

## REVIEW ARTICLE: WHO'S BRITISH NOW?

*Owen Dudley Edwards*

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Nicholas Canny, **Making Ireland British, 1580-1650**, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 650 pp, hb, £62.50, ISBN 0198200919; pb, 2003, £21.99, ISBN 0199259054.

The summer 2004 issue of **The Drouth** devotes itself to Bigotry, as theme rather than theism. As the English would say, I have to declare an interest: I am on the Editorial Board, but saw none of the contents in advance this time (with the doubtful exception of my own piece). Our guest editor, Gowan Calder, one of Scotland's finest actresses, and the granddaughter of its finest critic, David Daiches, inaugurates it seminally, and Mitchell Miller's part autobiographical meditation on tinker/traveller/gypsy 'Shall Brothers Be' takes its question of identity deeper than outsiders, however sympathetic, such as George Borrow or J. M. Synge could reach. (And its humour is less involuntary than Borrow's, less dictatorial than Synge's.) Ian S. Wood's 'For Poetry, Country and Ulster' dissects with dispassion, and some celebration, the poetry of Sammy Duddy of the Ulster Defence Association, and both invite a later word. On the other red hand Andrew O'Hagan and Joseph Bradley return to their parish pump-ups for the purpose of exhuming their ancient but lucrative martyrdoms in the cause of what Bradley, with devastatingly indecent self-exposure, calls 'the Irish or Catholic experience in Scotland' (the only Irish in Scotland are therefore Catholics; the only Catholic experience in Scotland is therefore Irish: its apposition to the 'Bigotry' theme goes beyond all duty). O'Hagan assures us that he likes Scotland 'enough not to mind very much when people in Edinburgh think that people like me should be sent back across the Irish Sea in a punctured

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canoe': since he lives in London it is probable that the Edimbourgeoisie, however thoughtful, will leave him to puncture his own canoe, for which few will question his skills.

Professor Willy Maley parachutes somewhere between the sublime and the Bradley-O'Hagan, the freedom of his fall initially crash-landing at some titular length 'Part of the Union or Part of the (British) Problem?: New British History, Old Marxist Historiography' with inevitable consequences. The neophytes may have their problems with it, and it may be less important where intelligible, more important where unintelligible. Maley concludes by denouncing Roy Foster's 'We are all revisionists now' as 'one of the most objectionable polemics I've read'. 'How can we tell the dancer from the dance?' asked Yeats. How can we tell the objective from the objectionable? It may be, chez Maley, that we are not supposed to. Or perhaps we are expected to pursue the theme into Professor Maley's other writings such as **Nation, State and Empire in Renaissance Literature** whose first page denounces Foster as 'untheoretical, anti-Marxist, anglocentric and elitist ... to my mind, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse'? This has a certain pleasing imagery, projecting Foster of the eternally youthful face and flowing brown hair leaping from flying horse to flying horse, a Bellerophon humanely changing Pegasus in his perpetual war against Chimera. Foster's Everest of historiographical achievement to date must be his enchanting two-volume **Yeats** whose subject's use of allied metaphor related to Patrick Pearse – 'This man had kept a school/And rode our winged horse' – a juxtaposition whose revisionism squares the circle. Still, Pearse, like Foster, passionately believed in humane education and the instruction of pupils by encouraging what they liked best. Otherwise, Foster straddles a horse of a different colour from Pearse, but it is neither ultra-violet or infra-red. His style shares a crucial quality with the polemical Marx: exhilaration. Both are entertainment in education. Presumably the anti-Marxism arises from Foster's ironic comment on the supposed universality of revisionism, something he believed no more than Sir William Harcourt believed in the universality of Socialism when as Chancellor of the Exchequer he allegedly boomed 'We are all Socialists now'. Harcourt later remarked that, whether or not he had said it, what was true was that there were no economists now. But in the old Stalinist days revisionism was assumed to mean anti-Marxism, as indeed was any independent form of Marxism. If Maley is complaining that Foster thinks for himself, we are – or we should be – all Apocalypse now. Elitism is of course unanswerable: yer man Yeats was an elite poet (compare

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Saki in 'The Jesting of Arlington Stringham' (1910) – 'The censorious said that she slept in a hammock and understood Yeats's poems, but her family denied both stories.') We may safely doubt whether the making of an elite institution has ever received such constructive chronological assessment of its architecture. And if Foster is untheoretical, then one trusts his example will be infectious: he has restored lucidity to literary criticism.

