



***Conquest and Land in Ireland: The Transplantation to Connacht, 1649-1680.* John Cunningham. Suffolk, UK: Royal Historical Society Publications/Boydell Press, 2011. 240 pages. ISBN: 978-0861933150. \$90.00.**

Matthew C. Reilly, Syracuse University

Nearly two decades ago Declan Kiberd cleverly posited the question, "If God invented whiskey to prevent the Irish from ruling the world, then who invented Ireland?" (1995: 1). Unlike Kiberd's critical literary approach to this question, John Cunningham's *Conquest and Land in Ireland: The Transplantation to Connacht, 1649-1680* (2011), is an in-depth analysis of the historical processes associated with the policies of transplantation to provide a more lucid understanding of the events that so dramatically affected the creation and recreation of modern Ireland. Although this crucial period in Irish history has received significant scholarly attention for well over 100 years (see Prendergast 1868), Cunningham's work is a welcome, detailed, and well researched contribution to this widely known but frequently misunderstood period. While at times suffering from a lack of historical context and a select focus on those holding higher social status or power, Cunningham successfully illustrates the nuances of transplantation policy, politics, and practice without clouding the overall significance and impact of the consequences. Cunningham begins where most historians of this period have focused their attention, with Oliver Cromwell. Using Cromwell as a point of departure, Cunningham begins the volume arguing that, "The history of Ireland in the 1650s is synonymous with Oliver Cromwell and with his supposed pronouncement on the fate of the Catholic population: 'Go to hell or to Connacht'" (1). As Cunningham goes on to explain, Cromwell's legacy is indelibly stamped upon Irish history and memory and has been a focal point of Irish/English historiography (see for example Micheál Ó Siochrú's 2008 volume, *God's Executioner: Oliver Cromwell and the Conquest of Ireland*). However, Cunningham's thorough literature review indicates that Cromwell's legacy needs to be placed within a larger historical context if we are to more fruitfully unpack the nuances of transplantation. It is within this brief introduction that Cunningham provides the majority of his own historical context, sweeping through prior English plantation efforts in Ireland since the 1550s and the rebellion of 1641 to bring the reader to the Cromwellian invasion of 1649 (8-9).

One of Cunningham's goals, that he later explicitly states (152), is to remove the spotlight (as well as some of the heavier blame) from Cromwell and to emphasize the roles of other essential players in the Cromwellian settlement and later transplantation. Here Cunningham is largely

successful as he compellingly illustrates the role played by Cromwell's son-in-law, Henry Ireton, in Ireland from 1649 until his death in 1651. In Cromwell's absence from Ireland, Ireton's campaign would prove significant beyond its militaristic sieges of Royalist/Catholic strongholds. Ireton established policies (qualifications) that sought to establish the level of involvement of individuals who participated in the 1641 rebellion as well as their allegiances during the 1649-1652 campaign. The subjective and ambiguous qualifications established by Ireton had an essential, controversial, and highly contested impact on the allocation of land during transplantation. This assessment of Ireton's lasting effect on Ireland is well-supported by Cunningham's use of substantial amounts of primary materials to not only describe the events that unfolded, but to examine Ireton's motivations, behavior, and character. Cunningham provides ample evidence to support his claim that Ireton's "rather haphazard approach to completing the conquest had produced a problematic and incomplete framework for accommodating the existing population in post-war Ireland" (30).

