partition, and the renewal of domination in one political unit by the historic beneficiaries of the colonial settlements. Such emphases are warranted not as a brief for present courtrooms, not for the joy of savouring past horrors, and not for wallowing in ancient grievances to the neglect of our ancestors’ past pleasures and achievements. Quite simply, the catastrophic components of the past significantly explain Ireland’s present, both its institutional outcomes and the present meagreness of its principal agents, collective and individual. Richard English’s book fails fully to appreciate these matters, but his failure is instructive.

Of course, neither Ireland’s nor Northern Ireland’s histories are uncontested catalogues of disorder, and only the last standaded platoon of the Thirty-Two County Sinn Féin Movement might argue otherwise. In fact, the island’s current circumstances stem, in part, from catastrophes that did not happen. The Nazi, or Stalinist, who homogenized Central and Eastern Europe under the cover of “National and Social”, never conquered Ireland. In the seventeenth century Ireland was not comprehensively “cleansed” of its natives, nor was it religiously homogenized, though both enterprises were conceived and embarked upon before being abandoned for less spectacular forms of subordination. In a comparative perspective, it is the catastrophic past, with its long-term repercussions, that explains the emotional and intellectual wellspring of Irish national ideology. And it is the current evocation of these repercussions that explains the diminution of hostility toward the British state and the peaceful accommodations that now prevail in both Ireland’s political entities.

Whose emotional voice?

Nowhere in 121st One, “Ireland before 1801”, does English admit incompetence in the Irish, Latin or French languages. This would seem a necessary acknowledgement by someone who has taken upon himself the task of appraising the existence (or non-existence) of national consciousness in Ireland’s pre-modern past. Since no works in Irish, Latin or French are cited in the bibliography the reader may assume that English lacks these languages. This observation is not advanced in a spirit of ethnic or linguistic triumphing—I have mostly forgotten Latin and French, and have but a few words of Irish. Nor does the observation imply that only those with the relevant linguistic skills can have worthwhile opinions. Solid historical judgements can emerge from reading secondary interpretations of primary sources, provided there is a scholarly consensus that is not contested as partisan by reasonable persons. But English’s notes and bibliography convey no mastery of those historians, past or present, who have a full command of Irish, and who differ from their “anglophone” colleagues—and among themselves—in questions pertinent to Irish national consciousness before the nineteenth century. So we must sceptically that English can achieve his goal of assessing Gaelic Ireland’s self-consciousness.

Like most of us, he is heavily dependent on anglophone secondary sources for readings of Ireland’s Gaelic past. So it is incumbent upon him to show why we should take his word, rather than the word of others, for any reading of that past, where there is no consensus. This criticism, moreover, does not apply only to his treatment of the consciousness of the pre-modern Gaelic Irish. Consider the issue of how to name those who invaded Ireland in 1169, or, in the account English prefers, who were invited in by a locally defeated pretender. He says there was no “English” invasion at all; Rathlin, Ireland was Colonized “by an intermingled group,” Anglo-Norman lords ... and their hybrid followers.” But at least one study of how the Normans became English, not cited, maintains that “the Celtic church served not only to draw Normans and English together (for security reasons),


6 Jan Loesch has written of the difficulties facing the professional scientist (and historian) who deals scientifically with textual readings of pre-modern texts, and the readings resulting from such texts remain “Serious, Hagiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Archival Evidence,” American Political Science Review, 90 (1996), 605–18.


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11 Irish Historical Studies, the professional (into) for someone in England's field, contains an elegantly written article, which he does not cite, by a master of French, Irish, and English sources, which shows that the Irish described the said 'Anglo-Normans' as 'English', and nicely supplies parallels between twentieth-century Ulster's divided peoples and those of late medieval Ireland, see J. C. H. Jones, The Writing of Irish Medieval History, Irish Historical Studies, 27, (1990), 97-111.

12 Heil, Freedom, 43.

13 Irish Freedom, 26, my emphasis.

14 Some of the more cogent essays in Professor Ellinas's book are a matter of dispute, see his review 'History of North's Catholic Ireland: Ireland's Rejection of Secularism', Sunday Times, 22nd October, 2008.


to reinforce Englishness where it already existed, but also helped to make the former [the Normans] adopt the identity of the latter [the English].' Hugh Thomas argues that the Normans assimilated very quickly into an Irish identity. Similarly, John Gillingham has persuaded me; but John McGarry and I were wrong to write in one of our books of 'Anglo-Normans' invading Ireland, even though that label has been standard in Irish and British historiography. Rathen, Gillingham insists, the native Irish were right to describe the relevant events, then and later, as the coming of the English. Gillingham has dramatized that the 'incomers' had no such expression as 'Anglo-Normans' for themselves. This absence is supplementary evidence for a very fast assimilation of Normans into English identity between the 1120s and 1140s. We might call this the Novus romanus iuris anglici Theben. So the (French-speaking) English, not the Normans, or Anglo-Normans, invaded Ireland. or, as English prefers, were invited in — and, of course, it was both.

