estate
> Her men, her maidens weep to see
> Her desolate, that should peopled be.
>
> O'Donnell goes in that stern straight
> Sore stricken Ulster mourns her fate
> And all the Northern shore makes moan
> To hear that Aodh O Neill has gone.

Her chiefs are gone, there's none to hear,
To bear her cross or lift her from despair,
The grieving lords take ship
With these our very souls pass overseas.[1]

The fact that the poet to whom that elegiac poem is generally ascribed (Fear Flatha Ó Gnímh) received a royal pardon in 1602 and was subsequently patronized by Martha Stafford, daughter of Sir Francis Stafford, an English official in Ireland, and wife of Sir Henry O Neill,[2] suggests, at least, that the poem should not be taken as being totally representative of his *œuvre* as a whole nor of his attitude to contemporaneous affairs.

That the seventeenth century in Ireland was an era of unprecedented upheaval cannot be gainsaid. It was, undoubtedly, a watershed and for the hereditary learned classes in particular the beginning of the end of their priviliged position in Irish society, as the socio-economic system on which their status depended slowly gave way. The end of the bardic order should not be interpreted, however, as the demise of a culture, language or society. In socio-cultural terms that order represented but the tip of an iceberg which, ironically, revealed more and more of its variety and complexity over the next two centuries. As the professional hereditary class of literati gradually lost their privileged status in society and their control of literary tastes and canons they were replaced by other types hitherto unknown in Irish literary annals – the gentleman-poet, the priest-poet, the amateur poet, the prose writer – and by a new class of semi-professional literati who had to adapt their traditional training and attitudes to changing circumstances. New metres, new themes, new poetic surnames, new literary classes, new modes of writing – in prose and verse – emerge. As a consequence, the seventeenth century was also a major period of literary diversification and of reorganization: it must be placed with the twelfth and seventh centuries among the great periods of creativity and literary renewal. A paradigm of change alone will not suffice in dealing with the seventeenth century; the apposite framework is change within continuity – the central pattern of the Irish cultural tradition. There is, moreover, another perspective which cannot be ignored: the general European background. For Europe as a whole, the seventeenth century was also one of upheaval; of social, political and religious strife of such proportions to warrant the title 'the General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century' in the historiography. The origin of that crisis was not in essence political, although it had political implications, but intellectual, what Mousnier labelled 'an intellectual mutation', one which essentially redefined the relationship between people and the state.[3] Since religion underlay all political ideologies in Western Europe, it subsumed not only practice and belief but also matters of state. The application of the principle *cuius regio eius religio* not only determined the denominational/sectarian character of the emergent centralized mon-

archies and states but for many of Europe's peoples it inextricably intertwined religion with national consciousness. In England and Ireland, in particular, religious allegiance and national identity coalesced, Protestant and Catholic being perceived as synonymous with English and Irish respectively. There was a fundamental difference, of course. In England, Protestantism (the Anglican variety) enjoyed the privileges and status of a state-church whereas, in Ireland, Catholicism, the religion of the majority, was denied legal rights or official recognition. In rejecting the Reformation, the Irish found themselves in an anomalous and unique situation in Western Europe in that a Catholic majority was ruled by a Protestant sovereign. Therein lay the kernel of the politico-religious nature of Ireland's problem and the ultimate source of the major changes that ensued. Of all the changes evidenced for seventeenth-century Ireland one of the most far-reaching and most significant was an ideological shift among the learned classes, an intellectual mutation which necessitated the redefinition of an Irishman, the rewriting of Irish history, the reformulation of Irish distinctiveness; above all a rethinking of attitudes and policies towards the temporal authority. The immediate sources of this mutation were politico-religious in nature. One is the fact that by the end of the sixteenth century the Irish upper classes – the equivalent of the political nation in the English context – had irrevocably aligned themselves to the Church of Rome. The second is that after the battle of Kinsale and particularly after the Flight of the Earls the overriding attitude of those classes was one of accommodation of the new order. Central to that accommodation was the evolution of a *rapprochement* with the temporal authority as represented by the King.