But the pivotal point (apart from begrudgment of success) is anglocentricity. As criticism of Foster it is of little use: his genius in fact lies above all in Irish landscape and people (from time to time the English in Foster's writing seem like an amusing figment of the Irish imagination). But it is a general charge these days, and if Maley has only one gun to fire, he has wielded it with greater success elsewhere. His 'Part of the Union ...' justly accentuates the era of Tudor-Stewart-Stuart (they Francified with Mary Queen of Scots, late Queen of France), a long way from Foster's usual illuminations but one whose historians now seek to come to terms with its intractability by recognising the inseparability of Wales, England and Scotland from one another. Bluntly, British and Irish historians have long wallowed in their own dunghoops on a *Sinn Féin* principle: our preoccupation is ourselves, and anyone else is irrelevant, save when they are exploiting us, exterminating us or exhuming us. Almost all historians are horribly concerned with their own respectability, to be enlarged where possible to the past of their points of self-identification, which need not necessarily turn on ethnicity, religion, politics, geography, language and may seem totally arbitrary but yet reflect some passionate conviction enlarging the historiographical ego. James Anthony Froude had very nineteenth-century reasons to worship Caesar, as had Anthony Trollope in venerating Cicero. And few historians of the British and Irish island<sup>3</sup> have approached the generosity with which Homer could valorize Trojan as well as Greek, or Herodotus penetrate the magnitude and depth of the Persian civilisation against which his fellow-Greeks had so recently fought. The search for respectability was exaggerated into a slavish following of Nancy Mitford's insistence that true aristocrats spoke of 'England' when their social inferiors said 'Britain', or following whatever instincts had ruled before Mitford clove her hoof by definitions. Hugh Trevor-Roper, not without a surreptitious peep at the appropriate Mitfordisms, led the snoblesse on its voracious paths, but his historical imagination fought a lifelong war against his social yearnings. The result might sound like unintentional imitation of **1066 And All That**, much inferior in perception. A.J.P. Taylor, a rival for the Oxford Regius Chair

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widely deemed his better, had become a great success as a TV lecturer whence, early in the 1960s, Trevor-Roper had to show he could do as well, but he could not distinguish between simplification and contempt. Accordingly his first stirrings on the need for four-nation history, or at least for recognising that England was inexplicable without knowledge of its neighbours, was shovelled out to the TV masses thus:

Cromwell was popular with the army because he hated the Scotch. All of the army hated the Scotch. Cromwell particularly hated the Scotch because he was Welsh. He was Welsh, of course, his name was Williams.

Presumably the great unwashed watchers assimilated it readily enough with their digestion of the contemporary film **The Nutty Professor** starring Jerry Lewis.

The thing continued to nag Trevor-Roper's own gnat-mind, on the principle that 'Great fleas have little fleas upon their backs to bite 'em ...'. He enjoyed using his Borders domicile for more than fox-hunting, and while his *obiter dicta* were chosen to be unfriendly to the natives, he at least wanted the natives to fight back. Trevor-Roper might seem rather unlikely casting as the Great White Hunter, but such seems to have been his dream. It had the thrill of risking one witch doctor too many, such as his attempts to anatomise the Scottish enlightenment without mention of its universities, or his pronouncements on the respective merits of Scots-Gaelic and Irish poetry in happy ignorance of the language of either. At one point it led him into a discussion of Scottish society over one thousand years earlier than the time he thought he was writing about (in an essay aptly named 'The Invention of Highland Tradition'), and in general all the aspiring Scottish historian needed for success was an adverse review from Trevor-Roper. But he did see that his England needed redefinition (all the more, did he but know it, because the popular realisations of modern Englishness are by Scots, from James Boswell to J. K. Rowling). Ultimately the matter passed into relatively safe hands, such as Professor Maley's.

Maley, in **The Drouth**, gloomily remembers:

The first paper I gave on the British Problem was on Francis Bacon, entitled 'Another Britain', at the University of Lancaster in December 1994. It was end of term and my presentation clashed with the Departmental Christmas do. ... At question-time, some revellers came in

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wearing paper hats, and one Irish member took exception to my use of the term 'British', though he hadn't heard the paper. It's an odd experience when an Irishman wearing a yellow crown objects to your use of the term 'British'.

