CHAPTER I

Introduction: Irish representations and English alternatives

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The essays in this book explore the ways in which Ireland was read and written about from both English and Irish perspectives during the early modern period. In short, how it was represented. The years 1534–1660 witnessed a colonial revolution in Ireland which went hand-in-hand with a constitutional revolution in England. The volume is concerned both with the representation of politics and the politics of representation. In looking at the literary representations of writers such as Barnaby Googe, Edmund Spenser, Barnaby Rich, John Bale, and John Milton, we find that they are both *representers* of Ireland in terms of their works, and *representatives* of Ireland with respect to their estates and offices. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, aesthetic and political representation cannot easily be severed.

As well as discussing English representations of Ireland we shall argue that Ireland was, in a number of important ways, a *representation* of England. This is not to suggest that Ireland did not exist outside of English representations, but rather that English representations of Ireland were in point of fact representations of *England*.

But why 'English alternatives'? It is not simply that an alternative Englishness thrived in early modern Ireland. Rather, two kinds of Englishness competed for power in England's Irish colony.[1] The *OED* offers a number of definitions for the word 'alternative'. One of them is that an 'alternative' is a choice between two things, which involves the acceptance of one and the rejection of the other. In this respect an English 'alternative' is a choice between English and Irish which rejects Irishness. Similarly, a change can be *of* a thing or *from* a thing, i.e. from Irish to English or from one English to another.

If 'alternative' is a loaded term, so too is 'native'. After all, one of the first questions an Irish historian might ask of us is this: where do the native Irish fit into this narrative? They are not merely surrogate

English subjects, but *Irish* natives. The problem here is that the term 'native' is as open to diverse definitions as any other. In Irish history, every neutral expression or anodyne appellation conceals a complex cultural reality.

The word 'native' features in a recent collection of articles, entitled *Natives and Newcomers*.[2] One might have thought that this term would have been devoid of the modern pejorative connotations it possesses in the period to which it is here applied. One might have thought that the only cause for complaint would have been the absence of any distinction between the indigenous peoples. Not so. In his *Ogygia*, Roderick O'Flaherty spoke thus of the indigenous Irish:

> The Latins have termed such people, Aborigines, or natives, because their origin cannot be traced any higher; and the Greeks call them Gigantes, or Giants, that is born of the earth, because they came from no other country; but like trees and herbs, were first produced from the earth by vegetation.[3]

Not all writers who classified the Irish did so in order to celebrate their antiquity. In a letter of 1607 to Robert, Earl of Salisbury, Sir John Davies (1569–1626), poet, lawyer, and Attorney-General of Ireland, had this to say on the subject status of Ulster's native population:

> [H]e that was O'Reilly, or chieftain of the country, had power to cut upon all the inhabitants, high or low, as pleased him; which argues that they held their lands of the chief lord in villeinage, and therefore they are properly called natives; for *nativus* in our old register of writs doth signify a villein; and the writ to recover a villein is entitled *De nativo habendo*; and in that action the plaintiff doth declare that he and his ancestors, time out of mind, were wont *tailler haut et bas* upon the villein and his ancestors.[4]

Davies takes 'native' in an Irish context to signify 'belonging to the land', and since, thanks to Davies' own personal brand of legal imperialism, the land belongs to the English, now British, Crown, so the native Irish belong to the Crown. By deriving 'native' from *nativus* Davies reduces Gaelic nationhood to English subjection.[5]

There can be no simplistic notion of natives. All natives are also alternatives. Moreover, every representation is a presentation and a production. The range of the discursive manifestations of Ireland cuts across genres and disciplines, from print to painting, from manuscript to folio, from poetry to politics. The essays in this volume deal with literary and historical representation, legal documents, map-making, portraiture, reformation sermons and polemics, Latin marginalia,

governmental statements, and bureaucratic policy documents. Throughout, there is a sense that Ireland was not a fixed, stable entity. It was a complex, differentiated, heterogeneous and variegated *text*.[6] Ireland was a disputed territory in more ways than one; not simply in terms of litigation, land rights and settlements, but also in terms of the languages in which it was constructed.

