

## Squabbling Siblings

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A review of

**Frank Ferguson & James. McConnel (eds), *Ireland and Scotland in the Nineteenth Century*** (Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2009. Pp 182. Hardback ISBN 978-1-84682-150-9, €49.50).

This volume, the latest in Four Courts' exceptionally strong 'Nineteenth-Century Ireland' series, is also an excellent illustration of the evolution of Irish-Scottish Studies, and of the subject's current strength and vitality. Since the pioneering work of Cullen and Smout in the 1970s, Irish-Scottish research has developed from a predominantly comparative pursuit – with individual studies of ostensibly similar aspects of Scottish and Irish history being interpreted comparatively by the reader or the editors – into a much more nuanced and broad-ranging field. In the context of the peace process in Ireland, and devolution in Scotland, Irish-Scottish studies perhaps took on too celebratory a tone in the 1990s, at least in political and media circles, leading Liam McIlvanney and Ray Ryan to call for a more rigorous critique of relations between the two nations, complaining of too great an emphasis on “‘Romantic’ Celtic camaraderie”.<sup>1</sup>

*Ireland and Scotland in the Nineteenth Century* demonstrates that any emphasis on camaraderie has been superseded by a renewed critical approach to the subject, and the complex, chequered history of relations between the two nations is becoming increasingly well-covered. Most contributions to this volume contain work which deals with issues of direct interaction between either the Scots and Irish nations, encounters between individual representatives of those nations, or of intellectual and cultural transmissions from one to the other. As the editors highlight at the very outset, ‘the relationship between the inhabitants of Ireland and Scotland could at times be fissile and fractious ... dissonance is one of the central themes to emerge from this collection.’ [p. 7]

Although there are not explicit ‘sections’ within the book, the editors have grouped the individual articles together as a means of giving the collection an element of internal

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<sup>1</sup> Liam MacIlvanney and Ray Ryan (eds), *Ireland and Scotland: Culture and Society, 1700-2000*, Dublin, Four Courts: 2005).

coherence. The first three contributions are linked by a sense of mutual suspicion, competition or antipathy between Scotland and Ireland. Kevin James' account of late Victorian Irish tourism is well-chosen as an opening contribution, as it highlights a consistent theme of the relationship between Ireland and Scotland for much of the nineteenth century: that of squabbling siblings fighting for London's attention. It might be inferred that Ireland's contention that she was 'in no degree inferior' to the Scottish Highlands as a tourist destination hints at the realisation of fighting a losing battle against a tourist industry which was already well-oiled by mid-century. And yet, Edinburgh's urban elites also looked askance at what they perceived as preferential treatment for Dublin as a 'national capital' during the Victorian era. Clare Norcio's chapter on technological exchange in Ulster underlines the great esteem in which Scottish agriculturalists were held in the early 1800s. Scottish farming expertise was used throughout northern Europe at this time, with Ulster having particularly strong intellectual and technological exchange. However, the preference for Scottish estate managers in some parts of Ulster – most notoriously Derryveagh in the 1860s – shows that the Scottish connection had the power to create tension and division, as well as reinforce bonds between Protestant communities on both sides of the North Channel. S. Karly Kehoe's innovative study of Catholic women religious makes a significant contribution both to Scottish Catholic history, and to Scottish gender history. In building on some of the pioneering work of, for example, Martin Mitchell and Bernard Aspinwell, Kehoe unpicks some of the complexities of Victorian Scottish / Irish identities, and does an especially good job of demonstrating the differences and tensions between Scottish Catholic and Irish Catholic identities. Kehoe's contention is that the 'presence of Sisters and nuns generally tended to enhance external opinions about the progress of Catholic community' (p. 39)

The second loose grouping of essays focuses on an element of cultural exchange between Scotland and Ireland, that of Presbyterianism. Andrew Holmes sets the context with an account of Irish Presbyterian commemorations of their Scottish roots. This is followed by Frank Ferguson's essay on Scottish identities in the writing of two Irish authors, a valuable account which highlights some of the stereotypes which existed in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries, which of course persisted long afterwards. The analysis of Drummond's 1811 poem, *The Giant's Causeway*, is fascinating as it hints at the dichotomy between Irish 'Celtic' identity and Scottish 'Gothic' or 'Scandinavian' identity. Almost contemporaneously, Scott's *The Antiquary*, which contains some of the

same themes, and Scandinavian writers such as Tegnér and Geijer were helping to popularise the Viking past throughout Europe. This poem not only demonstrates the way in which literary constructions were influenced by – and later influenced – general stereotypes of Celtic / Norse identity in the nineteenth century, it shows that Drummond, and contemporary Irish-Scottish literature, can be perceived as part of a northern European literary tradition. Scots-Irish Presbyterian identity is also tackled by Patrick Maume in a chapter on Coleraine-born poet, William McComb. Peter Gray's chapter on one of the leading Presbyterians in nineteenth-century Scotland, Thomas Chalmers, and his plans for the alleviation of Irish poverty, builds on the theme of Scottish-Irish Presbyterian connections. Well known as an active advocate of Scottish poor relief, and of attempting to create a 'Godly Commonwealth' among the poor of Glasgow, Chalmers' role in attempts to reform the Irish Poor Law have not previously been recognised. In arguing for a system along the lines of his Scottish experiment, Chalmers was undoubtedly arguing that the Scottish system of poor relief was more successful than that of England, but also that – particularly based on his alleged experience of Irish immigrants in Glasgow – it would be more suitable for the poor of Ireland. In ameliorating the condition of the Irish paupers, moreover, the moral state of the people would be raised.

Matthew Potter presents a genuinely comparative chapter on local politics, and as ever the contrasts provide much of the most interesting material. One of the important themes to emerge is the idea that the operation of many aspects of Scottish life were 'decentralised' (from London), contrasting with a highly centralised system in Ireland, which saw the role of 'Irish local authorities become much more marginal than that of their counterparts in Scotland' (p. 117). This certainly supports the argument made by Graeme Morton and others that, despite surrendering sovereignty in 1707, Scotland retained a strong sense of self through 'local' government and civil society. It also lays the ground for much more comparative work on Irish-Scottish civil society in the nineteenth century, especially regarding relationships with London. Susan Kelly's comparative account of tuberculosis cures underlines this potential.

Richard McCready and Amy O'Reilly present research on two different aspects of Irish culture in nineteenth-century Scotland. In her account of the Hibernian Society of Glasgow, O'Reilly underlines not only that the Irish immigrant community had its own social structures, but that it was also possible for a certain commonality to exist between

Catholics and Protestants, with a shared Ulster heritage occasionally over-riding religious animosities. Moving to the second half of the century, McCready's chapter examines the way in which St Patrick's Day parades and celebrations operated in Dundee, and is not simply an exposition of the nature of public exhibition, nor even of the 'invention of tradition', but is a wide-ranging account of the Irish in a Victorian city, dealing with the communities diverse identities as well as reactions from the non-Irish residents of the city. Máirtín ó Catháin concludes the work with an interesting account of Michael Collins' (tenuous) relationship with Scotland, based on a remarkably broad array of primary source materials. In particular, ó Catháin's work suggests that the links between the leaders of the Irish rebellion and 'cultural nationalist' Scots such as Ruaraidh Erskine of Marr, and Red Clydesiders like John Maclean – which were explored by James Hunter in the 1970s – are due for a more concerted examination than has hitherto been the case.

As a collection, *Ireland and Scotland in the Nineteenth Century* breathes life into the historical side of Irish-Scottish studies, opening up new avenues for debate, criticism, and refinement. It demonstrates that there is continuing value in the comparative approach, while also promoting a more transnational method of research.