

Ireland, 1641  


MANCHESTER  
1824  
Manchester University Press

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Published by Manchester University Press  
Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9NR, UK  
and Room 400, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA  
[www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk](http://www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk)

Distributed in the United States exclusively by  
Palgrave Macmillan, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York,  
NY 10010, USA

Distributed in Canada exclusively by  
UBC Press, University of British Columbia, 2029 West Mall,  
Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z2

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library  
Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data applied for

ISBN 978 0 7190 8817 9 hardback

First published 2013

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Typeset  
by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong  
Printed in Great Britain  
by The MPG Books Group, Bodmin

This volume is dedicated to John Morrill,  
a great colleague and true friend of Irish history

## 1641 in a colonial context

NICHOLAS CANNY

When, for the purposes of this chapter, I was commissioned to consider the Irish Insurrection of 1641 in a colonial context it brought to mind D. B. Quinn's excellent but now seldom-cited 1966 book, *The Elizabethans and the Irish*, and particularly its ninth chapter 'Ireland and America intertwined'.<sup>1</sup> This chapter was devoted principally to two issues. The first focused on how negative depictions of Native Americans constructed by Elizabethan adventurers were sometimes evocative of, or even influenced by, what English adventurers had to say of the social and political mores of the populations of Ireland, especially the Gaelic Irish. It also considered the reverse of this: how English adventurers in Ireland sometimes likened what they described as the 'manners' of the Gaelic Irish to social practices they associated with the native population of America. Quinn was keenly conscious of the preposterous nature of Elizabethan claims that the Gaelic Irish and Native Americas were kindred peoples. He had no doubt, however, that some Elizabethan authors, and their readers in England, were convinced that the Gaelic Irish and Amerindian peoples operated at a similarly low level of cultural attainment, which corresponded with that of the ancient inhabitants of Britain before they had been brought to a civil condition through a process of conquest.<sup>2</sup> This implied, of course, that the English had a moral obligation to bring the native Irish and the native Americans to civility through a process of conquest in the same way that the ancient Romans had rescued their own ancestors from barbarism. The second problem posed, but not resolved, by Quinn considered whether the rhetorical representation of people in a negative or dismissive fashion made it easier for some English adventurers to inflict cruel or extra-legal actions (including massacre) upon elements of the Gaelic Irish and Native American populations.

Quinn's work on Ireland, however, has fallen out of favour with many recent historians, and particularly with advocates of the New British History

who take a special interest in the early modern period. Rather than concede that Ireland's historical experience during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was significantly different from that of Britain in matters other than confessional choice, the New British historians concentrate on what Ireland and Britain shared in common. Consequently, they tend to dismiss English negative portrayal of Irish people as inconsequential rhetoric, and to disregard evidence that the English crown government did not always intend to absorb all elements of the population of Ireland into a single British polity. While few practitioners of New British History take cognizance of the very extensive secondary literature on English (and also Scottish) efforts to create British-like communities on the far side of the Atlantic, they also discount the evidence that English officials in Ireland resorted to legal and military stratagems that would not have been considered appropriate for England and Wales; whatever of Scotland.<sup>3</sup> This chapter will attempt to extend the Quinn discourse into the seventeenth century, and in the course of doing so reopen the debate over the context English people of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries considered appropriate for discussing the condition of Ireland.

There are continued references by seventeenth-century English people to the supposed cultural shortcomings of Irish and Native American populations, cited with the purpose of debasing both peoples. In the case of Ireland, however, English invective against the different segments of the country's population tapered off after the first decade of the seventeenth century, when conditions became more orderly throughout the country. Moreover, disparaging comments became increasingly couched in the rich anti-Catholic rhetoric commonplace in England, rather than the cultural terms favoured in Elizabethan discourse on Ireland.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, when studied together over the full course of the seventeenth century, the differences between England's engagement with societies in Ireland and North America are more striking than the similarities. Also, as the seventeenth century proceeded, the promoters of plantations in the two locations competed with each other to attract desirable Protestant settlers from Britain or further afield.<sup>5</sup> The fact, however, that Ireland was subjected to repeated phases of plantation during the early modern centuries indicates that it was treated differently from the other domestic jurisdictions of the British monarchy. Indeed, many in Britain considered Ireland to be a place where colonies might be established even when the jurisdiction as a whole was being described as a kingdom.

Evidence of parallels between England's engagement with Ireland and North America can be found in violent actions against Native American peoples during the early decades of the seventeenth century. The massacre of the population of an entire village of Pequot Indians by English colonists in 1637, for example, bore some resemblance to mass killings enacted by English soldiers

on Rathlin Island in 1575 and at Mullaghmast in 1578. However plausible it might be to liken these events, it is impossible to point to any direct causal connections, given that those responsible for the Pequot massacre were hardened soldiers who had fought with the Elizabethan army in the Low Countries, rather than veterans of the Irish war during the final years of Elizabeth's reign.<sup>6</sup> Colonial parallels for what happened in Ireland in 1641 (or for particular episodes within what was a very complex disturbance) prove equally difficult to find. Essentially, the Irish insurrection of 1641 represented an assault by the Catholic Irish upon the English and Scots who had settled in their midst. The search for an American counterpart to this major Irish conflagration, therefore, must be confined to episodes where Native Americans engaged in what the English described as a surprise attack upon 'defenceless' victims; of which there are many examples.<sup>7</sup>

Among the English-language texts devoted to a discussion of what happened in Ireland in 1641, many of those composed *after the event* portrayed an unjustified attack upon innocent settlers. Plentiful evidence within these texts suggests that English authors again drew upon the vocabulary of cultural disparagement rampant in Elizabethan writing on Ireland. On the other hand, those, whether Irish or English, who wrote of the condition of Ireland in the decades *previous to 1641*, usually represented Ireland as a kingdom, and rejected the colonial template as inappropriate for sustained discussion. Nonetheless, some English officials who then expounded on Ireland still made some use of the culturally abusive language of the Elizabethans, mingled now with the florid vocabulary of anti-Catholicism, whenever they sought to justify the expropriation of the property of surviving Irish landowners. Lord Deputy Thomas Wentworth certainly believed that his allegations of the cultural and religious deficiencies of the Irish justified him in depriving them of much of their property and denying them rights and liberties which people in England took for granted. Wentworth also reverted to the narrow English view, widely held in Elizabeth's reign, that the Scots (whether Catholic or Protestant, Highland or Lowland) had no business in Ireland, and could be treated with contempt. More controversial in the eyes of contemporaries was his further contention that English-born Protestants, resident in Ireland for less than a generation, had become corrupt within a colonial environment where he contended English ethical norms did not apply.<sup>8</sup>