Of course, the question as to whether Ireland was a kingdom or a colony is more than just a matter of semantics. Ciaran Brady and Raymond Gillespie have pointed out that there were two simultaneous perceptions of Ireland among both English settlers and officials:

On the one hand, there was a perception of the island, more prescriptive than real, as a culturally undifferentiated society, a polity with a constitution clearly similar to England's, in other words a kingdom as defined by the 1541 act for 'the kingly title'. Yet there was a second assumption, more adventitious perhaps but more real, that Ireland was a colony with opportunities for gain and advancement for those who were willing to adventure for them.[7]

Yet this is not to forget that semantics do matter. 'Ireland', it has to be remembered, was the English name for the country, and even this name was subject to variation. In Barnaby Googe's pastoral poem, 'Cupido Conquered', the narrator declares: 'Then shuld I wreak mine Ire of him, / that brought me to this Land'.[8] This pun on Ireland as a 'Land of Ire' is a familiar feature of contemporary English colonial discourse. John Derricke refers to Ireland's troubles as 'her exceadyng Ire'. Quibbling on the name of Rory Og O'More, 'a wretched Roge', he has him apologise to his own country thus: 'Wo maie I be, for moving her to Ire'.[9] Sir John Davies, in his *Discovery*, uses the same conceit to distinguish the New English colony from its Old English predecessor: 'So as we may well conceive a hope, that Ireland (which heerto fore might properly be called the Land of Ire, because the Irascible power was predominant there, for the space of 400. yeares together) will from henceforth proove a Land of Peace and Concorde'.[10] Finally, the anonymous author of the 'Dialogue of Sylvanus and Peregrine' (1599) opens with an identical play on words: 'Sylvan: In Ireland man? Oh what a Country of wrath is that, It hath not the addicon of the syllable Ire in vayne'.[11] Thus, in the very name 'Ireland', we find a negative English image. Ireland was defined by and against English ideals.

The production of Ireland as an appendage of England in law and in literature drew extensively on puns, which were used both to describe the country – primarily in discourses on its history and topography – and to judge the lie of the land, in documents on geography and government. By playing on proper names, the English colonists were able to gloss over their appropriation of Irish land and expropriation of the Irish. Ireland, 'Land of Ire', was altered by being translated into English.

Ireland was often represented in English texts by *prosopopoeia* (personification of an abstract thing), a device which allowed the colonist to capitalise on Ireland's subject status. As a 'woman', Ireland could be courted. As 'virgin' territory, she stood in need of 'husbandry'. John Derricke presents the native Irish as inadequate suitors for their own land:

> I mervailde in my mynde
> and thereupon did muse:
> To see a Bride of heavenlie hewe,
> an ouglie Peere to chuse.
> This Bride it is the Soile,
> the Bridegrome is the karne,
> with writhed glibbes like wicked Spirits
> with visage rough and stearne.[12]

Luke Gernon, a Jacobean magistrate for the province of Munster, employed this extended figure:

This Nymph of Ireland is at all poynts like a yong wenche that hath the greene sicknes for want of occupying. She is very fayre of visage, and hath a smooth skinn of tender grasse…Her breasts are round hillockes of milk-yeelding grasse, and that so fertile, that they contend wth the vallyes. And betwixt her leggs (for Ireland is full of havens), she hath an open harbor, but not much frequented. She hath had goodly tresses of hayre *arboribusq' comoe*, but the iron mills, like sharpe toothed combe, have notted and poled her much, and in her champion partes she hath not so much as will cover her nakedness…It is nowe since she was drawne out of the wombe of rebellion about sixteen yeares, by'rlady nineteen, and yet she wants a husband, she is not embraced, she is not hedged and diched, there is noo quicksett putt into her.[13]

Here 'Ireland', wanting cultivation, 'wants a husband'. This type of pun is understandably popular amongst the younger sons of the lesser gentry who settled in Ireland in the period.[14]

The personification of Ireland as a suppliant female is a figure of long standing in Irish culture.[15] A seventeenth-century Irish writer, in a treatise dedicated to James II, presents his country thus:

Ireland, the most ancient nursery of your ancestors…prostrates her venerable person at your highnes's feet, to stand an inspection before the eyes of your understanding, and, in the utmost dejection and in deep mourning, all covered with sack-cloth and ashes, with dishevelled hair and tears trickling down her cheeks, presents a book, in which are written, lamentations and mourning and woe…Her only remaining solace at present is, that one family, your paternal stock, of the many to whom she has given birth, not only exists, but with a degree of pre-eminence wields the sceptre of the British dominions.[16]

This careful compliment to the King plays with Ireland's affiliation. Like his grandfather, James I, a Scot, the king springs from a race the writer claims Ireland to be 'proto-parent' of, and hence owes Ireland the respect due of a son to a mother. At the same time, James II, as King of Ireland, is its patron.

Spenser's Irena is one of those literary representations of early modern Ireland which humanise the land whilst dehumanising its inhabitants. Sheila Cavanagh has argued that the metaphoric separation of Ireland from the Irish 'illustrates the poet's consciousness of Ireland's divided nature'.[17] Irenius complements Irena. Both appeal to their respective sovereigns to rescue Ireland and reclaim it as a British dominion:

Wherefore the Lady, which *Irena* hight,
Did to the Faery Queene her way addresse,
To whom complayning her afflicted plight,
She her besought of gratious redresse,
That soveraine Queene, *that mightie Emperesse*,
Whose glorie is to aide all suppliants pore
And of weake Princes to be Patronesse,
Chose *Artegall* to right her to restore;
For that to her he seem'd best skild in righteous lore (our emphasis).[18]

The context for the period under discussion is that of an expanding literary market, as the need to create a national language and literature became acute after the Reformation demanded that the vernacular replace the international Latin of the late European middle ages. This need to compose a culture – empirically, constitutionally, literally – meant that a vast archive of material de-

veloped to meet the Tudor state's designs on Ireland. James I, inspecting the documents stored in Whitehall, declared 'We had more ado with Ireland than all the world besides'.[19] Natalie Zemon Davies has reminded us that there can be easy separation of factual evidence and narrative fiction:

> To be sure, fictive creation had its most appropriate expression in poetry or a story, not in history, which was increasingly praised (though not always practised) as a truth which was 'bare' and 'unadorned'. But the artifice of fiction did not necessarily lend falsity to an account; it might well bring verisimilitude or a moral truth. Nor did the shaping or embellishing of a history necessarily mean forgery: where that line was to be drawn was one of the creative controversies of the day.[20]

What, in the final analysis, constitutes evidence? The word 'evidence' comes from the Latin 'videre', meaning 'to see'. Under the heading of 'evidence' we are looking at all types of visual representation.[21] What types of source material contribute to the production of a historical narrative? Edmund Spenser referred to his magnum opus, *The Faerie Queene*, as an 'historical fiction' and its subject matter, 'the historie of King Arthure' as 'furthest from the daunger of envy, and suspition of present time'. Yet Spenser was aware that the story of Arthur had other uses outside fiction; one being to justify English rights to Ireland: 'ffinallye it apperethe by good recorde yeat extante that kinge Arthur and before him Gurgunt had all that Ilande in his Allegiance and Subjeccion' (*View*, lines 1439–40). Geoffrey of Monmouth had asserted that Arthur had conquered the island and Gerald of Wales had also used the tale to re-state the claim.[22] Tudor historians copied these accounts and prominent Irish historians such as Geoffrey Keating and Peter Walsh devoted much space in their narratives to rebutting them.[23]

Our modern literary divisions do not reflect the Renaissance mixing of genres. James VI of Scotland read Spenser's portrayal of the trial of Duessa in Book V of *The Faerie Queene* as a satire of his mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, and demanded that the poet be punished.[24] James' reading of the poem, in the context of the succession crisis, was essentially political and suggests that it is for sovereigns and censors, not subjects and scribes, to determine the status of a text. Equally, a pure, unmixed typology of genres cannot be established as these only exist as they are read.[25]