The accession of James I to the Crown of the three kingdoms in 1603 was a source of hope and joy to the Catholics of the towns and boroughs of Ireland. His mother being a Catholic, it was assumed that he would be lenient and understanding, if not positively tolerant. In this expectant mood Catholic churches were reopened, Mass was celebrated openly, public religious processions organized and Protestants banished. In a letter to the King of Spain, O Neill and O Donnell gave their explanation of that hope: 'When the Queen died and this King, who was before King of Scotland, succeeded to her, the Irish hoped, on account of their old friendship with the Scots, that they would receive from the King many favours and, in particular, their liberty of conscience.'[4] The same optimistic hope underlies two poems in Irish written by two Ulster poets immediately on James's accession. In one of them, Eochaidh Ó hEodhasa, a poet from County Fermanagh, who as a 'deserving native' received 300 acres under the terms of Ulster plantation, contrasts the metamorphosis of Ovid to the changes for the better which James's accession has brought about. Although the poem's discourse is stilted and rather arcane, the message is obvious:

> Many a thing – need it be said – in the beginning changed to evil; much more propitious now is the fate that causes everything to turn for the better . . .
>
> The brilliant sun has lit up, King James is the dispersal of all mist; the mutual mourning of all, he has changed to glory; great the signs of change.
>
> More remarkable than that is the fact that we, the troubled people of Ireland, that each one of us has forgotten the tribulation of all anxieties . . .
>
> It is meet for us, though I say so, to bid farewell to our yoke of anxiety; the helping eye of our King supersedes the lasting force of our sorrow . . .
>
> May no reversal come soon again either from evil or from envious eye or from reversal of fortune; we have experienced every transformation.[5]

The second poem, by a Donegal poet (Eoghan Ruadh Mac an Bhaird), is much more concrete and less abstruse. He states clearly the hereditary basis of James's claim and invokes the twin validatory mechanisms of genealogy and prophecy to legitimize his unquestionable right to the crown of Ireland:

> Three crowns – 'tis fitting for him – shall be placed on James's head; the utterance of the books is no secret, every seer confirms it . . .
>
> That young Prince so high of mind, James Stewart, shall have Ireland's wondrous crown – an honour, I know, he well deserves . . .
>
> For three hundred years – lasting their effect – is it in the possession of the high-king's ancestors . . . Scotland of the smooth-earthed land was held by nine of his family before him; I will give you their names . . .
>
> O prince whose hand gives straight judgments – it will now be said – talk not of 'taking new territory'; thou hast already a right to red-sworded Ireland . . .
>
> The Saxons' land has been long – 'tis well known – prophesied for thee; so likewise is Ireland due to thee, thou are her spouse by all the signs . . .
>
> There is no high-king's blood, however noble – save that of the Virgin's son – that surpasses thine.[6]

The emphasis, in both poems, on James dispersing enmity and strife; on him, in the second poem, giving 'straight judgments' could, obviously, be applied to contemporary affairs but they also reflect traditional notions

of legitimate and righteous kingship. For Mac an Bhaird to address James as 'Ireland's spouse' was to bestow on him not only an honorific accolade but the ultimate seal of legitimacy; Ireland's spouse in traditional Irish ideology was synonymous with the rightful king who would bring peace, banish strife, and under whom, because of his rightfulness, Ireland would prosper and abound in beneficence.[7] Indeed it is in such millenarian terms that Ireland, under James I, is described in the social satire *Pairlement Chloinne Tomáis*: 'When King James ascended the throne, as a result of his goodness and graciousness, under him Ireland was filled with peace and prosperity for a long time and Clann Tomáis set about sending their children to school and to study for the priesthood.'[8] The adoption of James I by the Irish learned class and his absorption by them into the Irish scheme of things is reflected most vividly in the work of the genealogists. Overnight an impeccable genealogy was bestowed on him; as Mac an Bhaird declared, only the son of Mary had more noble blood than he. James's descent was, in fact, of particular interest to the literati and it constituted one of the causes of dissension in the 'Contention of the Bards', one faction claiming that James was descended from a Munster King, another that he was of Ulster origin.[9] They were not, in fact, conflicting claims as the official genealogy proved conclusively that on his mother's side James was descended from the Ulster King Fergus, the first Irish King of Scotland, whereas on his father's side he was descended from Corc, the fifth-century king of Munster. Moreover, it was subsequently shown that he was also related directly to the kings of Connaught and Leinster: an impeccable unquestionable genealogy.[10]