The ensuing discussions of settlement and transplantation highlight the emerging debates and political entanglements that occurred from 1652 to 1680 between parties with vested interests in Irish lands, including governing bodies in Dublin and London, Cromwellian soldiers, Ulster-Scots, Royalist Irish Catholics, Irish/English Protestants, and hopeful adventurers from England and the New World. Cunningham begins this section of the book by tacking back and forth between the Dublin and London dialog that ultimately led to the official policies of transplantation, focusing on the development of policy in Dublin and the time lag experienced in the ratification of these policies by the English Parliament. During the mid-1650s the development and legitimation of policy was centered on two questions: who were the responsible parties/individuals for the 1641 rebellion and the war that followed, and what was to be done with them? As Cunningham notes, "The Catholics of Ireland were believed to be guilty of committing widespread massacres in 1641, and they were held responsible for the long and costly war. By 1653, in the face of schemes of confiscation and transplantation, it appeared unlikely that they would be able to win any significant concessions" (56). In general, this state of affairs persisted (100, 154). However, Cunningham suggests that things were not quite this simple when viewed at the local level and that the conflict transcended essentializing notions of the Irish Catholic/English Protestant binary opposition.

In order to tackle these rather large issues and debates surrounding who was to lose lands, whom these lands were to be granted to, who was to be transplanted, and what lands they were to be granted in Connacht, Cunningham focuses on specific individuals and locales as examples of what took place throughout Ireland. He chooses to trace the stories of the Galway townsmen, the Leinster officers, and those who held and were granted land in Co. Roscommon. These scenarios act as microcosms for the larger processes of transplantation and the controversies associated with the actual confiscation, granting, and settling of the land. Cunningham draws the reader's attention to the seldom discussed Athlone court and Loughrea Commission. Here Cunningham poignantly illustrates the distinction between the policies of transplantation and what actually happened on the ground. For example, while thousands of acres of land were granted to Irish Protestants and Catholics in Connacht by decrees in Athlone, in fact it seems that 150,000 acres were granted that didn't actually exist, making the task of the Loughrea Commission of hearing appeals all the more challenging (90).

The final chapter of the volume preceding the conclusion reminds the reader that the process of transplantation was not solely a phenomenon of the 1650s. As Cunningham convincingly argues, disputes over land titles, and attempts by Irish Catholics to receive compensation for lands lost outside of Connacht, persisted into the 1670s. He also describes the attempts of the Catholic population to return to prominence following the Restoration and their overall disappointment as the situation changed little through the 1660s and 70s. Cunningham concludes by tying the events of the mid-seventeenth-century to contemporary Ireland. He briefly mentions a few examples of the lasting impact of the transplantation on the landscape, through family names and lineages, as well as architecture (both standing and razed). Cunningham thereby reminds the reader of the contemporary significance of events surrounding the transplantation for the creation of modern Ireland.

Overall, Cunningham has done a superb job of analyzing previously underutilized primary materials from a period that has been covered by other scholars. As he notes in his introduction, many if not most of the documents directly relating to these events were lost in the fire of 1922. However, he has identified seemingly tangential resources, most notably appeals to Dublin, London, Athlone, and Loughrea, to acquire a more complete grasp of the controversies surrounding transplantation politics and the reactions to those politics and practices. From an empirical standpoint the volume is a substantial contribution to modern Irish history and should be valued for its detailed analysis of a poorly understood episode in Irish history. After introducing Cromwell and suggesting that his role in transplantation politics has been overstated, Cunningham does an excellent job of elaborating on the critical role played by Ireton as the primary architect of the "Cromwellian" settlement. From here he provides the reader with exquisite detail of the nuances of the transplantation, from the development of its policies, its early faulty attempts to be put into practice, its ambiguity and contestation, and its ultimate consequences for the landscape and people of Ireland.

On the other hand, when viewed from a broader perspective, the book leaves something to be desired in terms of its coverage of the historical context. As the title suggests, the work is concerned with the period from 1649 to 1680, and the author strictly adheres to this timeframe. There is an acknowledgement that the militaristic campaign beginning in 1649 stemmed from the 1641 rebellion, yet little evidence is presented to support this theory of the significance of the rebellion. Furthermore, and on a wider scale, transplantation policy and practice are discussed outside the realm of the larger colonizing efforts in Ireland, specifically the Ulster and Munster plantations. While the plantation efforts of the early seventeenth century are mentioned in passing (33), their significance and interconnectedness with the Connacht transplantation are largely ignored. Additionally, this lack of historical context makes the volume difficult to digest for those not familiar with the period in question. A more thorough engagement with the historical context of the transplantation era would have provided a more holistic analysis of the events based on evidence that could speak to the discourse of colonialism in Ireland prior to the Cromwellian invasion. In particular, the work of Nicholas Canny (1973; 1988; 2001), who is thanked in the acknowledgements, would have proved quite useful in providing such context and is only cited in passing (4, 90).