The expense to adjudicate the interpretations of medieval documents is not among my priorities but I am able immediately to observe as the book begins that English has missed an important controversy in the ethnic history of these islands, and has instead replicated the old homogenography. Has he done so through ignorance? Perhaps; no one can read everything, even on the scholarship relevant to a small country. Has he preferred the old homogenography on empirically defensible grounds? Perhaps, but if so, he does not supply them. The suspicion arises that the old homogenography is in this instance comforting it enables him to emphasize 'hybridity' in Irish history, and to dispute traditional nationalist accounts of late-standing English and Irish animosity rooted in colonial relations. This is perhaps why he can later refer to the 'English in Ireland and the Irish in England (as they might respectively) be called.' Without acknowledging that in what the respective groups called themselves, according to their own sources in each of their respective languages.

On politically correct cosmopolitanism

Independence, thanks to prosperity and immigration, is now multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual in novel ways. Northern Ireland, thanks to the peace process, is also increasingly attractive to immigrants. Excelcius. But it is an admission to read and celebrate the present back into the mists of time, whether the mists be deemed Celtic or otherwise. We are confidently told by English, without sources, that

Different civilizations and peoples, and groups were, from the earliest history of old Ireland, written into the story of its inhabitants, so notions of a monocultural race, or of imputed racial purity or homogeneous, are deeply misplaced. Since ancient times the Irish gene pool has been profoundly mixed... There was no single, original Gaelic or Irish race, just as there were no discernible natives in the sense of an original people than whom all others and their descendants are less truly Irish [sic]... Even in the Iron Age, the people of Ireland were genetically very mixed... Readers may then expect to be told that there really were 'black Irish', or at least 'black and tan Irish', and anticipate tales of the skeletal remains of persons whose reconstructed phenotypes are not Caucasian. Instead, we get a quotation, and a citation. The quotation reads 'Prehistoric Ireland was a considerable racial mix.' The citation is to Mariette Ellinas's The Catholics of Ulster. Now, whatever merits Professor Ellinas may have as an historian, she is not notably distinguished as a geneticist.

By contrast, Brian Stock, professor of Human Genetics at Oxford University, arguably is.
In his recently published Saxons, Vikings and Celts (yes, he uses the 'C' word), he argues that the DNA evidence shows that the ‘matrilineal history of the Isles is both ancient and continuous’, and the strong evidence of ‘exact and close matches between the maternal and western clans of western and northern Iberia and the western half of the Isles is very impressive, much more so than the poorer matches with continental Europe... On our maternal side, almost all of us (British and Irish) are Celts.' Sykes confirms that the genetic data falsify the old notion that the Celts of Ireland originated from middle Europe. We Hibernians are Iberians: ‘The Irish myths of the Milesians were right in one respect. The genetic evidence shows that a large proportion of Irish Celts, on both the male and the female side, did arrive from Iberia, at or about the same time as farming reached the Isles.’

The paternal Y-chromosome data also suggest Iberian origins for the males of the Isles, especially in Ireland. The recent discussion of the ‘U1 Neill-chromosomes’ enables Sykes to have some fun; it is said to be an example of the ‘Genghis effect’, that is, a very large numbers of men are descended from only a few genetically successful ancestors; ‘the longer a clan has been in place like the Isles, the more similar the Y-chromosomes become.’

Before political panic sets in among readers of Field Day Reviews let me emphasize that Sykes's use of DNA data is not being deployed to confirm some primordial conception of the Irish nation, but merely to show that Englishs anti-imperialisturo is poorly founded. I lack the competence to adjudicate the validity of inferences from technical genetic research, and would want a lot of assurances about the representativeness of the relevant DNA samples from which major historical conclusions are being drawn, but what can be said without fear of rebuttal is that neither Professors Elliott nor English have the authority to pronounce confidently on pre-modern Ireland's genetic make-up. And, to the extent that we can rely on current scientific evaluations, pre-modern Ireland was rather ethnically (and genetically) homogeneous. We may suspect that for English the assertion, and it is no more than, of that profoundly multi-cultural and multi-people 'far past' is intended to hide the largely dichotomous recent past or to sermonize for the present.

In the case of 'the Celts', English also strays from careful appraisal of the historical evidence, because of a keen determination to debunk Irish nationalist myths. He thereby misleads the general reader. The idea of a unified Celtic people — with a heartbeat in the former forests and mountains of Mitteleuropa — is indeed a recent construction, as certain archaeologists have loudly complained. But English errs when he declares that 'if no racial or ethnic group in Ireland in the ancient or medieval period, was known, or identified itself as Celtisthen we should not pretend that they did so, and the "Celts" is a title which therefore should be rejected for Irish people from these centuries.'