The accommodation by the learned class of James I and the facility by which an appropriate niche was found for him in the inherited Irish value-system is merely a working out in intellectual terms of a shift which had already been accomplished in the theological and religious spheres. The crucial development was the appointment of Peter Lombard as Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland in 1601 and the subsequent implementation of his policy of acceptance of the status quo.[11] Lombard believed that the cause of Catholicism in England and Ireland could best be advanced by accepting James as the lawful king. This was not merely a strategic ploy, it was a conscious decision based on a realistic assessment of recent politico-religious developments in Europe; it was moreover based on the new theological formula which had been developed and advanced by the Jesuit theologians, Bellarmine and Suarez. According to their teaching, as temporal and spiritual authority were to be clearly distinguished it was possible for a Catholic people to give allegiance at least *in temporalibus* to a 'heretical' Prince. Lombard, through his vicar Rothe, had this new policy adopted and approved by the clerical synods at Drogheda (1614), Kilkenny (1614), Armagh (1618), Cashel (1624). The official teaching as promulgated at those synods specified unequivocally that James was due, by his subjects, the loyalty due to Caesar.[12] That

was henceforth official Church policy in Ireland and it is well reflected in the catechismal and spiritual material now being provided in Irish by the agents of the Counter-Reformation. The general principle is laid down in the earliest catechisms translated into Irish:

> The fourth commandment: Honour thy father and thy mother. This is how one transgresses against this commandment . . . whoever does not remain obedient and respectful to his prelates and to his princes and to his temporal lords and to those who are in high office over him and those who do not yield to the laws and statutes of their place of domicile . . .
>
> Not only are we bound to honour our fathers and our mothers but we are likewise bound to give the same honour to every superior either of Church or State.[13]

The practical implications of the teaching were spelt out and applied to concrete circumstances in the spiritual tracts provided by Mac Aingil and Ó Maoil Chonaire:

> But notice that every Christian is bound not only to keep the commandments of God and his Church, but he is also bound not to break the commandments of the civil authority. . . . Therefore you must ask yourself if you have broken, and how many times, the lawful commandment of your Prince, your Lord, your master, your father or any other person who is lawfully your superior. But if any of those superiors were to impose a commandment on you which would be contrary to God's law or the Church's it were more proper for you to obey God and the Church rather than that commandment. . . . Moreover, if your father were to impose a commandment on you which would be contrary to the commonweal . . . or contrary to the commandment of your Prince don't take any notice of it and if your Prince were to give you a commandment which would be contrary to God's commandments do not be reluctant to break it. . . . Similarly if a temporal superior commanded you not to frequent the sacraments, not to listen to Catholic sermons, not to make confession or communion, to listen to the service or sermon of the heretics, not to fast, to violate the churches, to insult the statues, understand that these are unlawful commandments which are against God or the Church and that you are bound to disobey them. However, every commandment which your legitimate temporal superior gives you, particularly if he is your Prince, and if it is not contrary to the law of God or of the Church, you are bound in conscience to obey it . . .
>
> If the Emperor orders me: be prepared for my service, that is right; but not to accompany him to the church of the idols for a higher authority has ordered me not to go there. I beg your pardon, you [the

temporal authority] are threatening prison, he [the spiritual authority] is threatening the fires of Hell. Accordingly Caesar is entitled only to his due; he is not entitled to God's.[14]