Nonetheless, participants in political debate during the first half of the seventeenth century, including Wentworth, generally chose a more measured vocabulary than their sixteenth-century predecessors when discussing Irish affairs. This is explained in part by the fact that the crown government now dealt with a more compliant population, which included substantial communities of English and Scottish Protestant settlers. These newcomers, for the most part, displaced those most vehemently opposed to English rule in

Ireland, who had either been killed in wartime or fled the country to take refuge in Catholic Europe.<sup>9</sup> The generally peaceful condition of Ireland from 1603 to 1641 encouraged many to see the country as one of the three composite monarchies ruled over by the British crown. Many Catholic exiles, and those in Ireland who identified with them, also took to describing Ireland as a kingdom, albeit a kingdom that might be offered to a Catholic monarch from the continent.<sup>10</sup> Those exiles who sought a more radical solution for the future governance of Ireland similarly looked to European rather than colonial models. These contemplated a Republic that would make allowance for provincial (and presumably ethnic) particularities, which, for them, would be a Catholic counterpart to the Protestant Republic in the United Provinces.<sup>11</sup>

Spanish intervention in the Nine Years' War, 1594-1603 is another factor that accounts for the normalisation, or Europeanisation, of the vocabulary employed to discuss the condition of Ireland. Before this, English commentators depicted most conflict in Ireland either as unwarranted rebellions against a legitimate monarch fought by renegades who adopted cowardly guerrilla tactics and refused to confront the crown army in the open field, or as wasteful internecine warfare that produced mindless destruction of property and the impoverishment of the most vulnerable in Irish society.<sup>12</sup> Once Spain became formally involved, participants on both sides took to describing the war, especially when discussed retrospectively, as part of a wider European Catholic/Protestant conflict.<sup>13</sup> Defeat for the Catholic interest meant the loss of property and political power for the Catholic population of Ireland, as would have happened to the defeated side in any such European conflict. Moreover, the advocates of the Catholic interest, and most particularly those who went into exile in the aftermath of defeat, represented themselves to the Spanish authorities as people who had suffered harsh penalties for their attachment to their faith and to the Spanish crown, rather than as victims of a colonial conflict. They believed that they could look forward to a recovery of what they had lost only in the event of a further outbreak of hostilities between England and Spain.<sup>14</sup>

On the other side, while English and Scottish Protestants in Ireland (or those who spoke on their behalf) still represented themselves as being engaged upon a civilising and missionary endeavour, they seldom pronounced their mission in colonial terms, except when advocating plantation as the prime instrument for Anglicising and Protestantising the country. They also took to describing the Nine Years War as a European conflict, in which English forces, aided by Irish allies, confronted an invasion force supplied by the Spanish monarch and supported by those in Ireland opposed to the English crown. Moreover, the rejection by some Irish of the crown's authority was increasingly attributed to the persuasions of Irish Catholic bishops, inspired by the Papacy, rather than as the product of innate barbaric opposition to civility.<sup>15</sup>



After attaining victory in the Nine Years War and implementing a sequence of plantations, most notably in the Province of Ulster, British Protestants in seventeenth-century Ireland portrayed themselves as a dominant minority, whose pre-eminence over feeble demilitarised opponents would be threatened only in the event of the discontented elements within the country receiving military assistance from Spain, or more specifically from Irish regiments in the army of Spain. Protestant clergy in Ireland proved less sanguine, but even their jeremiads were couched in terms that would have been familiar to Protestants throughout Europe. In these they predicted that if true believers in either Britain or Ireland strayed from the path of righteousness, God would permit evil to befall them, at least for an interlude, as a trial of their faith, while keeping a watchful eye on the fate of Protestant communities in Bohemia, the Palatinate and elsewhere on Continental Europe.<sup>16</sup> Speaking in these apocalyptic terms, the clergy readily recalled the martyrologies of those who had died for true religion in these and other European conflicts, particularly in Marian England and during the course of the Wars of Religion in France. This mode of thinking explains why, when the doomsday situation did materialise in the shape of the Irish Catholic uprising of 1641, some clergy immediately devoted themselves to compiling witness statements from among the Protestant survivors, which would among other things supply material for an Irish Protestant martyrology analogous to Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*.<sup>17</sup>

Taking their lead from contemporary explanations, historians of the twenty-first century (including the present author) have interpreted the outbreak of the 1641 insurrection in Ireland either in a Three Kingdom's context or as part of a broader Catholic/Protestant conflict that culminated in the Thirty Years War.<sup>18</sup> The colonial context, however, so frequently invoked in the discourses of the sixteenth century, was never entirely forgotten by English contemporaries. In the months and years after the 1641 insurrection it re-emerged more plainly in the writings of those Protestants who sought to explain why the Irish Catholic population rose in arms to slay their unsuspecting Protestant neighbours. They began by locating events within a European context contending that the Pope with his priestly conspirators had used the Catholic landowners to effect the destruction of all the Protestants in Ireland. For some, this assault presaged the first step towards reversing the success of the Protestant Reformation in England and Scotland as well. As they proceeded, however, several authors attributed the sheer brutality and perverse destruction, which they described in detail, to the innate barbarism of the Irish. This subsequently justified wreaking total revenge upon the perpetrators, as England's rulers had long been responsible for eliminating barbarism from Ireland.