Geoffrey of Monmouth's influential — if largely fictive — 'The History of the Kings of Britain has the Celts as one of the five nations of the larger island. So some labelling of people as Celts did occur in the twelfth century. More importantly, we can and should use the word 'Celtic', in agreement with the canonical classifications of linguistic branches, to refer to Gaelic speakers, and writers. Such speakers, and writers, preceded English speakers, in history and in residence, on the island of Ireland, and on the neighbouring island. One can neither explain the past accurately, nor improve the political temper of the present, by seeking to deny homogeneity in pre-English Ireland, or by trying to efface the cultural and linguistic distinctiveness of Ireland from eastern and southern Britain before the twelfth, and indeed before the seventeenth century.
What is your methodological poison?

Two classes of canines roam in the social science jungle. They gather in packs which rarely rove. One growls, ‘So what? What’s the story? What does it all mean theologically?’ The other sends to bark, ‘What’s the method? How do you know what you know? Given that we know how difficult it is to know, why should we accept your conclusions?’ It is far easier to answer the growler than the harker. The harkers, like theologians, have many monosyllables among them, and want to know whether an argument survives their tests. Methodologically, Irish freedom is a disappointing mess, no matter how pluriplacal or less one is on these matters.

English deserves credit as a historian in a political science department for engaging in interdisciplinary reading. Such trespassing is still uncommon among Ireland’s cohorts of political historians, who have remained until recently somewhat dismissive of the social sciences, especially if educated in Cowbridge or Dublin. But even a sensible starting premise, exploring Irish nationalism requires a social-scientific influenced
historian to generate explicit hypotheses from the general theoretical literature, and to use these to account for the origins and development of Irish nationalism, its expression, and mobilization, and successes and failures. Secondary materials — and sometimes appropriate primary materials — should be used to appraise the merits or otherwise of these hypotheses. Such case-materials must be carefully selected to test the relevant hypotheses fairly — and are more compelling if treated through comparative analysis. A long sweep through the history of Ireland, mildly touched over as a history of Irish nationalism, with a selection bias toward intellectuals, followed by a general survey of the large social science literature devoted to explaining nationalism, with asides on Irish materials, and polemics among historians, does not meet the standards of either social science or of rigorous evaluative historiography.

In short, one cannot sensibly present an apparently detached "story" of Irish nationalism first, and then follow up with a general literature survey of the social science of nationalism, and leave it at that. Either the "story" is profoundly influenced by the literature survey, in which case it is theoretically "saturated", as the epistemologists say. Or it is not, in which case the survey must be defended according to some other clear principles of selection. No such clear principles are proffered. In fact, the story of Irish nationalist history presented here is far from a detached "account; it is an account of Irish history according to the currently conventional wisdom of those who unfortunately are called "revisionists", married to a series of rebutals of extremist or foolish Irish nationalist claims that are too often undocumented.24

Republican women protesting against Britain's execution of political prisoners in Mountjoy Jail, 1921. (Photograph: Topical Press Agency/Hulton Archive/ Getty Images.)

21 The expression "revisionist" is unfortunate because it stems from the Second International's debate between "orthodox" and "revisionist" Marxists (led by Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein respectively). It suggests a contrast between a calcified orthodoxy of Irish nationalism, and a refreshing adaptation of doctrine to reality. All historians should, of course, be open to the revision of their arguments — for example, upon the discovery of fresh data, or the demonstration that their interpretations have been unrepresentative of archival materials, or if they are shown to have contradicted themselves, or to have overlooked critical material. It is a few reasons for which revision is the appropriate response. Revisionist historians, so-called in Ireland, are, in the main, either opposed to or most aware of Irish nationalism, or regretful of the successes, political or cultural, of Irish nationalism. Their criteria are not anti-revisionist per se — that would be to embrace having a closed mind. Rather, they are either suspicious of, or at least one stream of Irish nationalism not happy to demonstrate that the revisionists have misconstrued or misrepresented the Irish past.
Le me submit some adjectival evidence on the 'revisionist' bias. We are told that Ian MacBride is 'the most authoritative historian of nineteenth century Presbyterian nationalism', and that Macartain Elliott is 'one of the most accomplished biographers'.

We are informed of Paul Bew's 'important series of books', of Roy Foster's 'compelling, two-volume biography', of Sena Patric's 'fascinating and fine treatment', and of Stephen Howe's 'judicious' discussion of whether Ireland had a colonial experience. No similar authoritativeness, accomplishment, importance, magnificence, fascination, horror or judiciousness appear to attach to the works of Irish nationalists, their sympathizers, or emitters, of those academics critical of revisionism. Now let me submit some bibliographical evidence. The collection on the revisionist controversy edited by George Boyce and Alan O'Day is frequented cited, whereas that edited by Ciaran Brady is not, period. Would it be unjust to conclude that is because anti-revisionists are more vigorously present in one of these works?