Ó Maoil Chonaire, Ó hEodhasa and Mac Aingil were not only leading figures of the Counter-Reformation movement in Ireland, they were also typical representatives of it. Their primary aim of winning over the minds and souls of the Irish was achieved by presenting the issue to their followers in apocalyptic terms, applying to the Irish scene the Counter-Reformation polemic imported from the Continent where they had been trained and where they now resided. But behind the rhetorical and polemical language of their tracts a subtle pragmatism can be detected, one which differentiated between the heretics as such and the leader of their heretical Church: James 'our noble King', 'our noble illustrious King', 'his majesty the King', as Mac Aingil calls him, who although not a son of the Catholic Church, neither subscribed totally to the teachings of the blasphemous heretics Luther and Calvin; moreover James was not fully culpable – he had been led astray by 'bad teachers' in his youth.[15] This notion of 'bad teachers' or 'evil advisers' is utilized by other writers as well in their successful attempt to divorce James from the church of which he was head and from the actions carried out by its officers. It is but another manifestation of the lengths to which the literati, both lay and clerical, were prepared to go to rationalize their accommodation of James I. The theological and ideological dimensions of that accommodation are easily established; behind both theology and ideology lay a practical acceptance of the facts of Irish life and of the status quo. James was not only king, he was an absolute king whose writ had, for the first time ever, complete sway over the whole of Ireland; in practical terms he was Ireland's first 'High-King' and the ultimate source of power, favour, preferment and patronage. There was only one choice in dealing with the totally new situation. Lombard had spelt it out in the early years of the century: 'by the King's favour or by arms', and the same bleak choice was repeated by O Neill and O Donnell in their dealings with Philip III of Spain.[16] The hope of armed aid from Spain and a successful recourse to arms never died, but in the meantime reconciliation with the ultimate source of power was the only practical course available.

That attitude and its practical implications are well documented in the contemporaneous literature, the tone and the terminology of the excerpts being as revealing as the actions they describe. According to Red Hugh O Donnell's mother, the leaders of the rebellion of 1608 were guilty of 'treason against their King'; it was against 'the King's ordinance' they rebelled, declared the Four Masters; Rory O Donnell went to Dublin in 1603, according to the poet Eoghan Rua Mac an Bhaird, to parley with Mountjoy 'the deputy of the High King of Ireland'; in another poem, the same poet declares that Ireland was now in the King's 'title'; he assures

Niall Garbh who was then imprisoned in the Tower of London that he will be forgiven his crime 'when the crown remembers him again with favour' and that he will be released 'as soon as King James bends [in forgiveness]'. It was 'with the permission of the King and his writ', an anonymous poet declared in the 'Contentions of the Poets', that the Northern Half would exact tax and tributes henceforth from the Southern Half; Mac Aingil declared that he was addressing those under the Majesty of the King – 'the King's majesty and his people whom I wish to teach'; furthermore he declared that no one should obey any ordinance which was contrary to the 'commonweal'.[17] The most interesting feature of those excerpts is the new terminology being utilized and the new concepts being signified: *réim*, 'writ'; *teideal*, 'title'; *Prionsa*, 'sovereign'; *mórgacht*, 'majesty'; *maitheas poiblighe*, 'commonweal'; *an choróin*, 'the crown'. None of them had hitherto any place in native Irish law, Irish polity, or in traditional Irish ideology. Not all of those terms acquired the same currency, nor are they all attested outside particular texts. Some of them, on the other hand, are widely attested and they became permanent items of a new political lexicon. They all, however, constitute a formal reflex not only of the intellectual mutation in progress but also a literary realization of a central fact of Irish political life: that the overall aim of Catholic Ireland's élites was to come to terms with the King, since they realized that it was only through him that they and their cause could prosper. In the ensuing conflict between Parliament and Crown the Irish aristocracy, and accordingly the Irish learned classes, sided unequivocally with the King. Their redress was always to their own understanding, tolerant King, not to a Puritan Parliament from whom they had no hope of even toleration, let alone preferment. And when they did eventually have recourse to arms – in 1641 – they did so not as an act of rebellion, but in the King's name: 'We are in no rebellion ourselves, but do really fight for our Prince in defence of his Crown and royal prerogatives.'[18]

To the new lexicon of Irish political thought (sovereign, the crown, commonweal) one must add two more central and pervasive elements: *ríoghacht*, 'kingdom', and *náision*, 'nation'.[19] Ireland was now one united kingdom with her own king as titular head; the crown of Ireland constituted one of the 'three crowns' worn by James and to him was accordingly due the loyalty due to Caesar; in the island of Ireland there now resided, a *nation* – the Irish nation which was also a Catholic one.