Behold the glory of the unintelligible. Maley actually goes on from this to complain that George Bernard Shaw was Socialist 'apparently because he hated the working class' (which thesis does not appear to be here, and certainly was not there). But the memory had much more to do with scholarly realities than its author evidently wanted to admit. The idea of Wales and Scotland being drawn across the eternal grievance-axes uniting Dublin to London is continually met by smouldering suspicion from the Irish intellectual/propagandists. It clutters up the obsessions, complicates the indictments, and offers alternative outlets for the blood-price. Maley, while necessarily demanding a Scottish dimension (if sometimes no more than a Scottish wing for the factory of Anglophobia or, as he prefers it, 'anglophobia'), can willingly contribute a few overlooked decibels to the Irish historiographical Auld Lang Whine. His 'How Milton ... read Spenser's **View**' (in Brendan Bradshaw, Andrew Hadfield and Willy Maley eds., **Representing Ireland: Literature and the Origins of Conflict 1534-1660**, p. 214) denounces Milton's **Lycidas** on the ground that the drowned friend it laments, Edward King, was the son of 'Sir Harry King, the infamous arsonist of Boyle Abbey' whence 'Milton was steeped in the politics of English colonialism'. The obvious rejoinder is that King was even more steeped in the waves of the Irish Sea, and that the father's fire drew no allusions from Milton in his grief at the son's water. Anyhow, King's father was Sir John King; it was Henry King who, according to the poet Belloc, chewed little bits of string and was early cut off in dreadful agonies ... had *his* ancestors unstrung the Harp of Erin to provide him with his lethal nourishment?

But Maley blanched a little later to encounter an Irish thesis that Shakespeare revealed his hatred of the Irish when in **Richard II** the eponymous anti-hero adjures his entourage:

Now for our Irish wars.  
We must supplant those rough rug-headed kerns,  
Which live like venom where no venom else  
But only they have privilege to live.

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Maley pointed out that Richard at this point is anything but sympathetically portrayed: in fact this little witticism on the Irish flora and fauna is followed promptly by its price-tag:

And for these great affairs do ask some charge,  
Towards our assistance we do seize to us  
The plate, coin, revenues and moveables,  
Whereof our uncle Gaunt did stand possess'd.

And this action, so justified, costs him his throne and life, since his future supplanter is the swindled party, Henry Bolingbroke, later Henry IV. But Maley's adversary would have none of this: that such language was used in Shakespeare meant that Shakespeare supported such language. That the proscription of the reporter of adverse language logically demands /requires the banning of the works must follow: if A is Paddyer-than-thou by insisting Shakespeare subscribed to every speech he wrote, B will be Paddyer still when he demands nobody be permitted to read Shakespeare, and his works be ejected from public libraries and school curricula. Nor is such logic exactly foreign to the people who produced the most ridiculous literary censorship in Europe. The same era that founded it is satirised by Richmal Crompton's 'The Mysterious Stranger' (**William the Conqueror**, 1926) where William reads a thriller whose villain's oaths are 'represented on the printed page by blanks and dashes' with corresponding effects on William:

A hasty moment brought his bruised side in contact with a table. His feelings demanded some outlet. 'Blank!' he said, after a moment's deep thought. 'Blank, blank, *blank!*'

Even immortal verse could hardly afford to be as blank as that.

Shakespeare is in fact much more ambiguous about the Irish than he is about either the Scots (whose Macbeth he deliberately pushed several stages deeper into the Inferno than the lies of Macbeth's upstart conquerors had left him) or the Welsh (of whom he might make fun but who he always ensured would survive their English opposites). Shakespeare certainly seemed to know of magical powers held by Irish poets, as when Rosalind in **As You Like It** remarks of Orlando's rhymes to her:

I was never so berhym'd since Pythagoras time that I was an Irish rat,  
which I can hardly remember.

