Oliver P. Rafferty, ed.

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The topic of identity has circulated in academic discourse since at least the 1970s, responding to the political developments of the period. Later postmodernist critiques of identity as an essentialist concept have not dimmed the interest in the analysis and critique of identity formation in Ireland, a field that has had a huge impact on not just sociology and history but also literary studies. Oliver P. Rafferty's *Irish Catholic Identities* primarily includes pieces by historians—among them some of the most frequently published and senior scholars of the topic—Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Raymond Gillespie, Thomas Bartlett—as well as relatively recent PhDs such as David Finnegan, Brian Jackson, and Richard Keogh. The two excellent articles on literature—one by the distinguished literary critic and poet Bernard O'Donoghue, mainly on Yeats and Heaney, and the other by Frank Shovlin and John McGahern—leave the reader disappointed that some study of identity in literature was not provided for the earlier periods, or, for that matter, on writing in the Irish language.

Another unfortunate omission is the lack of any other articles by a female historian or on the subject of women's history other besides Catriona Clear's "The voice of Catholic women in Ireland, 1800–1921" and Louise Fuller's "Identity and political fragmentation in independent Ireland, 1923–83." The role of women—both religious and lay, Gaelic Irish and English—deserves more than thirty-five pages in a book of over 350. As is so often the case in Irish historical circles, women are given a kind of token position in the conferences and collections, even though there are outstanding female Irish historians working in a variety of time periods, including Katherine Simms, Bernadette Cunningham, Mary Ann Lyons, Jane Ohlmeyer, and Mary O'Dowd, to name just a few. History is still largely an old boys' club in Ireland. Marie Louise Coolahan's current work, "The Reception and Circulation of Early Modern Women's Writing, 1550–1700," should go a long way toward redressing the huge *lacunae* in the study of both Irish history and literature.

The book is divided into seven sections, the first three defined chronologically (Middle Ages, early modern seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) and the last four defined topically (women and diaspora; English and Irish; power, faith, and Catholic Unionism; and contemporary expressions). This penultimate category seems like an odd catch-all for dealing with articles that could not fit elsewhere. Eamonn Phoenix, for instance, writes about the Rt. Hon. Sir Denis Henry, Bart, "the only Catholic to have ever become a Unionist MP."

The introduction sets up a series of propositions that are in some cases dismantled by more recent research. For example, Raymond Gillespie's claims that there was little difference between and rather easy accommodation of Catholics on the Ulster plantation in the years before 1641 is implicitly questioned by David Finnegan's "Irish political Catholicism from the 1530s to 1660." Unlike the older generation, Finnegan and his peers have taken on the call to engage deeply with Continental sources, rather than to pay them mere lip service, and the result is a new historiography greatly enriched by the examination of the "enormous influence of religion."

Three of the best articles challenge revisionist pieties. For the Middle Ages, we learn that indeed "the lights grew dim during these times of trouble"—the Norman Conquest. And for the era of the penal or anti-papery laws, Thomas Bartlett explains that even if eighteenth-century Ireland was a type of *ancien régime*, still "what the penal laws did was to turn 'honour' into disgrace, reduce 'deference' to servility, and seek to undo family ties." And Eamonn Ó Ciardha's "Irish-language sources for Irish Catholic identity" is useful and informative, even if some will find his conclusions debatable.

The final series of essays may in some ways be the most interesting, since they deal with the twentieth and twenty-first century. The fate of the Catholic Church in the wake of the sexual abuse scandals is taken on by Niall Coll, who deals with what Diarmuid Martin has predicted will be the minority status of Catholic culture. Indeed, the "hostility to Catholicism" is accounted for in part by the increased power of the media. The author's call for attention to the genuine spirit of Vatican II as a way forward for the church may be too little too late, given the lack of trust on the part of the laity. When these essays were written, Bergoglio had not yet become the first Jesuit pope. It yet remains to be seen whether his enlightened and humane call for a more inclusive and ecologically aware Catholicism will help create a new form of Christian identity in Ireland. What would be truly revolutionary in Ireland would be a more inclusive attitude toward illegal immigrants, the poorest of the poor, to whom Pope Francis has brought the world's attention.

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