As noted, English hoped to provide 'an authoritative but accessible up-to-date, single volume account of what scholars now think and know on theThorn 1961, 'The Praise of Empires and Myth and Method of Kudor's Nationalism', New Left Review, 3rd series, 18 (2002), 160–3), and plan to do the same with Anthony Smith. The first was my doctoral examiner, the second a former colleague and chair of my former department, and I too taught an introductory seminar with the third for many years.

1. Are the questions or puzzles being answered or resolved in English's book set by the general explanatory literature in the works of major theorists of nationalism, for example the London School of Economics' The Kudorists, Ernest Gellner and Anthony Smith? Or Benedict O'Gorman Anderson, to give him his fully hybrid Irish name? Apparently not, because these theorems are surveyed at the end. They are not used to marshal the story, or stories, or to resolve controversies. At best the survey tells us how important thinkers have explained the salience of nationalism to the modern world.

2. Are the questions being answered set by the political claims made by Irish nationalist historians about Ireland's past, for example Eoin MacNeill, whose books are not cited in the bibliography? Again, apparently not, though 'easy pickings' are sought against popular historians such as Alice Sepprof Green, rather than engagements with tougher professional specimens such as J. Lee, L. Barry, J. Kent, Emma Linton, or Eamonn O'Mahony.

3. Are the questions being set by the claims of mobilized Irish nationalist activists, past and present, about their island's past, such as those of Irish Labour's James Connolly, Fianna Fáil's Frank Gallagher (some of whose books are cited), Sinn Féin's Gerry Adams, or the...
Social Democratic and Labour Party's John Hume? Yes, in part. (Indeed English
teachers are known to be generous toward Hume).

4. Lastly, do the questions flow from the
to the political opponents of Irish nationalism,
and how present, whether unionists,
conservatives or self-styled post-
nationalists?

In fact, one can find elements of all four
interrogative agendas in Irish Freedom
— the social scientific, those of the (actual
and presumed) nationalist historians, the
beliefs of popular politicians, and those we
may deem the Hibernophiles. But they are
scattered rather than gathered and considered
in sequence, and the general reader will be
as perplexed as me. English never explicitly
presents his explanatory agenda. Is the
question, "Why do Irish nationalists hold the
beliefs that they do?", or "How valid are the
beliefs of Irish nationalism?", or "Why do these
typical nationalist beliefs resonate among
some Irish people?"? Had these separate
puzzles been distinguished and evaluated one
might feel that some worthwhile explanation
had been accomplished.

Instead, the book reads like a flow chart
or a transcript of lectures. Not in the sense
that the prose is uniformly weak; though it
is careless, and wordy. Here is an example of
carelessness. From earliest times the
inhabitants of Ireland were racially mixed
rather than joined by ties of blood ... 26 Now,
other, the mixture resulted in interbreeding, in
which the inhabitants were joined by
ties of blood or, the mixture did not result in
interbreeding — in which case, in what sense
were they "mixed" other than by residency
of the same island? It is good to be against
racism, an ideology, but it is not wise to
confuse blood ties and kinship with racism.

Here is an example of the need for pruning:

Frequently, nationalism involves the
enforcing of attempted reversal of
power relations (imposing a national
empire, liberating a colony from imperial
control), by means of the use of power as
leverage. Much of the practical definition
of nationalism — what it does, to
day; how it affects people's lives; why it
appeals so much to people — involves
questions of the deployment of power as
attempted leverage. 27

Everything italicized could have been
previously cut.

The book, in short, has not been edited
down to produce a fully coherent argument.
The commendable aiming of the text at the
general reader has a price: a lot of
basic sociology, anthropology and indeed
Evolutionary psychology are presented
clarly, but histrionically, and occasionally
misleadingly. Parts Two and Three, the
general history of the nineteenth and
twentieth century, do not work, despite
their length, because too much is taken
for granted, and more care is devoted to
treating famous leaders' personalities than
narrating the political history of nationalist
organizations. Part Four, the explanation of
Irish nationalism, turns out to be an eight-
page guide to the general reader on recent
anglophone literature on nationalism, in
which accessibility leads to the sacrifice of
rigour and depth. Instead of isolating a range
of testable propositions on nationalism, and
evaluating them against Irish case-materials,
we are treated to an unsatisfactory account of
why nationalism has been so persistently
dominant in many modern lives.

What might have been done?