Most commentators, including the continental authors Gerard and Arnold Boate, who drew their information from Irish Protestant refugees in London

as well as from personal observation, cited the twelfth-century commentaries of Giraldus Cambrensis to support their claims concerning the innate barbarism of the Irish. The events of 1641 confirmed for the Boate brothers what they had read of the Irish in Cambrensis and in the works of other medieval detractors, when 'those barbarians, the naturall inhabitants of Ireland' not only 'murdered or expelled their English neighbours (upon whom with an unheard-of and treacherous cruelty they fell in the midst of a deep peace without any the least provocation)' but they also:

endeavoured quite to extinguish the memory of them, and of all the civility and good things by them [the English] introduced amongst that wild nation; and consequently in most places they [the Irish] did not only demolish the houses built by the English, the gardens and enclosures made by them, the orchards and hedges by them planted, but destroyed whole droves and flocks of English Cows and Sheep, so as they were not able with all their insatiable gluttony to devour the tenth part, but left the rest lie stinking and rotting in the fields.<sup>19</sup>

The Boate brothers and other Protestant commentators attributed the character of the Irish assault upon an unsuspecting settler population to a cultural recidivism innate to all barbarians. Here they were influenced by medieval and Elizabethan authors who had expounded on the 'degeneration' of successive waves of civil settlers introduced to Ireland through the centuries. Through their access to an altogether more fertile repertoire of atrocity narratives (actual or exaggerated) than had been available to Elizabethan authors, they described in more graphic terms than their predecessors how an apparently civil people could revert to barbaric practice. For example, in the late sixteenth-century when the poet Edmund Spenser strove to evoke revulsion against barbaric practice, his depiction of ghoulish behaviour came from classical, mythological or entirely fictional incidents, more than from reference to contemporary incidents in Ireland or the Netherlands, which he only occasionally alluded to, and then in veiled allegory.<sup>20</sup> Protestant authors of the mid-seventeenth century, however, who wished to depict any particular people as barbaric had less need to look to classical literature for suitable illustrations of inhumane actions because they could presume that their audiences would be familiar with an extraordinary range of the tortures and cruel rituals that humans inflicted on each other. Woodcuts and copper engravings regularly enhanced texts devoted particularly to portraying the tyranny inflicted by Catholics upon true believers. Representations of Spanish cruelty in the Low Countries were often augmented by reference to the treatment meted out by the conquistadores to the native populations of the Americas. Those who wished to render more compelling depictions of Spanish tyranny extended their purview to the colonies and took to citing the moralising criticism of the missionary priest Fra Bartolomé de Las Casas. Las Casas

complained that Spanish colonists in the Americas excessively exploited the native population to advance their own enrichment, neglecting their missionary responsibilities in the process. Protestant anti-Spanish literature took the complaints of Las Casas out of context, while Las Casas himself became almost a Protestant divine by adoption.

Reference to America, and the alleged Spanish tyrannising there, opened the way to representations of the cruelties, cannibalism and sexual aberrations supposedly practiced by Native American peoples within their own communities. The general atrocity literature absorbed these accounts, which were often conflated by publishers, encyclopaedically as in Theodore de Bry's *America*, published from Frankfurt and quickly reprinted and translated into the principal northern European languages during the early years of the seventeenth century. In addition to the wealth of information, De Bry's *America* also served as a powerful Protestant polemic that enriched the imagination of Protestants whenever they contemplated victim experience, by effecting a visual cross-fertilisation of the cruelties practiced in various parts of the world. These sometimes made reference to the ungodly barbarism of Native American populations, but they devoted particular attention to the tyranny of Catholics, whenever they had the opportunity to laud it over others, whether Native Americans or upholders of the true religion.<sup>21</sup>

The fertility of Protestant imagination in conjuring up images of atrocity helps explain the readiness with which Protestants survivors from the 1641 insurrection in Ireland came forward with lurid horror stories, which they swore had been narrated to them by credible third party witnesses. Many of the stories from the depositions were further recorded in the multitude of pamphlet narrations of these same events, published in the immediate aftermath of the insurrection, and thus came to be accepted as truth by a wide British Protestant audience. Modern scholars frequently dismiss these accounts as nothing more than propaganda reliant entirely on hearsay evidence. Events such as spectacles appearing at the sites of atrocity both before and after the episodes being described; pregnant women being hanged and delivered of dead infants while on the gallows; babies being torn from the wombs of women; foetuses being fed to dogs; the heads of babies being shattered on rocks; and human fat being rendered into candles, may never have occurred, but these would have seemed very real to those who heard and read of them, not least because of their familiarity with conflated atrocity narratives within Europe and beyond.<sup>22</sup> These narrations did much to convince a wider public that the Irish who perpetrated these atrocities were not only bloody papists but also outlandish barbarians, living beyond the realm of civil as well as of Christian community.

The narrators and publishers of such alleged atrocities not only reverted to the Elizabethan practice of levelling charges of cultural depravity against

the Irish, which they sustained by reference to barbaric practice, they also pointedly chose modes of presentation which readers would have associated with stories of attacks perpetrated by Native Americans upon English settlers. In fact, the structure of the most potent Protestant text that accounted for, and described, the Irish Catholic insurrection of 1641 was almost identical to the best-known narration of a widely publicised English colonial reverse; the so-called Virginia massacre of 1622. The two texts are Sir John Temple, *The Irish Rebellion: or, an History of the Attempts of the Irish Papists to extirpate the Protestants in the Kingdom of Ireland; together with the Barbarous Cruelties and Bloody Massacres which ensued thereupon*, published in London in 1646, and Edward Waterhouse, *A Declaration of the State of the Colony and Affairs in Virginia with A Relation of the Barbarous Massacre in the time of Peace and League*, published in London in 1622.<sup>23</sup>

English officials in Ireland during the 1640s attributed the planning of what they asserted was an intended massacre of all Protestants in Ireland to the Pope and his priestly agents in Ireland. The views of Sir John Temple, Master of the Rolls in the Dublin administration, accorded with this interpretation.<sup>24</sup> His book, *The Irish Rebellion*, seemed very European in its focus. He likened the task of explaining and describing the events of 1641 in Ireland to that undertaken, but never completed, by Monsieur du Plessis, a minister of state to King Henry IV of France, 'to write a History of those times wherein he lived', which for du Plessis involved the Wars of Religion in France, including the notorious St Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572.<sup>25</sup> As with du Plessis in the case of France, Temple wished posterity to know 'of the first beginnings and fatal progress of this rebellion, together with the horrid cruelties most unmercifully exercised by the *Irish Rebels*, upon the *British and Protestantis* within this Kingdom of Ireland'.<sup>26</sup>