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So did Sir Philip Sidney, ending his **Defence of Poesie** with a humane curtailment of curses on Poetry's enemies: 'I will not wish unto you to be rimed to death as is said to be done in Ireland'. Traditionally Irish satire was held to have lethal powers, and certainly could turn a community against the poet's victims. But this sort of thing argues much greater awareness of Gaelic poetry in the sixteenth century than, say, Trevor-Roper possessed, and hence the necessity for historiographical linkage of the kingdoms in terms of the linguistic accessibility of the islands' peoples to one another. The point is somewhat easier of Scottish and Welsh comprehension. Compton Mackenzie might enjoy the hideous mispronunciation of his tiny Gaelic by his imaginary Macdonald of Ben Nevis, but many an Anglified laird remained firmly in control of his ancestral language. The custody of the Welsh language for long rested in the hands of conservative forces, sometimes wealthy, sometimes high Episcopalian rather than the later Wesleyan tradition with which modern Welsh nationalism was so identified. Myles na gCopaleen alias Flann O'Brien makes the same point when in **An Béal Bocht** the gathering of professional modern Gaeilgeóiri is sardonically subverted by the oldest local native speaker who answers their semi-literate sloganeering with '*Ní Saoirse go Seoirse*' [no freedom until George]. But the English invader of earlier times has been growing more polyglot under recent scholarship. Swift, for all his desperate search to be taken for anything save an Irish Yahoo, knew Irish-Gaelic well enough to draw his first two books of **Gulliver** from the well of Gaelic legend. And Richard McCabe in his **Spenser's Monstrous Regiment** uses his own Gaelic scholarship to affirm Spenser's poetic obligations to the Irish bards and their traditions, for all of his homicidal sentiments towards the aborigines desperately resisting his merciless Tudor frontier. Philip Sidney, although much more briefly in Ireland than Spenser (a year as opposed to almost twenty), was listening and learning; his friend Spenser, ultimately marrying an Irish woman, had much better chances of either.

We have to think of much more linguistically adept cultures than our own on both sides of the supposed civilized/savage divide. Nicholas Canny's **Making Ireland British 1580-1800** insists that many if not indeed most English residents in rural Ireland of some years' standing must have known and spoken at least some Irish. We have to come to terms with a world where, for all of its vaunted written learning, sometimes stretching to the philosophical and scientific heights of Bacon and the poetry and humanity of Shakespeare, the deepest cultural resources of the bulk of our island ancestors in their time were oral, and oral culture was contemptuous of

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geographical divides. Ossianic tales survived among folk narrators in highly similar forms in Donegal and Argyll; the Irish Púca was clear cousin to Shakespeare's mischief-maker in **A Midsummer Night's Dream**. Puck's name of Robin Goodfellow derives from the same uneasy cajolment of fairies of uncertain temper as the Irish used in calling them the good people or the Greeks in naming the Furies the Eumenides. Spenser's **Faerie Queene** is eloquently shown by Canny to assume the material and moral value of making Ireland English ('British' stirred different hopes to follow when Scotland was English, in many English ambitions, although in realisable reality it formally enters the story in 1603 when England fell under a Scot); but McCabe and others may justly argue that fairy traditions on Spenser's Irish lands were ready for conscription at the poet's command. It is deeply satisfying that warring Protestants and Catholics may have found their richest metaphysical common ground in paganism. Officially, Protestantism of all varieties regarded Catholicism as so bad a bargain of Christianity with paganism as to have preserved what it was supposed to have destroyed, and then Protestant Puritans, Presbyterians, etc, saw Protestant Episcopalianism as having made a bargain if anything worse, given its royal sanction, whence Puritan/Presbyterian outlawry of Christmas etc. But a Protestant riding to victory with its highest aesthetics in **The Faerie Queene** mixed some seductive pagan metaphors. On their side, the fairies took poetic service with Gael no less than Anglo (or Brit), a mercenary neutrality they had previously enjoyed between God and the Devil. It brings us back to Mitchell Miller and the tinker/gypsy/nomad culture in these islands. They were at large throughout the archipelago in the strictest usage of 'tinker' when their Snout performed in Quince's company; as the first to see Bottom in an ass's head he seems promptly to have deduced its fairy origin, his 'O Bottom, thou art chang'd' being merely banal as a way to notice an ass's head but spot on as a diagnosis in labelling the victim a 'changeling' and hence prey to the fairies. Fourscore years later Bunyan's **The Pilgrim's Progress** showed another tinker's perceptiveness with fairy culture. It is of course a great Christian work, but is also a great fairy story which is one reason for its modern success in the hands of twentieth-century fairy-storytellers such as Enid Blyton and C. S. Lewis.