Let me provide examples to illustrate
a methodological underachievement, lest my
complainers seem pernickity. In each of the five
paragraphs that follow I take an agenda
from one or more thinkers, whose works
English has read, or might reasonably be
expected to know. The exercise provides
a synopsis of testable propositions and
questions that could have been the focus of a
Ernest Gellner's theory of nationalism has at least two testable implications: it predicts nationalism arising in conditions of unevenly developed industrialization and it predicts nationalist conflicts over state-management of modern (generic) primary, secondary and university educational systems. It also has a typology of 'nationalism-inducing' and 'nationalism-thwarting' situations, using three independent variables across two groups: access to political power, access to modern education, and access to a modern high culture. These testable
implications, and the typology could be explicitly evaluated, modified or falsified to appraise their merits in confrontation with Irish historiography. That would involve grappling with difficult questions, notably the meaning of 'high culture' (which is not a reference to annual music and opera). It would suggest, in particular, a detailed appraisal of research on the development of schooling and literacy education systems, and the controversies in which they gave rise. That is not attempted. It is simply not enough to reject Geel's approach by saying that Irish nationalism developed before industrialization developed in Great Britain — one needs to understand what Geel meant by 'industrialization', which was more than smelting furnaces and smoking factories, and to consider Geel's own responses to alleged cases of nationalism before industrialization, for example in the Balkans. It is also essential to consider what uneven development might mean, and to use census, demographic and economic data to evaluate literacies. But not one table graces English's book, even though he has read many books with the relevant data on these matters.

Elie Kedourie's theory of nationalism claims — wrongly — that nationalism was 'invented' at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a claim refuted by any dispassionate reading of the later writings of Wolfe Tone and other members of the United Irishmen before 1798.29 Kedourie's more interesting claim, elaborated in a later work on Nationalism in Asia and Africa and now directly considered by English, suggests that nationalism is spearheaded by 'marginal men', those situated between native and imperial cultures, as both in nature, and blocked from attaining the social mobility to which they think their education entitles them.30 The 'Stocked social mobility' thesis is partly investigated for late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century Ireland, notably in a quick survey of John Hutchinson's subsequently published doctoral thesis, some of which is cited by English, but not the census data.31 Moreover, no consideration is given to applying these insights explicitly and rigorously to the situation of Northern Catholics after 1921.

Michael Hechter's recent work, Containing Nationalism, is more innovative than his better-known earlier work on Internal Colonialism — the latter is not considered by English, though it produced some interesting debates.32 Containing Nationalism is cited, but simply as it seems, those numerous books that treat nationalism as a modern belief system. Containing Nationalism is more original than that, and could have been a fertile source of testable hypotheses, which seem to fit well with some of the materials that English presents. Part of Hechter's problem is to explain attempted secession as the departure of an existing territory, and its respective peoples from a state to create a new sovereign nation-state, and the commitment of secession. Secession is political, and has to be explained politically, he argues. His key idea in that secessionism is a strategic response to 'distracted rule', that is, to a political context's displacement of traditional elites who have enjoyed some degree of protovassal autonomy. 'Indirect rule' or 'autonomy', especially if applied early, and maintained with flexibility, launches secessionist dispositions through the incorporation of key political elites. An obvious agenda suggests itself, a comparative assessment of the Welsh, Scottish and Irish dispositions to secede from the United Kingdom. The successful 'containing' of nationalism was in fact the norm in ascendant empires in which systems of indirect rule or dual polities were technological necessities. By contrast, the modern centralized and statetribe state, facilitated by the resources of industrialization and modern militarism, disrupts older modes of autonomy and is therefore more likely to produce active responses in the periphery. This theoretical lens is suggestive for Irish history. It treats nationalism as a dependent variable, and central state activity as the independent
variable. Its key hypotheses are that attempts to conquer Ireland and to accompany them with direct rule from London provoke nationalist responses — whether in the reactions of Gaelic lords unhappy with metropolitan efforts to monopolize political patronage, or of those eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish Protestant Patriots seeking to govern Ireland without reference to London. Hechter’s lens suggests that accompanying centralization with novel settler elites (and the importing of massively disruptive white settler societies) is even more likely to provoke nationalist responses. The approach suggests that the break-up of the Union was the predictable consequence of refusing a house rule settlement early and flexibly. It suggests that we should read the Act of Union as an act of centralization and the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 as a related effort to “contain nationalism” by creating two local Irish forms of home rule. Explaining the failure to deliver a home rule settlement before 1920 in turn requires a focus on Irish Protestants (especially Ulster Protestants), not as Protestants per se, but rather in their historic formation as privileged settlers. Hechter, like Gellner and Kedourie, in short, is not mined for explanation in the way he could be. Even though English has read all three authors, and summarized part of what they say, he has not used them for explanatory purposes.

Secession may also be conceived as the end-point of a regime’s failure to render a territory’s status ‘hegemonic’, that is, unquestionably part of the ‘natural’ order. Political scientist Ian Lustick’s Unsettled States, Disputed Lands, not cited, is a major effort to explain why Britain, France and Israel respectively failed to render the incorporation of Ireland, Algeria and the West Bank and Gaza as ‘hegemonic’.33 His answer lies in regime actions, in particular the fearful decision in each case to build settlements displacing native elites and some native populations but without entirely expelling or exterminating the natives. The existence of colonial entities within parliamentary regimes posed a simple dilemma: democratization and the expansion of full citizenship would unwind the respective conquests and damage the interests of the descendents of settlers. Vocations on this thesis lie at the heart of many recent accounts of conflict in Northern Ireland. English does not explore this thesis directly, perhaps because he has not read Lustick’s version, or perhaps because he has made his mind up that settler colonialism has no role to play in explaining the breakdown of home rule, partition or the development and mobilization of (Northern) Irish nationalism.