Temple traced the origins of the Irish who, despite the efforts of missionaries from Britain during medieval times to effect 'the conversion of a barbarous people', retained their 'depraved and barbarous manners' until 1172, when King Henry II of England undertook 'to conquer Ireland and reduce those beastly men unto the way of truth'.<sup>27</sup> There, according to Temple, King Henry found:

a beastly people indeed; for the inhabitants were generally devoid of all manner of civility, governed by no settled laws, living like beasts, biting and devouring one another, without all rules, customs, or reasonable constitutions, either for regulation of property, or against open force and violence; most notorious murderers, rapes, robberies, and all other acts of inhumanity and barbarism, raging without control, or due course of punishment.<sup>28</sup>

This condition of the people, averred Temple, left King Henry with no option but to seize 'by the sword . . . all the lands of the whole kingdom'. This action was further justified, claimed Temple, because:



the land itself he found it good, and flourishing with many excellent commodities, plentiful in all kinds of provisions, the soil rich and fertile, the air sweet and temperate, the havens very safe and commodious, several towns and little villages scattered up and down in the several parts of the country; but the buildings so poor and contemptible, as, when the King arrived at Dublin, their chief city, and finding there neither place for receipt or entertainment, he set up a long house made of smooth wattles, after the manner of the country, and therein kept his Christmas.<sup>39</sup>

Temple deployed the juxtaposition between a barbarous people and a fruitful land throughout his narration to explain how, over the centuries, several English monarchs had introduced civil institutions and civil colonies to Ireland. They repeatedly found, however, that whenever the settlers extended the hand of friendship the Irish took advantage of the situation to attack them, so that 'Ireland hath long remained a true *Acelanda*, a Field of Blood, an unsatiated sepulchre of the English nation'.<sup>40</sup> According to Temple, many believed that the comprehensive military victory attained by the army of Queen Elizabeth, and by the subsequent sequence of plantations had brought this cycle of violence to an end. The Protestant newcomers

who with great cost and much industry, planted themselves so firmly, as they became a great security to the country, and were a most especial means to introduce civility in those parts: so as now the whole Kingdom began exceedingly to flourish in costly buildings and all manner of improvements; the people to multiply and increase, and the very Irish seemed to be much satisfied with the benefits of that peaceable government, and general tranquillity, which they so happily enjoyed.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, during the reign of King Charles I, Irish Catholics had been ruled over by a government that was most 'sweet tempered, and carried on with great lenity and moderation'.<sup>42</sup> The authorities had even allowed Catholics to enjoy 'the private exercise of all their religious rites and ceremonies . . . without any manner of disturbance'.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, claimed Temple, the condition of the country was so placid that:

the ancient animosities and hatred which the Irish had ever observed to bear unto the English nation, they seemed now to be quite deposited and buried in a firm Conglutination of their affections, and national Obligation passed between them. The two nations had now lived together 40 years in peace, with great security and comfort, which had in a manner consolidated them into one body, knit and compacted together with all those bonds and ligatures of friendship, alliance and consanguinity, as might make up a constant and perpetual Union betwixt them. Their intermarriages were frequent, gossiped, fostering, relations of much dearness among the Irish, together with all others of tenancy, neighbourhood, and service, interchangeably passed among them; nay, they had made as it were a kind of mutual transmigration into each others manners,

many English being strangely degenerated into Irish affections and customs, and many Irish, especially of the better sort, having taken up the English language, apparel, and decent manner of living in their private houses.<sup>44</sup>

As he contemplated the sudden cancellation of such marks of reciprocal respect once the Irish resorted to rebellion on 23 October 1641, Temple was convinced that the apparent contentment of the Irish Catholics had been cynically simulated. They had been plotting, he now proclaimed, to insinuate themselves into the homes and communities, as well as into the affections, of the settlers so they would have the opportunity to 'seize most treacherously' the fortified positions held by the English, and to surprise, rob and murder all British Protestants in Ireland. According to Temple, this stratagem proved so successful that the 'English were . . . easily over-run . . . and so suddenly swallowed up before they could make any manner of resistance in the very beginnings of the rebellion'.<sup>45</sup> During the course of this onslaught, claimed Temple:

their servants were killed as they were ploughing in the fields, husbands cut to pieces in the presence of their wives, their children's brains dashed out before their faces; others had all their goods and cattle seized and carried away; their houses burnt, their habitations laid waste and all as it were at an instant, before they could suspect the Irish for their enemies, or any ways imagine that they had it in their hearts, or in their power, to offer so great violence, or do such mischief unto them.<sup>46</sup>

Temple cited the prevailing tranquillity in the months prior to the insurrection, the suddenness of the insurrection itself, its universality, and the common form that the assault upon the English assumed in all parts of the country, as proof that the insurrection had been long in preparation. The intelligence provided to the government in Dublin by Owen O'Connolly on the night of 22 October 1641, of the plans by a significant number of Irish Catholic noblemen and their followers to seize Dublin Castle, gave concrete form to Temple's circumstantial evidence. Temple described O'Connolly as 'a gentleman of a mere Irish family, but one that had long lived among the English, and had been trained up in the true Protestant religion'. His information, which officials initially considered implausible, ultimately led to a series of arrests which, according to Temple, saved the Castle from being taken and the Protestants in Dublin from being butchered.<sup>47</sup> Finally, the examinations, 'taken upon oath' from the Protestant survivors of the insurrection, provided for Temple the ultimate proof that the rebels intended a comprehensive massacre of settlers. From these witness statements, he averred:

it may easily be conjectured how fatally the first Plot took, how furiously the rebels, throughout all parts of the kingdom, proceeded in their bloody executions, and what were the courses they took to bring about so suddenly the universal destruction of all the British and Protestants there planted.<sup>48</sup>

