

The Irish in the Exiled Court of Charles II.

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A Review of

Mark R.F. Williams, *The King's Irishmen. The Irish in the Exiled Court of Charles II, 1649-1660.*

(Boydell: Woodbridge, 2014). ISBN 978-1-84383-925-5. Hardback, 340pp. £75.

In his study of élite Irish Royalists who were forced into exile in the 1650s, Mark Williams asserts that the purpose of his monograph is to illuminate ‘a period of history which has been left almost entirely in the shadow of the Wars of the Three Kingdoms’. Such an approach is welcome as Williams adds an Irish dimension to the evolving discourse on Royalism. In pursuing new avenues, he also joins a group of scholars who are shifting research focus on early modern Ireland away from the violence of the mid-seventeenth century and are instead exploring topics that are less contentious but no less important. Williams examines the fates of nine men (eight Irish, one English) that served the king during his exile ‘in order to situate Irish understanding of Royalist allegiance within the wider political, religious, social, and cultural contexts of seventeenth-century Europe’. In doing so, he achieves his objective by interweaving the personal histories of the courtiers into the shifting high-politics of the 1650s, which results in a book that provides critical insight into how the catastrophic events of the 1640s continued to shape each man’s life in the subsequent decades. Published as part of Boydell’s *Studies in Early Modern Cultural, Political and Social History*, it is equally sympathetic to the motivations of Catholics and Protestants who followed the king into exile. It also compliments recent publications that seek to understand Royalists in Scotland and England.¹ Divided into eight chapters, or case studies, each explores a particular theme (Memory, Duty, Faith, Honour, Access, Patronage et cetera) around which the author seeks to create a theoretical framework to assess how the courtiers contributed to, or failed to cope with, exile. This is an interesting approach and one that helps to structure the book, although some chapters are more

¹ Barry Robertson, *Royalists at War in Scotland and Ireland, 1638-1650* (Farnham, 2014); Andrew Hopper, *Turncoats and Renegades: Changing Sides during the English Civil Wars* (Oxford, 2012).

successful than others at accentuating the themes. It also ensures that the author does not lapse into narrative accounts of the courtiers' lives. As a result, the book provides far more than a mere blow-by-blow account of events and by locating his study within the wider literatures on both Royalism and exile, Williams has produced a timely addition to a burgeoning area of research. The author rightly makes no apology for the narrow focus of his study and he is clear that this is not a general work on exile, which in an Irish sense has been well served by the *Irish in Europe Project* run from Maynooth University. Instead, Williams analyses how a select group of courtiers dealt with exile, dislocation and penury.

The first chapter's examination of 'memory' and how it was used to enhance or confound the reputations of those seeking to prosper in Charles' inner circle very much sets the tone. The focus is Murrough O'Brien, Lord Inchiquin, and his inability to unshackle himself from his previous actions. Like the marquis of Ormond and Daniel O'Neill, Inchiquin was raised as a Protestant ward of court. After hostilities spread to the south of Ireland from Ulster in 1641, Inchiquin fought for the Royalists in the Munster army against the Catholic confederates but refused to join a Royalist alliance as he would not fight alongside Irish Catholics. Instead, Inchiquin and the Munster Protestants sought support from Parliament in 1643 and he served as a commander in the Protestant armies over the next five years. It is during this time that he garnered a reputation for brutality that was evidenced by his expulsion of Catholics from Cork city in 1644, while he earned his lasting reputation as 'Murcadh an Dóitéan' (Murrough the Burner) for plundering of the Rock of Cashel in 1647. His allegiances, however, reverted to the Crown when the Independents at Westminster announced that they were willing to govern without the king. Thereafter, Inchiquin declared his support for the Second Ormond Peace in 1648 but subsequent to the execution of Charles I, Inchiquin was forced into exile. As the Royalists tried to rebuild their reputations after military defeat, Sir Lewis Dyve published an account in 1651 that attempted to exonerate the marquis of Ormond's reputation. Vyne had not intended to further tarnish Inchiquin's reputation but the earl's actions in the

1640s were inadvertently brought to the fore and Inchiquin was left with little choice but to publicly dispute the account. Ormond largely accepted Inchiquin's explanations for his actions, concurring that his service in the Parliamentary armies was not an act of disloyalty against the Crown but an act of aggression against Protestantism's principal enemies in Ireland. The king was similarly convinced by the argument and invited Inchiquin to join his lamentable privy council in 1652, yet the earl could not escape from 'the combination of rumour and recollection' that followed him. Nor were past actions overlooked: Irish Catholics at the French court ensured that Inchiquin's advancement in the French armies was blocked although he was eventually appointed governor of Catalonia in 1654. This position, however, took Inchiquin away from Charles and it appears that disenchantment set in. As the decade progressed, he failed to jettison his chequered past and drifted further from the court, taking up military roles in Portugal and eventually at Tangiers. The chapter succeeds in demonstrating Inchiquin's sense of dislocation and how difficult it was to escape the events of the previous decade. In doing so, Williams' account of Inchiquin's exile manages to be both sympathetic and revisionary.