A fifth source of explanatory review could have arisen from considering why Irish nationalist secessionist movements have failed (most basic), and why only one has partly succeeded. In the wider world the number of failed secessions always exceeds the number of successful secessions, and we need to explore both failures and successes. That secessions frequently fail is specified to the strength of states, and the difficulties faced by secessionists. Should we seek uniform explanations of all attempted secessions (or successful secessions, or the failures)? Is geopolitics what matters? — that is, whether the relevant territory is controlled or contested by great powers. Are geography and topography important? Is the potentially secessionist territory mountainous, insular, contiguous? Is the military strategy of the nationalists that is decisive for their chance? Or the regime’s counter-insurgency strategy? Does democratization — through the formation of new elites and followings — precipitate the conditions for secessionist success? Do material factors matter? Is the region backward or advanced? The analytical questions continue without pause. When are secessions contested? When are they accepted? In contested cases, secessions are called ‘separatist’ or ‘traitorous’, by ‘unionists’ (or ‘federalists’). The language suggests betrayal within the family. Are such unionist claims ‘nationalist’?
Materialist theories of secession emphasize exploitation. The secessionists may claim they are being taxed without representation. They may claim the land system is exploitative, that it benefits settlers, or that the tariff system benefits the metropolis. The secessionists may argue that secession is in their collective material self-interest. There is an abundance of Irish historiography to test such claims. Materialist explanations have problems: How do we judge their comparative importance, as motivations, or as causes? 'Group pride' and 'group self-esteem' may relate to economic variables in non-linear ways — that is, groups may seek self-government even when it is neither objectively nor subjectively in their material self-interest. 'Ethno-nationalism' may matter more than 'eco-nationalism', as Walker Connor has crisply put it. The Irish data, properly evaluated, may sustain Connor's thesis. Cultural theories of secession, by contrast, emphasize cultural differences. These theories conform with nationalists' self-conceptions of their mobilizations and they are what English tends to accept. Yet secessionists may have significantly acculturated into the culture of the dominant group before they secede. Irish nationalists had become more like the English before the War of Independence; Northern Irish nationalists, it is widely agreed, had become more like the British before the civil rights movement and the launch of the Provisional

34 Walker Connor, 'Eco- or Ethno-Nationalism?', Ethnic and Racial Studies, 7 (1984), 142–59
IRA. The disposition to secede within a state may not be strongly related to cultural differences between potential secessionists and the dominant culture. Welsh speakers are far more culturally differentiated from Westminster than working-class Belfast Catholics. Political theories of secession, by contrast, generally suggest that there are variables matter in explaining nationalist support among (prospective) citizens of a secessionist state. They are 

fear for their 

national group — which may include cultural 

fears, but may also be a response to past 

or anticipated repression; expectations 

of prospects for prosperity; and, lastly, 

recognition (of identity or status), that is, the group is seen respected as an equal, or not. The 'strong democracy thesis' 

suggests that democracies stop secessions because they reduce fear, enhance prosperity and settle recognition disputes (as optimistic Castilian nationalists say of modern Spain). The converse implication is that Irish nationalism became secessionist because the United Kingdom was not democratic in the right ways. Explanations of this nationalism therefore require a rigorous appraisal of the British state and its public policies since at least 1798. That is not provided in this book.

On building bridges between one's eyes

Having suggested the linguistic and methodological blind spots of Irish Freedom, let me turn to the ideological fallings, where objective appraisal is necessarily more difficult. English critics Gerald of Wales for seeing 'history writing as involving a moral dimension', but he has morals of his own which he rarely imparts. He wishes to emphasize the permanently hybrid character of Ireland's population. He prefers to emphasize interaction, exchange and diffusion in British-Irish relations rather than conquest, colonization and control. He isolates and mocks weak points in Irish nationalist historiography and political propaganda rather than property

addressing the catastrophic dimensions in Irish history that provided Irish nationalists with their well-documented and non-mythical resentments against British rule. He perhaps concentrates too much on politically radical Irish nationalists — the United Irishmen, the Fenians, the IRA — and not enough on moderate Irish nationalist organizations — the Repeal movement, the Irish Parliamentary Party, the parties of independent Ireland and of Northern nationalists. The ideas of Irish liberals and non-socialist republicans are treated with less scrutiny than those of leftists, socialists, and fascists — whose taxes have always been those of demographic minorities and Ireland's nationalist feminists, as always, are rather neglected. Data on clerics per person among Protestants compared with clerics per person among Catholics are not provided. Personal jibes are occasionally odd. Erskine Childers' use of cocaine is remarked on; it is not remarked that it did not stop him from being a first-class analyst of legal materials. And so on.