This raises a question of Nicholas Canny's unquestionably ironic title, since his fascinating, immensely detailed and fiercely argumentative analysis of his massive research records a seventy-year series of attempts to Britify Ireland and ends with citations of Sir William Petty the demographer and Dáibhí Ó

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Bruadair the Gaelic poet 'acknowledging, one with sadness and regret the other with hope and satisfaction, that the experiment of Making Ireland British had, in every respect, proven a costly failure'. That was to speak chiefly of Munster where, as Canny sees it, Spenser had set out the Britification agenda in prose and poetry, although McCabe is more doubtful of Spenser's continued reliability from a strictly Elizabethan Court viewpoint. Canny firmly takes step by step, making the most of factual advances, impatient of ill-based theorising, and well he might. In the infancy of four-nations historiography, as we are, even the most sober historians take flight into conjecture. Scholars as respectable as Toby Barnard and Ian McBride, the former in print, the latter in conference address, have opined that resolute conduct persisting in Cromwell's policies would have extirpated Catholicism in late seventeenth-century Ireland, a speculation more cautiously adumbrated by Macaulay, Carlyle and Froude (curious that the modern professionals should outguess the romantic amateurs). Considered in the context of the successive failures in the Britification process so implacably laid out by Canny, the notion recoils on its makers' heads. Comparable cases where repression was followed by conversion have been cited from the European continent, not to speak of the Americas, but Canny in particular knows where to use and where to set aside comparison from his own mastery of the two continents in his period. He certainly shows greedy Irish chieftains participating in the state plunder of monasteries and church wealth where possible, but the want of serious Protestant zeal for evangelism lost the sixteenth-century opportunity when Irish Catholicism was as its remotest from Rome. A fierce counter-Reformation advent of early seventeenth-century Roman Catholic clerics linked the Reformation to Tudor and Stuart Irish land confiscation (for all that it was started by the Catholic Mary Tudor). The fact that the old religion held the majority of the Irish people during the eighteenth-century days of civil deprivation for Catholics – when in fact, all rational economic and political considerations militated in favour of apostacy – hardly supports the Barnard-McBride notion of capitulation to force. As Steven Ellis points out in the valuable collection of four-nations essays he edits with Sarah Barber (**Conquest and Union – Fashioning a British State 1485-1725**), Wales went Protestant when a Welsh-language policy – in the most literal sense a national interest – was given to its Reformation under its own Tudors. The contrast with Ireland is obvious, and there seems no sign that the opportunity would have returned. Cromwell may have made a name in Irish history (slightly refurbished for horrific purposes by the nineteenth century) but in Irish religion he scarcely

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made a dent. The Irish Papists seem to have been all the more Papist in the aftermath of the Bishops hanged by the Cromwellians. However much Voltaire might dislike the appropriation, hanging Bishops proved a successful activity only *pour encourager les autres*. It seems, indeed to have been even more successful in encouraging the laity than the clergy.

One clear theme emerging from Professor Canny's *magnum opus* is the intense suspicion maintained by successive generations of English administrators for their fellow-English now domiciled in Ireland. There are obvious bases for unease in thinking of 'Old English' retaining Catholicism, but it seems to have extended itself even to first-generation English deemed too long in Ireland. For a confident culture, the English were greatly doubtful that in spite of all temptations to belong to other nations their compatriots would remain Englishmen. Going native, staying Papist or, presumably, succumbing to the fairies seems to have been taken as the inevitable inescapable Irish diseases. There was also the alternative alienation, cited by McCabe in Spenser's case: the hard frontiersman demanding a more thorough policy of conversion and confiscation, increasingly at loggerheads with what increasingly seemed the criminally moderate policies of the Tudor court. Canny notes that some of the toughest nuts in the mid-seventeenth-century Irish civil wars, much outstripping Oliver Cromwell in atrocities, included such second-generation figures as Sir Charles Coote, Roger Boyle Baron Broghill, and Michael Jones, not to speak of their ally descendant of Brian Boru, Morrogh O'Brien Earl of Inchiquin. Canny quotes James Scott Wheeler's recent study **Cromwell in Ireland** on these four generals who 'often appeared willing to exterminate the Irish population ... they, more than Cromwell, made the conquest an ethnic war'. Cromwell himself continues to appear more moderate than he could afford to let himself be thought, justifying as punishment of the Irish insurgent slaughterers of innocent Protestants in 1641 the garrisons put to the Cromwellian sword in Drogheda and Wexford in 1649: but of these Drogheda seems more like a sharp warning to its English Royalist defenders and their allies at home while Wexford if anything showed what Cromwell could not admit – his inability to control his own troops. Professor Canny is derisive about Dr Toby Barnard's 'extraordinary opinion ... that "surprisingly little of a continuous folk memory or authentic popular legend of Cromwell can be traced before the nineteenth century"', but the evidence is spottier than he indicates: if Barnard is too firm, his ignorance of Gaelic poetry is far less abysmal than the pure or Trevor-Roper variety, and the mass of Gaelic poetry seems to