Temple, in common with his colleagues in the Dublin government, attributed the ultimate responsibility for the insurrection to priests, who had:

charmed the Irish, and laid such bloody impressions upon them, as it was held, according to the Maxims they had received, a mortal sin to give any relief or protection to the English. All bonds and ties of faith and friendship were now broken; the Irish landlords made a prey of their English tenants; the Irish tenants and servants a sacrifice of their English landlords and masters; one neighbour cruelly murdered by another; the very Irish children in the very beginning fell to strip and kill English children; all other relations were quite cancelled and laid aside, and it was now esteemed a meritorious act in any of them that could, by any means or ways whatsoever, bring an Englishman to the slaughter.<sup>39</sup>

According to Temple, the Irish had been easily gulled by their priests to act as they did because they remained every bit as barbaric as their ancestors who King Henry II had encountered. Temple contended, however, that the Irish in 1641 operated more viciously and effectively than their twelfth-century progenitors because they:<sup>40</sup>

living promiscuously among the British in all parts, [and] having from their Priests received the watch-word both for time and place, rose up, as it were actuated by one and the same spirit, in all places . . . at one and the same time; and so in a moment fell upon them, murdering some, stripping only or expelling others out of their habitations.

Temple concluded from this most recent manifestation of barbarous treachery by Irish people that no further effort should be made to bring them to civility. Rather, he pronounced, the English were now liberated from all previous constraints and free to have:<sup>41</sup>

such a wall of separation set up betwixt the Irish and British as it shall not be in their [the Irish] power to rise up (as now and in all former ages they have done) to destroy and root them [the British] out in a moment.

The solution of permanent separation offered by Temple was clearly a colonial one, based on the contention that the Irish were not amenable to civil any more than religious reform. Thus, notwithstanding his acknowledgment of the service rendered by Owen O'Connolly who had proven himself a true convert, Temple decreed, as emphatically as any Elizabethan author had ever done, that the Irish as barbarians should never henceforth be considered the cultural or legal equals of English people. Temple justified his recommendation by reference to Irish and European precedent, and, like his Elizabethan counterparts, he drew heavily upon the anti-Irish invective of Giraldus Cambrensis. Unlike the Elizabethan authors, however, Temple made no reference to England's civilising role in North America to illuminate his views on Ireland. Neither he, nor his readers, would have considered this

necessary because in the intervening half century several literatures of atrocity had been conflated into one, which represented all barbarians – whether from Europe or America; from past centuries or from the present – as similarly bent on the destruction of civil people and the symbols of an ordered life.

The extent to which Temple's *The Irish Rebellion* can be taken as a prime example of atrocity literature conceived in the colonial mode becomes clear when it is considered together with *A Declaration of the State of the Colony and Affairs in Virginia* by Edward Waterhouse, whose possible relative of the same name and of equally forceful opinions had served in Elizabethan Ireland.<sup>42</sup> The Waterhouse text described the so-called massacre of 347 English settlers by 'Native Infidels' in the colony of Virginia on 22 March 1622, and prescribed for the future security of that colony.<sup>43</sup> Faithful to the colonial atrocity genre, Waterhouse not only explained why it had been possible for despised enemies to enact the particular atrocity, he also advocated revenge and a fresh beginning. This latter would occur only with the arrival of new settlers to replace those who had been slaughtered. They would be placed in a secure environment which no enemy might penetrate. Each text, therefore, served as a *vade mecum* for those planters, settlers, clergy, artisans, merchants and wives considered necessary to advance the wealth and security of the specific colonial site under discussion. In order to be plausible, this reportage had to be based on 'eye-witness' accounts or on letters from credible sources. Thus, whereas Temple cited letters from contemporaries who had been in Ireland when the insurrection occurred, as well as depositions from survivors, the 'truth' in the Waterhouse text was 'drawn from the relation of some of those that were beholders of that tragedy, and who hardly escaped from tasting of the same cup, as also from the letters . . . by the Governor and other gentlemen of quality'.<sup>44</sup>

Given their longer-term purpose, colonial discourses always waxed lyrical on the plentifulness of the natural resources associated with a site for possible future settlement. Temple spoke eloquently of the paradisiac environment that had greeted King Henry II in Ireland, while Edward Waterhouse described Virginia as a:

spacious and fruitful country . . . naturally rich, exceedingly well watered, very temperate, and healthful to the inhabitants, abounding with as many natural blessings, and replenished with as goodly woods, and those full of deer and sundry other beasts for man's sustenance; and the seas and rivers thereof (many therein being exceeding fair and navigable) as full of excellent fish of diverse sorts, and both water & land yielding as great variety of fowl, as any country in the world is known to afford.<sup>45</sup>

As Temple did when describing Ireland a quarter of a century later, Waterhouse, attributed the backwardness of Virginia to the indigenous inhabitants: 'whose



barbarous savageness needs more cultivation than the ground itself, being more overspread with incivility and treachery, than that [the ground] with briars'.<sup>46</sup>

Notwithstanding the untamed character of the natives of Virginia, the English who encountered them, claimed Waterhouse, found them seemingly docile to the point where the newcomers dedicated themselves to reforming civil and spiritual conditions with their:

houses generally set open to the savages, who were always friendly entertained at the tables of the English, and commonly lodged in their bed chambers . . . their familiarity with the natives, seeming to open a fair gate for their conversion to Christianity.<sup>47</sup>

Because the English in Virginia proceeded gently with the natives, it proved possible to negotiate:

a peace (as all men thought) sure and inviolable, not only because it was solemnly ratified and sworn, and at the request of the native king stamped in brass and fixed to one of his oaks of note, but as being advantageous to both parts; to the savages as the weaker, under which they were safely sheltered and defended; to us, as being the easiest way then thought to pursue and advance our projects of buildings, plantings, and effecting their conversion by peaceful and fair means.<sup>48</sup>