Rather than engage in tedious questioning of every normative judgement of the work, it is better to assess its ideological content by considering what it deals with briskly — or ignores. It treats Oliver Cromwell's conquest of Ireland over one page. No estimates are provided of the total death toll this deeply unpleasant man and his henchmen produced, both in war and through laying waste fields. William Petty, a pioneering demographer, suggested one third of Ireland's population died as a result of war, disease and deliberately induced famine in Cromwell's reconquest of Ireland. No reference is made to Cromwell's partially implemented expulsion programmes, offering Hell as an alternative condominium to residency in Connaught. A stature of this man — whom Irish nationalists typically consider a genocidal murder or an ethnic cleanse, or both — stands outside the House of Commons of the Westminster parliament. No contrast better represents the rival narratives of English and Irish nation-
building. Perhaps we can put matters in a different comparative perspective. What would one think of a 625-page history of Zionism that minimally referenced expansions and mass slaughter of Jews at the hands of European rulers? Or a 625-page history of Palestinian nationalism that dealt with the suppression of the Arab Revolt and the expulsion of the Palestinians over one long paragraph, without data? The Cromwellian massacres are locally and inter-nationally "contextualized" by English. He observes that they occurred after the 1648 massacres of Protestant settlers in Ulster, for which a figure of 4,000 dead is provided (but with no citation); and, more obscurely, after the slaughter of Protestant settlers in Magdeburg in 1634. English does not believe that to explain all is to excuse all, but this type of "contextualization" veers toward apologia.

The neglect of major colonial settlements and moments of conquest and their long-term repercussions is consistent. There is a method here. The Statutes of Kilkenny (which are not quoted), we are told, said much more than just that the Englishness of the English in Ireland should be preserved from corrupting Gaelic influences, but it is for this that they tend to be remembered. The Penal Laws were treated over a page and half, with main words deployed there to suggest their non-implementation. One can only expect some two centuries hence that an Africana historian will emphasize that the apartheid laws were often not applied, and fell into desuetude. I say this in response to English's un解析ised and unjustified aside that "between the Irish Penal Laws and the twentieth century South African apartheid laws are utterly misconceived".

He wants to emphasize the centrality of religion in the eighteenth century, and here the method reveals itself. If religion rather than colonialism is analytically primary, then Irish nationalism can be presented as collective - he prefers "communal" - sectarianism, rather than as movements to reverse the conquest(s). The argument is this: Protestants fought and displaced Catholics from power in the seventeenth century; the Catholic population was not ethnically homogeneous, because it was a fusion of the Old English and the Irish; ergo, it was not - then - an ethnic conflict, but a religious conflict. Yet the very fact that we can talk of the New English, the Old English and the Irish, and that English himself does so, shows the lack of ethnic differentiation, and conflict. That new settlers displaced previous settlers from power does not mean there was no distinction drawn between colonizer and colonized. Rather, the new conquest and settlement meant that the Old English who had acculturated with the Irish were reclassified as Irish Catholics, and as political inferiors. Geoffrey Keating's work, not cited, foundational for Irish nationalism, deliberately sought to incorporate the Old English into a shared Gaelic national past in opposition to the imperial New English.

The allegation that religion was the great divide - rather than the major marker of the distinction between colonizer and the colonized - is said by English to demolish "any neat sense that Irish nationalism-versus-unionism involved a native-settler division: not only were many modern Irish unionists not descended from the Plantation [sic], but many of the supposed nationalist "natives" were themselves drawn from comparatively recent waves of immigration." This statement is most revealing. Sentiment accompanying conquests are conflated with voluntary economic immigration, English assumes, without citation, that "many" modern Irish unionists are not descended from the Plantation settlers. Such statements are typical, but I have never seen them statistically verified, or documented, either by demographers or geneticists. They may be true, depending on what we mean by "many." If they are true, that means there must either be excessive evidence of conversion, intermarriage or illicit sex.

36 Irish Freedom, 44-45
37 Irish Freedom, 64-66
38 Irish Freedom, 81; my italics
40 Irish Freedom, 64-65

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across the religious boundary, or extensive
evidence of immigration of Protestants
into Ireland since the eighteenth century,
or some conjunction of such phenomena,
which, peculiarly, escaped the attention of
contemporaries and subsequent historians.

As for the assimilation of the Old English
and the Gaelic Irish, this is well attested,
and denied by none, and was celebrated
by Geoffrey Keating (c. 1569–1646), but
this assimilation occurred outside of Ulster,
because the latter was conquered late.