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include Cromwell as firm within the demonology rather than leader of the pack. There is even some admiration for his family bravery. Canny is ready enough to acknowledge this, and notes how James VI and I was posthumously traduced for his Ulster Plantation whose effects were denounced in language more reminiscent of modern curses on Cromwell. And Canny finds the Cromwellian land confiscation decided on by the Long Parliament well before Cromwell was more than a minor MP.

But neither Cromwell nor anyone else comes out of it well. The poets, Spenser or Gael as the case might be, prove a self-interested lot, however beautiful the literary garb in which they declare their interests. The dispossessed have acquired much sympathy over the centuries from historians/propagandists enlarging themselves in the apologetic. It gets cold but fair scrutiny from Canny, and with so formidable and even vast a history of the pivotal years 1580-1650 a new tone is set not lightly to be set aside. For one thing Canny, as befits his Galway professoriate, is Atlanticist, but on an Atlantic which made Ireland European as well as American, as Galway's exceptionally sophisticated and cosmopolitan history degree teaching makes very clear. What precisely this European Irishness meant Canny asserts with his usual challenging firmness:

[T]hose Irish people of high social status who, for various reasons, sought to make a career on the continent of Europe made full use of the moral authority which they, as exiles, enjoyed over the friends and kin who had endured in Ireland to influence them in their choice of policy. Therefore, it is not sufficient to represent any element of the population of Ireland as passive sufferers who attempted valiantly, but ultimately unsuccessfully, to resist the changes that were pressing in upon them from outside. Rather, all people associated with Ireland, regardless of their rank or national origin, and whether they remained at home or had made a career on the Continent, were active participants in a process that brought natives and settlers to establish working relationships which, however tenuous, persisted until they were engulfed by the insurrection that beset the country in 1641.

If the new four-nation historians have been forced to realise that King Charles's head would probably have remained on his shoulders had it not been for Scotland and Ireland, Canny makes them remember that the most formidable Catholic general in the field in Ireland in the 1640s, Owen Roe

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O'Neill, while nephew of the eponymous Hugh (Elizabeth's last and most dangerous enemy) brought as his greatest credential his career as a Spanish general: if the Confederate wars deriving from the 1641 insurrection shaped the British as well as Irish Civil Wars, it also made them part of the Thirty Years' War in Europe. Cromwell in 1649 stormed Drogheda under Sir Arthur Aston whose service under Gustav Adolf of Sweden in that war was firm guarantee that this, too, was an event in European warfare. If Ireland can do one thing for Britain— or, failing that, for Scotland, Wales and England — it may be to remind it of its European identity.

History is certainly the means by which our European character is to be affirmed, by knowing the component parts of our archipelago, certainly, but also by recognising our place in the European game. Even on the oldest kings-and-things basis, how many students realise the importance of Charles I having as a beloved and active Queen the daughter of the French hero-king Henri IV, of William III being Henry IV's great-grandson, or of every single British ruler from 1714 to 1901 having married a German? Traditionally, British diplomatic history was shovelled into a ghetto whence British domestic history was excluded as fully as possible. Equally American history, hardly recognised enough to be termed a Cinderella by British Academics before 1945, has been annexed by Canny in various other works to show how the Irish experience acted as a paradigm or a warning for the colonial founders of British America. Yet, he is ready enough to acknowledge moments of extremity, if not uniqueness, in the Ireland he reveals. In sheer weight of numbers slaughtered by the various sides in 1641-53 he estimates the Irish figures worst although sardonically noting that a case has been made for Scotland. The highest Irish figures in pitched battles were annihilation of Catholic forces, but equally Canny pointedly avoids the usual Catholic attempts to scale down the figures for Protestant settlers murdered by the insurgents in 1641. He works from depositions scholars have preferred to avoid, and constructs a horrific story of the brutality to which a dispossessed people subjected those they deemed their oppressors. But he shows its place as the sequel to the patchwork of opportunism which British settlement had shown itself.