It is therefore dangerous to read a modern separation of literature

and history back into the sixteenth or seventeenth century: what status should we grant *The Mirror for Magistrates*, for example?[26] Or John Derricke's *The Image of Ireland* (1581), much of which belongs to the same tradition of complaint or satire, yet could also be seen as an attempt to press the case for greater honours for his patron, Sir Henry Sidney, or as crude anti-Irish propaganda?[27] Conversely, to conflate such types of discourse, as if no generic expectations or conventions existed which determined the range of readings it was possible to make, is equally erroneous.[28] Henry Sidney's eldest son, Philip, tried to resolve this paradox by defining poetry as an imitation of the kinds of writing from which it had to be distinguished: 'But it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by'.[29]

Sidney makes the same point as Natalie Zemon Davies, that history and poetry (fiction) cannot finally be separated. Responding to Plato's argument that history tells what really happened whilst poetry embellishes and thus lies, he urges that the historian has to 'tell events whereof he can yield no cause; *or if he do, it must be poetically*' (our emphasis). If one argues that history is the useful discipline, Sidney counters that 'a feigned example hath as much force to teach as a true example' (*Apologie*, p. 110). In this way poetry 'excelleth history'; or one might say all good history is really poetry. Literature can be defined only in terms of its difference from other kinds of writing, a difference derived in part from the way it is read.[30]

Similarly, we would argue, Englishness and English nationality have been historically defined against non-Englishness. So that one of the most important ways in which Ireland was read in this period was as a series of negative images of Englishness. Ireland, in this respect, as well as being a text, is a negative of a photograph of English identity which never comes into view; we have only the negative, not the original print. The development of 'Englishness' depended on the negation of 'Irishness'.

A telling example of this occurs in the portrait of Sir Thomas Lee, where the production of civility draws on the contrast between English sophistication and Irish simplicity; gold brocade and bare feet. As Stephen Greenblatt has argued, the process of Renaissance self-fashioning draws upon images of the 'native' in order to construct and reinforce a sense of metropolitan gentility and superiority.[31] One author concludes his plans for the transformation of Ireland with the

hope that if his stern measures are properly applied 'her Majesty shall make Ireland profitable unto her as England or *mearly a West England*'. (our emphasis)[32] Ireland was to be purged of its transgressive resistance and stamped as a copy of the imperial authority.

Although branded by the New English as *Hiberniores ipsis Hibernis*, the Old English of the Pale insisted on the authenticity of their claim to be, if not more English than the English themselves, then at least as loyal to the metropolis as their Protestant counterparts. Richard Stanyhurst, for example, in his contribution to Holinshed's *Chronicles*, stresses the Englishness of the Pale:

The inhabitants of the English pale have beene in old time so much addicted to their civilitie, and so farre sequestered from barbarous savageness, as their onelie mother toong was English. And trulie, so long as these impaled dwellers did sunder themselves as well in land as in language from the Irish: rudeness was daie by daie in the countrie supplanted, civilitie ingraffed, good lawes established, loyaltie observed, rebellion suppressed, and in fine the *coine of a yoong England was like to shoot in Ireland*. (our emphasis)[33]

Stanyhurst's juxtaposition of English civility and Irish barbarity suggests that in early modern Ireland there existed a conflict between competing forms of Englishness in which Irishness was not an identity worthy of analysis but an insult to be hurled at one's enemy.[34]

When Sir Thomas Elyot advised governors to read Caesar's histories of Gaul and Germany because they described savage peoples who were like the Scots and Irish of his own day, it was to be understood that had the Romans not conquered the Britons, they too would have been primitives of the same order.[35] An identical teleology underlies the drawings of John White which portrayed the Virginian Indians and the Picts as interchangeable stereotypes.[36] Ireland was the site both of English identity formation, and of English identity crises;[37] from the writings of Gerald of Wales onwards, there is an obsessive fear of 'degeneration', which is equated with becoming Irish.[38] This is the force behind Barnaby Rich's statement that the English recusants who have planted themselves throughout the whole of Ireland 'are more pernitious in their example than the Irish themselves':[39] 'Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds'. Ireland has the ability to make the English more corrupt than their hosts: as Eudoxus exclaims in Spenser's *View*, 'Lorde how quicklye dothe that country alter mens natures!' (lines 4733–4).