II

The identification of Catholicism with Irish national consciousness is not reflected in the literature until the early seventeenth century but by that stage it is all-pervasive; a universal understanding permeating both prose and verse, common to the writings of layman and cleric alike in Irish and in Latin. According to Lombard, 'Catholicism is the one unifying

factor in Irish life; it is the fact that makes an Irishman'; Ireland alone, according to O Sullivan Beare, of all the countries in Northern Europe was steadfast in her Catholicism; according to John Roche, Bishop of Ferns, 'the very ground the Irish tread, the air they breathe, the climate they share, the very sky above them, all seem to draw them to the religion of Rome'.[20] The war in Ireland, maintained the priest-poet Ó Dubhthaigh, was one between General Patrick on one hand and, on the other, Captain Luther and Captain Calvin; it was tantamount to death for Ireland the manner in which 'her laws and her faith' had been denied, said Ó Gnímh; among the tragedies which had befallen Ireland, according to Mac Marcais, were 'the prohibition of music, the subjugation of the Irish language and neither wine nor mass being held in esteem'; as a result of the death of O Donnell, Mac an Bhaird declares, the true faith had been eclipsed, and a loathsome band of heretics had taken over God's vineyard; religious tracts had to be provided in Irish, Mac Aingil explains, 'because every other Catholic nation has books like these'.[21]

The acceptance by the Irish intelligentsia of the centrality of Catholicism to Irish ethnocentricity is paralleled, of course, in the attitude and actions of the government, particularly under Wentworth. For him and his absolutist policies religion was the overriding criterion of differentiation; as far as official policy mattered only two types existed in Ireland: Catholics and Protestants. The levelling effect of the acceptance and application of Catholicism as a distinctive ethnic feature had obvious implications for the native Irish and the Old-English alike. According to Carew the native Irish, because of their travel abroad, had become more civilized and as a consequence the old enmity and mutual distrust between the Irish and the Old-English was on the wane and accordingly 'under the mask of religion they being then conjoined it is worthy of consideration . . . what more danger to the state their union can now produce'.[22] Another official source blamed 'the pervidious Machiavellan friars at Louvain [who] seek by all means to reconcile their countrymen in their affections and to combine both those that are descended of the English race and those that are mere Irish in a league of friendship and concurrence'.[23] To ascribe to the friars of Louvain total responsibility for the emergent concurrence between Gael and Old-English, would of course be too simplistic. Nevertheless it is obvious that the continental colleges were vibrant powerhouses of new ideas and new attitudes and that they played a vital role in shaping the *mentalité* of the intelligentsia – and most probably other elites – in Ireland. Most Irish colleges on the Continent housed communities comprised both of Old-English and native Irish, and though those communities were often racked by personal and provincial rivalries, that rivalry never diminished the dynamic of their dedication to a new cause. It is accordingly not insignificant that the first poem in Irish which embodies the new thinking on the Old-English was written abroad by Eoghan Rua Mac an Bhaird in a poem of dedication

to Hugh O Donnell, son of Rory O Donnell, who was about to set out on an expedition to Ireland. The poem accompanied a war manual, translated by the poet himself, but which included advice not only on how to wage war, but also on how to make peace and prevent evil. In the poem the poet addresses the book, exhorting it to make its valuable learning available to the nobles of Ireland, not only to the native Irish nobility but to the Burkes, the Butlers, the FitzGeralds as well:

> O little book that is dedicated to Aodh, in thee is ample lore, bound for the Island of the Fair, of bright sward, lore that will be sweet to Ireland's hosts . . .
>
> The Burkes and the Butlers will not be weary of thy tales, nor the Geraldines who won affection beyond the old families of Fintan's land.
>
> Conceal from the race of Gaoidheal Glas no knowledge that thou hast found, nor from the Old English of the land of the Fair, with whom we, the warriors of Ireland, have united.
>
> Though I present thee to Ó Domhnaill above all in Fintan's land, go around the land on every side, share with every Irishman.
>
> Our own Gaels and Fair Foreigners, blessings on them with sincerity. Take my blessing to the land of Fál, a blessing go with thee now, little book.[24]