It brings us back to Canny's title, and the implications of his ironies for a British identity. **When Was Wales?** asked Gwyn Williams in a characteristically explosive title for a history. *When Was Britain?* would make for a much more inchoate book than his masterly volume. Linda

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Colley's **Britons** would make the identity a product of the long eighteenth century. Her husband David Cannadine might give supreme coping-stone weight to the modern invention of the British monarchy, which he variously establishes in the late and the middle nineteenth centuries (the middle is the more likely: we are all Albertines rather than Victorians). And was Ireland in it, or not – remembering how Irish Britain actually is, in point of ethnic composition, from Wellington to Callaghan? The Britishness of which Canny sees Ireland being made part of so unsuccessfully from 1580 to 1650 has its own lessons to teach. It starts at the point of aspiration, the Tudors partly drawing on the absurd legend in use by the propagandists of Edward I (whose removal of the Scottish archives, as the founder of modern historiography in English, William Robertson, remarked, enabled Edward to substitute his lies for the truths they might hold): Britain, as Dr William Ferguson has shown in his invaluable **Identity of the Scottish Nation**, was revived in Edward's claims to be master of Scotland as the domain of the legendary hero Brutus whom Nennius had asserted to be great-grandson of Aeneas and conqueror of the island, used in the form refurbished by Geoffrey of Monmouth. Spenser worked it up again in the **Faerie Queene** quoted appositely by Canny; and of course Shakespeare spun off lyrical charm and geographical lunacy along the same lines in John of Gaunt's dying prophesy (before Richard II seizes his wealth on the pretext of Irish war needs):

This royal throne of Kings, this scept' red isle  
...  
This fortress built by Nature for herself  
Against infection and the hand of war,  
This happy breed of men, this little world,  
This precious stone set in the silver sea,  
Which serves it in the office of a wall,  
Of as a moat defensive to a house,  
Against the envy of less happier lands,  
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England

whose influence to this day would make fine historians like R.C.K. Ensor and A.J.P. Taylor write great histories of these islands called **England, 1870-1914** and **English History 1914-1945** innocent of their own Mitfordism, and indeed bellicose Irish nationalist poets such as John Montague still inveigh against 'the island of England'. Nennius and Geoffrey were Welsh, but reflected the other Welsh Question – Where Was Wales? – radiating as its

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history does from Arthur's seat (and its poet Aneirin) to Tudor courts. Geoffrey at least was making Welsh legend serviceable for English ambitions. Spenser and Shakespeare were taking out insurance, in part: the most obvious prospect for succession to Elizabeth was the Scottish James (who would make ominous if fruitless demands for punishment of Spenser for the scurrilous treatment of his mother in **The Faerie Queene**, James characteristically more ready to hound down a poet than a politician, partly because he knew the poet's malice had long effects). Hence the Tudor poets inculcate the lessons in advance: whatever happens, Scotland is England's, even if England falls under the Scottish king.

Yet the British presence in Ireland in sixteenth-century reality was simply that Scottish influence was stronger in Ulster than English, and as like as not would be hostile to England, whether or not it was Protestant. Canny pays due tribute to the work of Willy Maley in establishing the hostility of **The Faerie Queene** to the Scots and a Scottish succession but, as Canny said, its main effect was to stamp Spenser in the eyes of courtiers of the 1590s as an unwanted anachronism, muddying waters with historical controversies as James VI's advent to the English crown grew increasingly certain.