This 'conceit of firm peace and amity', which subsequent events proved to be but 'treacherous dissimulation of that people who then had contrived our destruction', convinced the English in Virginia to abandon their usual defensive precautions.<sup>49</sup> In the lead up, therefore, to the day of the planned massacre, 'there was seldom if never a sword worn, and a piece seldom except for a deer or fowl'. This gullibility of the English, rather than the potency of the natives, explained how the English became victims of 'the devilish murder that ensued'.<sup>50</sup>

In this instance, Waterhouse described, as Temple did of 1641, how the natives established 'a general combination [and] in one day plotted to subvert their whole colony, and at one instant of time' to murder all settlers dispersed in 'several plantations' on either side of the Chesapeake waterway.<sup>51</sup> The stratagem of the natives involved going 'unarmed . . . without bows and arrows, or other weapons' into the houses of the English on the evening of the 21 March 1622 and also 'on the Friday morning (the fatal day) the 22 March', bringing with them:

deer, turkeys, fish, furs, and other provisions to sell and truck with us for glass, beads and other trifles; yea in some places sat down at breakfast with our people at their tables, whom immediately with their own tools and weapons, either laid down or standing in their houses, they basely and barbarously

murdered, not sparing either age or sex, man, woman or child; so sudden in their cruel execution, that few or none discerned the weapon or blow that brought them to destruction.<sup>52</sup>

In Virginia on 'that fatal Friday morning' a total of 'three hundred forty seven men, women and children':

fell under the bloody and barbarous hands of that perfidious and inhumane people, contrary to all laws of God and men, of Nature and Nations . . . most by their own weapons, and not being content with taking life alone, they fell after again upon the dead, making as well as they could, a fresh murder, defacing, dragging, and mangling the dead carcasses into many pieces, and carrying some parts away in derision, with base and brutish triumphs.<sup>53</sup>

Waterhouse reported that those killed in Virginia constituted but a fraction of the total settler population – 'about eleven part of twelve still remaining'. The majority had been saved from the intended 'universal slaughter' only 'by the means of some of themselves converted to Christianity'. These native converts, as would be the case with Owen O'Connolly in 1641, become God's 'instruments' to save the lives of those 'whose souls they had formerly saved'.<sup>54</sup> Unlike the reports of 1641, where the name of Owen O'Connolly became celebrated as the *converso* whose intervention saved Dublin's Protestants from slaughter, the Christianised Indians were identified only by the names of their masters who had effected their conversions. It became possible, therefore, to depict all as a 'false hearted people, that know not God nor faith'.<sup>55</sup> As John Temple would do with *The Irish Rebellion*, Waterhouse concluded his text on a triumphant note, pronouncing that the English whose hands had previously been:

tied with gentleness and fair usage [were] now set at liberty by the treacherous violence of the savages . . . so that [the English] who hitherto [had] had possession of no more ground than their waste, and our purchase at a valuable consideration . . . may now by right of war and law of nations, invade the country, and destroy them who sought to destroy us; whereby we shall enjoy their cultivated places, turning the laborious mattock into the victorious sword (wherein there is more both ease, benefit and glory) and possessing the fruits of other labours.<sup>56</sup>

Waterhouse carefully identified by name and location of all the English who had been killed, because each was now 'a glorious martyr' and also, in a manner similar to the 1641 depositions, to ensure 'that their lawful heirs, by this notice given, may take order for the inheriting of their lands and estates in Virginia'.<sup>57</sup>

The texts by Edward Waterhouse and John Temple were not only read extensively by the English audience to which they were initially addressed but proved potent in reminding settlers of succeeding generations in Virginia

and Ireland that they should be constantly on their guard against native assault. This, in itself, establishes them as colonial texts, but when they are considered together similarities also emerge between the two publications under the headings of themes, tropes and format. This is not to suggest that Temple plagiarised Waterhouse or was even familiar with his account of the 1622 massacre. The similarities can more probably be attributed to the fact that each belongs to a textual genre of colonial discourse, fashioned to explain, describe and take lessons from assaults launched by those represented as barbaric peoples upon civil settler communities. The formulaic reports suggest that the details had been chosen selectively (if not fabricated) in order to justify the dramatic remedial action being recommended. Each of the two authors would have recognised that the course outlined as a guide for future policy deviated from what would have been considered acceptable by British, or indeed Christian, norms. An appreciation of this reality explains why each chose for his discourse a genre specifically designed to 'exoticise' and dehumanise their adversaries. This, in turn, enabled them to account for the collapse of the relationship between the English/British settler communities and those native peoples for whose governance they had assumed responsibility. The newcomers resorted to sententious outpourings in preference to engaging upon a critical analysis of their own dealings with the populations they depicted as their cultural inferiors. They concluded that people, who by their actions and way of life had proven themselves to be uncivil, could be denied those entitlements to property, political authority or even to life itself, previously conceded to them by the English. In each instance, a case was made to justify further acts of expropriation and colonisation, leading to a consolidation of English power and the advance of civility into previously barbaric places.

This brings us back to the question with which this chapter opened - whether it is appropriate to locate developments in seventeenth-century Ireland within a colonial context? The evidence suggests that the answer is less straightforward than the question. The Catholic population of Ireland, and particularly those of Gaelic ancestry, always resented being likened to barbarians or American Indians. As the seventeenth century progressed, they began to place greater emphasis than their sixteenth-century forbears on an entitlement to be considered a European nation. English observers proved more willing than their Elizabethan predecessors to acknowledge Ireland as a kingdom, with the potential to become a constitutional equal to the kingdoms of England and Scotland, where the inhabitants might enjoy the same rights under the law as did English subjects of the same crown. Despite such benevolent expressions, some officers of the crown in Ireland continuously challenged the titles of Irish landowners. Moreover, some publicists constantly harkened back to the arguments of the Elizabethans that the Irish could not

be trusted with the ownership of property and with political power either, because they were Catholic, or uncivil, or both. As a result, the position of Irish subjects under the English crown was altogether less secure than that of their English or Scottish counterparts within their respective kingdoms. Any ambivalence towards the Catholic community in Ireland in normal times gave way at moments of crisis to the certainty that they had no entitlement to be considered civil people, much less subjects of the British monarchy.