A notable aspect of the study is how the author has reassessed some of the king's more well-known Irish courtiers, including Daniel O'Neill, Lord Taaffe, and the marquis of Ormond, offering a fresh perspective on their actions. O'Neill has not been seriously examined since Donal Cregan's authoritative essays were published in the 1960s but Williams succeeds in rejuvenating O'Neill's service in exile, although he is perhaps a little forceful in reminding the reader that O'Neill was a consummate courtier.² In granting Lord Taaffe two chapters, Williams is careful to remind the reader that Taaffe, like O'Neill, provided social glue when it was most needed by the court in exile. This in itself is an interesting insight, but the discussions of Taaffe's services come after a long and somewhat obtuse theoretical discussion that dilutes the impact of Taaffe's role. Williams'

² Donal F. Cregan, 'An Irish Cavalier: Daniel O'Neill', *Studia Hibernica*, no. 3 (1963), pp. 60-100; 'An Irish Cavalier: Daniel O'Neill in Exile and Restoration, 1651-64', *Studia Hibernica*, no. 5 (1965).

chapter on Bramhall usefully fills the gap between John McCafferty's publications on the bishop and carefully reinforces the reasons why Bramhall was chosen as Archbishop of Armagh in 1660.³

The Talbots, an Old English Catholic family from the Pale, are also given considerable treatment. A chapter devoted to Fr Peter's actions in the 1650s recounts judiciously his intrigues on behalf of Irish Catholics and this portrait of Peter allows the reader to understand how he aroused such distrust among English courtiers and it is made clear that the cleric's primary motivation was to secure toleration for Catholics in Ireland. When his agenda aligned with his efforts to restore Charles, Peter was a valuable asset with access to the Spanish royal courts. When he drifted beyond the Stuarts' remit, he was ostracised. The Stuarts offered the best chance of toleration for Catholics in Ireland but Peter was also willing to deal with other powers and his actions aroused suspicions among Charles' advisors, especially Edward Hyde. While making no attempt to condone Peter's goals, this consideration goes some way towards rehabilitating his motives.

In the book's liveliest chapter, several of the other Talbot brothers' exploits during the 1650s are recounted. Although Williams has little to add to the story of Richard's time in exile, his discussion of Fr Thomas' intrigues at the French court is particularly enjoyable. Thomas was on the wrong side of events, arriving in Paris as support for Charles was cooling at the French court, yet this chapter nonetheless provides critical insight into how Irish Catholic exiles sought respite for themselves and succour for the king.

The book understandably culminates in a reconsideration of the marquis of Ormond's time in exile, although he has been much discussed in the previous chapters. Lacking any modern biography, Ormond has polarised recent debates and historians have often dismissed his actions in the 1640s as self-serving, short-termist and ill advised. Such

³ John McCafferty, *The Reconstruction of the Church of Ireland. Bishop Bramhall and the Laudian Reforms, 1633-1641* (Cambridge, 2007); 'John Bramhall's second Irish career, 1660-3' in Kelly, J., McCafferty, J. & C. I. McGrath (eds.), *People, Politics and Power - Essays on Irish History 1660-1850 in honour of James I. McGuire* (Dublin, 2009).

opinions have taken root but Williams makes a determined effort to shift the discussion away from the marquis' political and military failings of the 1640s and instead focuses on Ormond's actions in the 1650s. Much of what is presented is new: no modern historian has critically examined Ormond during his exile and there are fresh insights into how he came to terms with poverty, defeat, and dislocation, as well as his explicit need to confront the strong influence of the Catholic powers over the king. In the preceding chapters, Ormond is presented in a schoolmasterly way, floating above the political intrigues and gaffes that confounded some of the other courtiers. Williams makes clear that Ormond was not above cynical manipulation to secure his or the king's position and argues that Ormond was pragmatic, an allegation that has been levelled at him elsewhere but here it is presented as an advantage. It was one of the marquis' defining characteristics and it came to the fore in the Restoration period. Such pragmatism was not (wholly) selfish and significant efforts go into discussing the rationale behind Ormond's decisions. The centrality of the king's reliance on Ormond is explicitly argued for and he is described as a 'marshall of Royalist space' – one who maintained a façade of royalism for the king when his erstwhile supporters deserted him.

When considering Ormond's personal motivations, Williams argues that Ormond's guiding principles were honour and duty (to both the king and God). Raymond Gillespie has convincingly argued that Ormond's understanding of religion was outdated, even in his own time, and Williams builds upon this argument to show how Ormond was willing to make compromises, but only once his own morals, reputation and sense of duty were not diminished.⁴ Ormond's more human side is also discussed, in particular his understandable frustration with both Charles I and Charles II in the early years of exile, but also how he overcame his grievances to start reshaping the narrative of how the

⁴ Raymond Gillespie, 'The Religion of the first Duke of Ormond', in Toby Barnard and Jane Fenlon (eds.), *The Dukes of Ormonde, 1610-1745* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp 101-14.

rebellion came about in Ireland, blaming recalcitrant priests for fomenting and perpetuating violence and criticising them for not supporting the Peace party.

After the Restoration, the events of 1640s were used to influence both the king and his courtiers and Charles punished those Catholics who had sided with the Papal Nuncio, Gianbattista Rinuccini, by excluding them from eligibility to plead their innocence at the Court of Claims in Dublin in order to receive decrees of innocence and reclaim their lands. Williams correctly identifies the paucity of the Old Irish position regarding the Stuarts in his conclusion, but he doesn't quite make the link that Rinuccini's supporters were later ostracised by Charles. However, in arguing that the ultimate aim of those he has examined was to restore the king, and thus restore order, he clearly makes a case for a distinct set of loyalties to the exiled monarch. As a result, this book will become an important reference for those examining royalism in all its variants, as well as a very useful tool for those wishing to understand the formation of Restoration Ireland's political leaders. In identifying a group of Royalists who are well contrasted with their English counterparts, Williams clearly stakes a claim that a distinctly Irish brand of Royalism should be incorporated into the canon.