And for all that James was survived by the Scottish Parliament for over eighty years, he proved the foremost Unionist of his time. His most enduring legacy was to be the Ulster Plantation where again a clearly divergent pattern of English and Scottish settlement is shown by Canny: the Scots knew much more about where they were settling than the English (and showed much stronger religious commitment to Protestantism), the English got better land, made more use of agents, had more grandiose ideas, and set their stamp on towns like Enniskillen and (by definition) Londonderry. The proof of that pudding came horribly clear in the eating, when the initial massacres by the Catholic insurgents of 1641 sought to spare the Scots, but it would not prove a permanent restraint. Canny's Ulster Scots continued initially to include Highlanders, some Catholic, but repression against Scots Calvinists in the 1620s sent the Lowland Protestants in greater numbers to Ulster, and their fate in 1641 brought a Scottish army into Ireland to complicate the Royalist/Parliamentarian/Catholic rival armies. Scotland nursed its horror-stories of 1641 as fiercely as did England, and the great Montrose was probably hanged in 1650 for having brought the Irish Catholics as his allies in the Scottish wars of the 1640s. But Montrose was only following in the tradition of the ancestors of his enemy Argyll in establishing links with Ulster Catholic Scots and Irish: the intervening slaughters changed a natural

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tradition of mutual brutalities into classic martyrology, numbered with the fate of the Huguenots on St Bartholomew's Day. Canny does not pursue the subsequent imagery of his own period in later eyes, but conventional Hibernophobia took on a much deeper, and jumpier, bitterness in Britain after 1641 had so signally showed the utter failure to have made Ireland British.

And yet apart from James VI and I (whose warmest admirers seem to have been contemporary Gaelic Irish poets), who was British in any sense other than Englishness writ large? If Irish Catholic goodwill towards the Scots did not last long enough to immunise them all from massacre in 1641, there seemed no end to English contempt for the fellow-settlers; Canny diagnoses it in the heart of the massacre narrative-processing:

Perhaps the ultimate proof of the haughty disdain with which the English continued to regard the Scots was that those English clergy in Dublin who compiled the depositions concerning the revolt described the Scottish and Irish (and on a few occasions even Welsh) Protestants by their nationality, and reserved the generic description British, which was to have been the hall-mark of the plantation sponsored by King James, for those deponents who were of English birth.

A century later Britishness asserted itself in a new song:

Some talk of Alexander  
And some of Hercules  
Of Hector and Lysander  
And such great names as these.  
But of all the world's great heroes  
There's none that can compeer  
To the gallant Duke of Cumberland  
And the British Grenadier.

After Highlanders became better known as cannon-fodder in British imperial service the second-last line was amended, not to say anodyned, to 'With a tow-row-row-row-row-row-row-row/To the British Grenadier'. The Butcher was *passé*, and by the time of the song's subjection to revisionism, the Royal Dukedom of Cumberland had passed to his great-nephew Ernest, whose gallantries required more discretion. The Butcher's victims at Culloden differed very little from the Irish Gaelic insurgents of the previous century in the terrors they evoked in English minds, and the antipathies they kindled thereafter, fuelling John Wilkes's **North Briton** and Jefferson's initial draft of the Declaration of Independence. The work of Murray Pittock

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and others has brought home to us how much common ground in politics and society was retained far into the eighteenth century by Gaelic Scotland and Ireland. The four nations or four kingdoms had much more complex unions among them than those of mere crowns or parliaments.

We should be mildly if somewhat churlishly grateful to Willy Maley, therefore, for confusing us about Britishness and its historiographical reconsiderations. We should be grateful to Nicholas Canny with no qualifications at all. It all looks as though historians of more recent times have been finding life a great deal too easy. The Scotland-Ulster linkage needs testing with aesthetic insights and appreciations of Ian S. Wood as well as with the hard evidence he has also employed. From this standpoint (and from many others) Edinburgh University's recent appointment of Professor Alvin Jackson is particularly welcome. His mastery of Ulster Unionist politics assessed in their Irish and English/British contexts will now find fuller fruition as he becomes a Scottish historian, and Scotland has everything to learn from him about Ulster realities. In the meantime, we need to be watchful about this British business. In recent years there have emerged bright references to the 'British Enlightenment', for instance. Granted that the English enlightenment was alive and well and in Switzerland with Gibbon, this seems a fairly brazen form of historiographical hitch-hiking, unless the argument is that British enlightenment consists of Boswell grabbing Dr Johnson for his laboratory or museum, much as a Nobel Prize for scientific achievement might some day be awarded to the vivisected rat or to the missing link. To be adjudged British is indeed a Nobel Prize in itself: you have succeeded, and are therefore worth appropriating.

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