Sir John Temple is a prime example of an official who lost no time in locating the Irish insurrection in a colonial context, and in formulating the argument that the insurrection provided an opportunity to the English to enter upon a fresh phase of colonisation. Unlike the Elizabethan authors, however, who penned texts to the same purpose, Temple drew no parallels between England's engagement with Irish Catholics and simultaneous English engagements with the indigenous population of North America. Temple did not see the need to make such connections, as Irish Catholics were clearly barbarians, and had repeatedly demonstrated their unwillingness to be absorbed into civil society. Temple's negative recommendations clearly went beyond being mere rhetoric. As a senior government official he could directly influence policy, but more importantly his idea to place a permanent wall of separation between Catholic and Protestant people in Ireland clearly inspired some of the more draconian measures considered by Cromwellian officials just a few years later.<sup>58</sup>

Historians, therefore, have no choice but to follow the example set by David B. Quinn in 1966 and keep an open mind to considering developments in early modern Ireland in a colonial context, if for no other reason than that English actors of the time sometimes did so. This enabled them to justify the employment of extreme measures in Ireland that involved the curtailment of fundamental rights, which would have been considered reprehensible if recommended for application within England. Historians who disregard discontinuities in practice between what happened in Britain and Ireland, and ignore extreme assertions, such as those made by Sir John Temple in *The Irish Rebellion*, have little prospect of understanding the totality of the relationship between Britain and Ireland during the early modern centuries.

## NOTES

1 D. B. Quinn, *The Elizabethans and the Irish* (Ithaca, 1966), pp. 106-22; see also Quinn, *Ireland and America: Their Early Associations, 1500-1640* (Liverpool University Press, 1991); Quinn was writing in the tradition of Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia, 1964), which is also a book now seldom cited.

2 This suggestion was promoted pictorially in the drawings of John White where his depiction of the inhabitants of Roanoke island were juxtaposed with those of



Ancient Picts and of a Tartar or Uzbek man; see Paul Hulton, *America 1585: The Complete Drawings of John White* (Chapel Hill and London, 1984).

- 3 For two very different examples of challenge to the Atlantic approach, see Hiram Morgan's review of Nicholas Canny, *Kingdom and Colony: Ireland in the Atlantic World, 1560–1800* (Baltimore, 1988), *International History Review*, 13 (1991), 801–6 and Rory Rappaport, 'Writing about violence in the Tudor kingdoms', *Historical Journal*, 54 (2011), 829–54. For a convenient introduction to the debates concerning the New British History, see Alexander Grant and Keith Stringer, *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History* (London, 1995); and for an example of the New British History in Irish history, see Steven Ellis and Sarah Barber (eds), *Conquest and Union: Fashioning a British State, 1485–1625* (London, 1995). For an example of a multi-authored collection on early modern Ireland that deliberately concentrates on Irish commonality with Britain and continuity over time, see Cianan Brady and Jane Ohlmeyer (eds), *British Interventions in Early Modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2005); see also a review of that volume by Nicholas Canny, in *English Historical Review*, 121 (2006), 840–2. For a volume that, while not conceived in the Atlantic mode, exposes a fault line in the New British History paradigm, see David Edwards, Pádraig Lenihan and Clodagh Tait (eds), *Age of Atrocity: Violence and Political Conflict in Early Modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2007), which is that discussed by Rory Rappaport in the publication cited above.
- 4 Alan Ford, *The Protestant Reformation in Ireland, 1590–1641* (Frankfurt am Main, 1985).

5 The extent to which the British experience of populating Ireland countered their efforts to draw settlers to America is discussed in Nicholas Canny, 'The origins of Empire: an introduction', in Nicholas Canny (ed.), *The Origins of Empire*, vol. 1: *The Oxford History of the British Empire* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 1–33; for an example of some seventeenth-century continuity of practice between Ireland and America, see Annaleigh Margey, 'Representing Colonial landscapes: early English maps on Ulster and Virginia, 1580–1612', in Brian Mac Cuarta, S. J. (ed.), *Reshaping Ireland, 1550–1700: Colonization and its Consequences – Essays Presented to Nicholas Canny* (Dublin, 2011), pp. 61–81.

6 On Rathlin Island, see Nicholas Canny, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: A Pattern Established, 1565–76* (Hassocks, 1976), p. 90; on Mullaghmast, Vincent Carey, 'John Derricke's image of Ireland, Sir Henry Sidney and the massacre at Mullaghmast, 1578', *Irish Historical Studies*, 31 (1999), 305–27; Ronald Dale Karr, 'Why should you be so furious': the violence of the Pequot War', *The Journal of American History*, 85 (1998), 876–909; many English soldiers who fought in Ireland during the Nine Years War, 1594–1603, were, of course, veterans from conflict in both the Netherlands and Brittany.

7 Jill Lapore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York, 1998), Lapore discusses the 'slippery' nature of words used to describe atrocity by which she means that when actions described by the English as atrocity are considered from a 'native' perspective they can be described as retaliatory actions exerted by an unjustly dispossessed people upon vainglorious colonists; this conflict of opinion has been present in discussions during every century concerning the Irish insurrection/rebellion of 1641.