The significance of the poem lies not only in its attitude and sentiments but also in its terminology. The Old-English families are *Fionn-Ghaill* 'fair-foreigners'; they, and 'our own Gaels' are subsumed in the new common denominator of *Éireannaigh*, 'Irishmen'. Mac an Bhaird's poem is not the only instance of the new terminology nor of the new attitude implicit in it.[25] Philip O Sullivan Beare in his *Zoilomastix* of 1625 castigates Stanihurst for using the insulting term 'Anglo-Hiberni' when referring to the Old-English. There was no such group in Ireland, he declares. Ireland contains only two types: Irishmen who are Catholic and Englishmen who are heretics; accordingly, *Posthac Ibernia dicantur Iberni.*[26] Interestingly enough, in an earlier work O Sullivan Beare had himself used the term 'Anglo-Hiberni'; he now however rejects its validity, blames Stanihurst for putting it into circulation and calls on all Irishmen to unite in the common cause: *Ibernis concordia suadetur, Anglorum doli panduntur. De Anglorum perfidia.*[27] As Séathrún Céitinn pointed out in an elegy on two members of the Butler family, between the native Irish and the Old-English there was 'mutual sympathy of blood, marriage and faith'; to those two brave steadfast groups 'of the family of Banbha' the New English – 'a foreign haughty swarm' – showed nothing but 'envy and fury'.[28] One of the tangible concrete results of the Counter-Reformation movement in Ireland was the involvement, for the first time in several centuries, of the Catholic Church and of individual churchmen in the

creation and cultivation of literature in Irish. As a result, a new element was introduced into the Irish intelligentsia – the priest-poet/priest-scholar – who being both Irish poet and Roman priest could invoke two sources of authoritative knowledge and apply them in reconciling the old with the new. Séathrún Céitinn (*c.* 1580–1644) is a fairly typical representative of this new class who by virtue of his training both in native lore and continental Renaissance humanism was able to provide a convincing legitimization of the new ideology in his definitive history of Ireland: *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* (*FFÉ*).[29]

The Renaissance humanists were the first to make a concerted effort to study the past with some appreciation of temporal perspective. By applying an historical technique to different branches of learning, particularly to jurisprudence and philology, a new understanding of history itself and, as a consequence, modern historiography was born. Central to the historiographical 'revolution', as it has been called, was an awareness of evidence which established the primacy of original documents in historical writing.[30] But if the new sense of historicism was the product of Renaissance humanism in general, the specific forms and interpretations of history it generated were shaped in particular by the upheavals of the Reformation and by the national rivalries that ensued. And although partisanship often distorted historical perspective, it did give impetus, organization and direction to historical investigation. Religious rivalry, the burgeoning of the notion of *patria*, the rise of national consciousness, the diffusion throughout Europe of the humanistic national history, as initiated by Polydorus Virgil, all reinforced what Dumoulin taught: the nation was now the 'only intelligible field' of historical study.[31] For a nation to lack a written history, Boudouin wrote, was an incontrovertible sign of barbarism, of cultural childhood.[32] Ireland too, claimed Keating, was 'a kingdom apart . . . like a little world'; it was not fitting that so honourable a country, nor so noble a people, should go unrecorded.[33]

Keating's immediate purpose, in writing *FFÉ*, was to answer the 'falsehoods' concerning Ireland and her inhabitants which were being propagated in the writings of Cambrensis and his latter-day followers, Stanihurst, Spencer, Camden, Davies and others. It is highly significant that in demolishing the malicious falsehoods of those foreigners, writers whose work resembled that of the beetle 'rolling itself in dung', Keating applied to them contemporary historiographical criteria. Naturally, he found them wanting. As regards Cambrensis, 'there is not a lay nor a letter, old record or ancient text, chronicle nor annals' which could support his lie; it was no marvel that Stanihurst did not know what he was talking about since he had never seen the original records, furthermore he was totally ignorant of the language in which those records were written and accordingly did not deserve the title of 'historian'; Campion was more like a player on a platform recounting stories than an historian; Morryson's work could not be regarded as 'history' since he had ignored the rules