English’s ideological perspective is plain let
us not code the recent conflict as a settler-
native conflict. As he puts it, “can people
born in a country, and possessing ancestors

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there who date back very many years, really be delegitimized as insubstantial settlers? Would this be an argument to deploy against Americans with Irish, or Polish, or German, or Italian ancestry, or against Pakistanis or West Indians in contemporary England? The rhetoric is revealing, but the moral heat leads to loss of intellectual control. If there is any 'delegitimating' going on, it is presumably because people are alleged to be authentic rather than insubstantial settlers—or descendents of such settlers. The argument conflates voluntary immigrants (the Irish and Poles in America and the Pakistanis and West Indians in England) with settler colonists who dispossessed natives. Most importantly, the slippage reveals how politically important it is for him to code the key conflicts of recent times as religious rather than as rooted in a past settler-native confrontation. The former coding suggests that the Catholics of Ireland become the historical problem; the latter coding suggests that the British state and its settlers become the historical focus. These respective ways of framing Irish history are not likely to be resolved by empirical evidence, as English's cavalier approach to evidence on this crucial matter suggests. But both framings should be evaluated properly in any large scale explanatory evaluation. It does not occur to English that the settler colonisation as a key factor in explaining Irish nationalism's strength has no necessary consequence on political prescription. It does not follow that any settlers' descendents should be expelled. It does not follow that their presence in Ireland is now politically illegitimate, even if some say so. Explanation and prescription are not always tightly coupled.

For English, the key question of modern Irish history is 'Why did the Reformation fail in Ireland?' The assumption is that had it not failed, there would have been almost no Irish Catholics, and ergo, no Irish nationalism. He reviews a range of explanations for this failure, including: the lack of royal will (including closet Catholic kings); the lack of state capacity; the strength of reformed Catholic institutions; and 'the lack of guile, craft and subtility involved in the attempted Protestant implementation'. He says that 'Numerous mistakes were made. Rather than dealing with the relevant Irish elites ... as allies, the Tudor regime increasingly relied instead on the policy of plantation or settlement.' And they preached Protestantism in English rather than Gaelic. These 'mistakes', as we are to call them, made Protestantism seem foreign, and 'the Reformation came to be seen as an English, foreign imposition ... In contrast ... Catholicism came to be seen as native and indigenous'—even though, as he has spent time trying to establish, Irish Catholicism (via St. Patrick) was a British import. The Tudors, like any other policymakers, were capable of errors, but they embarked upon colonial settlements for a reason. They wanted to secure Ireland. The failure of the new Protestants to push extensively in Ireland may also have been no mistake: seeking conversion across the linguistic boundary would have removed the barriers between the new colonists and the Irish.

A last reflection. No history of Irish nationalism can avoid evaluation of violence, including insurgent violence, state repression and paramilitary brutality. English has an entirely commendable distance for violence. But he is not impartial between his state and Irish nationalists. He cites Michael Davitt on the view that 'England's rule in Ireland is government by physical force, and not by constitutional methods', and observes that such views could legitimate 'cruel and awful acts'. Yet he does not directly engage Davitt's thesis with sequence. There is a consistent underemphasis in his book on the repressive and illiberal nature of British rule in Ireland— a judgement that is not intended to justify a single killing by any Irish nationalist, past or present. General Lake's coercion of Ulster before the 1798 uprising, the police surveillance of nineteenth-century republicans, the
He writes of Robert Emmet that 'to truth the notion that Irish freedom could be won and Irish difference resolved through violence remains as questionable now as it was in 1803.' Independent Ireland obtained its freedom through both democratic and violent means. Its independence was resisted both by coercion and undemocratic means. After a very long period of violence, Northern Ireland now has an admirable political settlement. It would be pleasant to conclude that both of Ireland's current political regimes could have materialized without violence by Irish nationalists, but, regrettably, nothing in English's book compels this conclusion.

Spinoza, the free modern secular democratic republican, declared that the purpose of the state is political freedom. The typical mobilizing purpose of political nationalism is freedom from an enemy or from a state that blocks collective self-government or otherwise misgoverns a nation. Ireland's nationalists did not win self-government from the British state by exclusively peaceful means. It is unclear that they could have done so. Ireland's history within the Union of Great Britain and Ireland, and Northern Ireland's subsequent history within the Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, is a repudiation to those who favour regulating national, ethnic and religious differences through integrationist and unitary governance. Integration has its place with immigrant minorities, but it cannot provide national minorities. The prospective resolution of the Northern Ireland conflict shows the merits of concessions and federal philosophies, institutions, policies and norms. A more flexible British state might have been able to deliver a federal reconstruction of the Isles in the nineteenth century which would have left Ireland associated with but not subordinated to the British state. It did not do so partly because it was in the grip of an inter-ethnic unionism — a British nationalism. Yet Robert Emmet's epitaph may be written because his country has taken its place among the free nations of the earth.