- 8 Nicholas Canny, *Making Ireland British, 1580–1650* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 279–85.
- 9 Gráinne Henry, *The Irish Military Community in Spanish Flanders, 1586–1621* (Dublin, 1992).
- 10 Bernadette Cunningham, *The Annals of the Four Masters: Irish History, Kingship and Society in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Dublin, 2010); Breandán Ó Buachalla, *The Crown of Ireland* (Research Papers in Irish Studies, 3, Galway, 2006).
- 11 Tomás Ó Fiach, 'Republicanism and separatism in the seventeenth century', *Léachtaí Chóim Cille*, 2 (1971), 74–87; more generally Hiram Morgan (ed.), *Political Ideology in Ireland, 1541–1641* (Dublin, 1999); Jane H. Ohlmeyer (ed.), *Political Thought in Seventeenth Century Ireland: Kingdom or Colony* (Cambridge, 2000); it is significant that the model of government chosen by the Catholic Confederation during the 1640s and 1650s was structured on provincial lines.
- 12 Canny, *The Elizabethan Conquest*.
- 13 Óscar Recio Morales, *Ireland and the Spanish Empire, 1600–1825* (Dublin, 2010); Hiram Morgan (ed.), *The Battle of Kinsale* (Bray, 2004).
- 14 Morales, *Ireland and the Spanish Empire*; Igor Perez Tostado, *Irish Influence at the Court of Spain in the Seventeenth Century* (Dublin, 2008); Benjamin Hazard, *Faith and Patronage: The Political Career of Flaitírlí Ó Maolchonaire, c.1560–1629* (Dublin, 2009).
- 15 Canny, *Making Ireland British*, pp. 165–76.
- 16 Ford, *The Protestant Reformation*.
- 17 On the many purposes behind the collection of the depositions see Aidan Clarke, 'The Commission for the Despoiled Subjects, 1641–7', in Mac Cuarta (ed.), *Reshaping Ireland, 1550–1700*, pp. 241–60.
- 18 Raymond Gillespie, 'The end of an era: Ulster and the outbreak of the 1641 rising', in Cianan Brady and Raymond Gillespie (eds), *Natives and Newcomers: The Making of Irish Colonial Society* (Dublin, 1986), pp. 191–213; Michael Perceval Maxwell, *The Outbreak of the Irish Rebellion of 1641* (Dublin, 1994); Canny, *Making Ireland British*, pp. 461–550.
- 19 Gerard Boate, *Ireland's Natural History* (London, 1652), reprinted in *A Collection of Tracts and Treatises Illustrative of the Natural History, Antiquities . . . of Ireland* (Dublin, 1860), pp. 1–148, at p. 77.
- 20 Canny, *Making Ireland British*, pp. 1–58.
- 21 Jean Frédéric Schaub, 'Violence in the Atlantic: sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', in Nicholas Canny and Philip Morgan (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World, 1450–1850* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 113–29.
- 22 The 1641 depositions can be accessed online at <http://1641.tcd.ie>.
- 23 John Temple, *The Irish Rebellion: or, an History of the Attempts of the Irish Papists to extirpate the Protestants in the Kingdom of Ireland; together with the Barbarous Cruelties and Bloody Massacres which ensued thereupon* (1646); the page references are from the London edition published in 1746; Edward Waterhouse, *A Declaration of the State of the Colonie and affairs of Virginia: With a relation of the Barbarous Massacre in the time of peace and league, treacherously executed upon the English by the native infidels* (London, 1622).
- 24 Aidan Clarke, 'Temple, Sir John (1600–77)', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (9 vols, Cambridge, 2009), vol. ix, pp. 293–6.



- 25 Temple, *The Irish Rebellion*, preface, p. v.  
 26 *Ibid.*, p. vii.  
 27 *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.  
 28 *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.  
 29 *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.  
 30 *Ibid.*, p. 13.  
 31 *Ibid.*, pp. 20-1.  
 32 *Ibid.*, p. 23.  
 33 *Ibid.*, p. 24.  
 34 *Ibid.*, p. 25.  
 35 *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 68.  
 36 *Ibid.*, pp. 61-2.  
 37 *Ibid.*, p. 30.  
 38 *Ibid.*, pp. 215-16.  
 39 *Ibid.*, p. 61.  
 40 *Ibid.*  
 41 Temple, *The Irish Rebellion*, preface, p. viii.  
 42 Terry Clavin, 'Waterhouse (Waterhouse), Sir Edward (1535-91)', in McGuire and Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, ix, 807-8.  
 43 Waterhouse, *Declaration*, title page.  
 44 Waterhouse, *Declaration*, sig. A3v.  
 45 *Ibid.*, sig. B2.  
 46 *Ibid.*, sig. C2.  
 47 *Ibid.*, sig. C2v-C3.  
 48 *Ibid.*, sig. C2v.  
 49 *Ibid.*, sig. C3.  
 50 *Ibid.*, sig. C3.  
 51 *Ibid.*, sig. Dv.  
 52 *Ibid.*, sig. C3, C3v.  
 53 *Ibid.*, sig. C3v.  
 54 *Ibid.*, sig. Dv.  
 55 *Ibid.*, sig. A3v.  
 56 *Ibid.*, sig. D3v-D4.  
 57 *Ibid.*, sig. D and sig. F2. This enumeration of names was prepared by Henry Briggs.  
 58 John Cunningham, 'Oliver Cromwell and the Cromwellian Settlement of Ireland', *Historical Journal*, 53 (2010), 919-37.



## Towards a cultural geography of the 1641 rising/rebellion

WILLIAM J. SMYTH

It is now agreed that the '1641 depositions' comprise a conflation of documents, containing confusing and often contradictory statements of evidence. Even more problematical, these depositions have generated passionate controversies down the centuries and still constitute contested terrain.<sup>1</sup> This chapter seeks to illustrate the role that cartography and geography can play in understanding and contextualising the 1641 rising/rebellion. In addition, the insights and advantages to be gained from bringing a broad-based comparative perspective to bear on the subject will be explored, which in turn will allow for a reconceptualising of the rising/rebellion. From the outset, the difficulty of writing about this topic needs to be noted.<sup>2</sup> Memories of the horrors of 1641 and its aftermath persist to the present – so many innocent lives lost, so many human tragedies piled up across the Irish landscape. Moreover, there is always the danger of bringing too much order to bear on what was a chaotic, highly complex and often paranoid world. To reduce the complexities, the chapter will adopt a ground-up view of the rising/rebellion, based on the evidence of the depositions. Geographic techniques and concepts as well as some anthropological theory will be used to explore the tumultuous, frenetic and often violent activities of the less powerful people. Since the powerless rarely find a place on the public stage, the 1641 depositions provide a unique source for studying the lives and fears of ordinary people in a time of great upheaval. Such people have much to say when they finally get the opportunity.<sup>3</sup>

### I

Geographers' first question relates to the 'whereness' of things. Geographers try to situate habitations, events and people as precisely as possible in space. They are better able to do this when dealing with comprehensive sources