Cunningham's comments surrounding the politics and discourse of Irish historiography also warrant discussion. The author argues that there has been a recent shift to "post-revisionist"

Irish historiography that has tended to focus on the mid-seventeenth-century (3-4). While the nature of this so-called "post-revisionist" turn is unclear, it is true that historians, literary scholars, and archaeologists alike have turned towards postcolonial theory to support or critique the politics of Irish historiography (see for example Carroll and King 2003; Horning 2011). Rather than labeling such studies "post-revisionist", it seems more useful to describe recent work as attempting to reveal the nuances of historical events aside from politics, colonial binaries, and nationalistic antagonisms, an approach also taken by Cunningham's work. In other words, while acknowledging a paradigmatic shift within Irish historiography, the author remains rather neutral and instead adheres to an empiricist positioning. This volume successfully illustrates the hardships incurred by English, Irish, Catholic, and Protestant individuals during the years of transplantation. But as Cunningham points out, the larger historical facts remain, namely that "these processes entailed a drastic reduction in Catholic proprietorship, from around 61 per cent of the land of Ireland in 1641 to less than 10 per cent by the end of the 1650s" (100).

Catholics and Protestants clearly experienced the years of transplantation differently, but in addition to political, religious, or nationalistic binary oppositions, class played a crucial role. Due to the nature of the historical record for the period under examination, Cunningham is largely restricted to documenting the experiences of the upper classes of Ireland from all sides of the conflict. While Catholics, Protestants, Irish, and English land owners all met with varying degrees of success and failure (generally more failures for Irish Catholics), the working classes were affected most dramatically. Although such individuals found an advocate in the Earl of Essex (135-149), Cunningham is largely silent regarding the fate of the thousands of Irish individuals who were unable to send lawyers or representatives to Dublin or London to plead their cases. Such individuals didn't lose several thousand acre estates and were not promised hundreds of acres of arable land in Connacht like the Irish Catholic and Protestant aristocracy. Although Cunningham claims that his volume attempts to "fill some of the gaps" of how individuals who were not part of the aristocracy fared during the transplantation (154), the reliance on a limited and top-heavy historical record to do so makes this an extremely challenging task.

In spite of these shortcomings, the volume is empirically rich and a valuable resource for scholars interested in modern Irish history as well as those interested in global transplantations. Cunningham's attention to detail unearths new perspectives on the transplantation years. He has successfully shifted the spotlight from Oliver Cromwell, a feat that I believe is necessary for a more lucid understanding of the period. Additionally, Cunningham has made a strong case for how class and social standing played a far more crucial role in determining the fate of land owners than religious, political, or nationalistic alliances (although it is clear that these identity markers were still significant). The volume would have benefitted from a deeper historical context and a more critical engagement with the discourse and practice of colonialism that led to the policies and practices of transplantation. However, the book still provides new depth and dimensions to a critical period that has shaped the course of modern Irish history.

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Endnotes

- ¹. See Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 1999.
- ². David Marquand, 'After Whig imperialism: can there be a new British identity?', in *New Community*, Vol. 21, No. 2, p.188.
- ³. Ibid. See Nairn, *The Enchanted Glass: Britain and its Monarchy*, updated 2nd edition, Verso, London, 2011.
- ⁴. Quoted p. 84.
- ⁵. Quoted p. 101.
- ⁶. Quoted, p. 50.
- ⁷. Quoted, p. 3.