John Donne, in his epistle to Henry Wotton, offers a variation on
the theme of colonial conversion. Here, Donne is concerned for the
safety – and identity – of an associate engaged in the dangerous
business of fighting in Ireland:

> Went you to conquer? and have so much lost
> Yourself, that what in you was best and most
> Respective frendship should so quickly dye?
> In publique gaine my share is not such, that I
> Would loose your love for Ireland: better cheap
> I pardon death (who though hee do not reap
> yet gleanes hee many of our frends away)
> then that your waking mind should bee a pray to
> Lethargies...
> Lett not your soule (at first with graces filld
> And since and through crooked lymbecks, stild
> it self unto the Irish negligence submit.[40]

Donne's allusion to 'Lethargies', and 'the Irish negligence' brings to
mind Spenser's parallel analogy for the cultural amnesia of the Old
English:

Is it possible that anye shoulde so far growe out of frame that they shoulde
in so shorte space quite forgett theire Countrie and theire owne names that
is a moste dangerous *Lethergie* muche worse then that of *messala Corvinus* whoe
beinge a most learned man thorowe sicknes forgott his own name. (*View*,
lines 2001–5).

Like Spenser, Donne perceives in the colonial experience the risk of
a loss of identity, an abandonment of self. Thus colonial adventure
can be both an opportunity to fashion an identity – as the archetypal
English gentleman – and an abyss into which one's identity may
disappear. Through literature, the poet hopes to cultivate and refine
the art of memory in order to preserve both name and nationhood.
One thinks here of the closing lines of John of Gaunt's emotive speech
in *Richard II*: 'That England that was wont to conquer others / Hath
made a shameful conquest of itself' (ii.i.65–6). Thus, the deter-
mination of an English self depends upon the subjection of an Irish
other.

Ireland was in some ways a laboratory or testing ground for
English military aspirations. While mainstream historiography has
tended to view the period in terms of the twin threats of Spain and
Civil War, it could be argued that the chief military preoccupation of

the Crown was with the policing and planting of Ireland. There is evidence to suggest that the English standing army has its origins in Ireland in the fifteenth century, and under Oliver Cromwell it embarked on one of its most notorious campaigns there.[41]

Ireland was also the place where elements dangerous to the English crown would be banished. Donne, in a sermon preached before the Company of the Virginia Plantation on 13 November 1622, proclaimed that the policy of planting colonies abroad 'shall redeeme many a wretch from the Jawes of death, from the hands of the Executioner... It shall sweepe your streets and wash your doores, from idle persons, and the children of idle persons, and imploy them: and truely, if the whole Countrey were but such a *Bridewell*, to force idle persons to work, it had good use'.[42] Donne maintains that the colonies function both as an alternative to prison and an alternative prison.

Lord Burghley endorsed a tract which argued that the Puritans should be sent to Ireland so that they could perform a useful function and not threaten the security of the metropolis.[43] It is no mere historical accident that many radicals interested in Italian political theory and connected with the earl of Essex should end up on the Munster plantation in the 1590s.[44] There may well have been 'no room at the top', as Muriel Bradbrook suggests, but this does not necessarily imply that Ireland was the last refuge of a scoundrel. The 'land of Ire' probably seemed rather more attractive than 'an Elizabethan Siberia' – at the very least it offered a political asylum unavailable in England.[45] As Barnaby Rich put it in 1615: 'thos wordes that in Englande would be brought wythin the compasse of treason, they are accounted wyth us in Ireland for ordynary table taulke'.[46]

Was the possession of an Irish estate an alternative to, or an extension of, the system of patronage in England? Often as not, the patrons of planters were themselves participants in the process of colonisation. Christopher Hatton, to whom Rich dedicated his early works on Ireland, was one of the undertakers on the Munster plantation. All of Spenser's patrons – Smith, Harvey, Sidney, Grey, Raleigh and Essex – were implicated in Irish ventures. Googe was patronised by Burghley, who was himself the architect of the Munster Plantation. Yet no substantial work on English patronage in Ireland exists. As always the concerns of metropolitan historiography have excluded the margins.[47]