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IRELAND UNDER THE ACT OF UNION, 1801–1922: FRACTIOUS ALLY OR REBELLIOUS COLONY?

James G. Collins

THE British Act of Union of 1801 incorporated Ireland into Great Britain with status ostensibly equal to that of Scotland, Wales, and England. In Ireland, Catholics and Protestants alike protested the act, which dissolved the three hundred member Irish Parliament, shifted Irish legislative representation to the English Parliament, and limited Irish representation in that body to one hundred members. The Union ended in 1921 after rebellion and the establishment of the Irish Free State. Historians of Ireland have debated whether the Act of Union in Ireland formalized a British imperialist presence ensconced by prior occupation or whether the act was, in fact, a British misstep originally intended to embrace Ireland as a fully privileged member of Great Britain. The interpretive stances in the debate over whether Ireland stood as Great Britain's fractious ally or its rebellious colony have ranged from "nationalist floridity" to "rationalist aridity."¹

What is this intellectual struggle about? Is it not just a semantic exercise to debate whether or not Ireland was once a colony of Great Britain? Not completely, not, at least, to historians of Ireland. To them, it is about defining Ireland's past and, by extension, Ulster's present. If the answer to the question "Was Ireland a Colony under the Union?" is yes, then what is Ulster's present status? How about Scotland and Wales?

The books and articles under review examine the recent historiographical debate over Ireland's national status during the Act of Union. This essay interrogates these texts hoping to answer some questions: What was the Act of Union, and why did Great Britain enact it? Did Great Britain dominate and subjugate Ireland, or bring modernity, law, and order to the island? Did Britain rule Ireland, or did Ireland rule Ireland? The answers to these questions may suggest an answer to a final

¹ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland: 1798–1998* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 3.

question: Was Ireland, in fact, a colony? This paper will argue that in spite of its creation of a *de jure* union with Ireland through its Act of Union, in the long term, British administration in Ireland bungled its mission to finalize its *de facto* union through ineptitude and an ironically overbearing sense of superiority to all things not English and not Protestant. The turmoil that simmered steadily in Ireland for one hundred and twenty years after the Act of Union and that finally boiled over during the Home Rule controversy in 1914–1916 resulted from British efforts to compel cooperation from a citizenry that distrusted the stewardship of conceited incompetents, not from the efforts of an oppressed majority to overthrow an imperialist interloper.

Historians who have attempted to answer the questions posed above have tended to coalesce into schools of thought ranging from a radical, separatist nationalism to a liberal analysis that sees benefits accruing to both parties in the Union. The liberal stance sees Unionism as a progressive and ultimately positive force and Ireland, as a whole, a regional component in the European Atlantic system. The nationalist posture avows that Great Britain always intended to colonize Ireland and that the proof of its intentions is in the economic, social, and administrative regulations it enacted that benefited Great Britain at the expense of Ireland. In between this range of positions reside many nuances and hybrids of those themes.²

Alvin Jackson's 1999 book introduces this historiographical debate in *Ireland: 1798–1998*. Jackson describes how this discourse heated up with the growth of a "scientific historical methodology" applied to Irish history in the journal *Irish Historical Studies* beginning in 1938. Jackson divides the analysis of Irish history after the Act of Union into three categories. He places Irish postcolonial and decolonization analysis into one category he calls "nationalist" scholarship. The scholars he describes interpret evidence to show that England's intention with the Act of Union was to formalize a colonial subjugation in Ireland but give it another name. An adaptive form of this viewpoint that Jackson typifies as "neonationalist" is characterized by what he calls a "greening of Ireland" type scholarship. The neonationalist point of view has bred a burst of interest in all things Irish, such as "Riverdance" and Neil Jordan's film "Michael Collins."³ The third side of Jackson's historiographical triangle has those historians he calls "liberals," that is, those who saw post-Union Ireland as England's argumentative ally, one not quite at peace with itself as a member of a greater commonwealth. For his own work, Jackson

² Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7–10.

³ Jackson, 3.

claims neither a liberal approach nor a neonationalist one. Jackson writes, “this volume could not consciously be imbued with any Whiggish agenda, however subtle or artless.”⁴ In other words, he considers himself neutral as opposed to other scholars. His contention is not convincing, however, because the subject matter has for so long excited intense debate. The key word in his statement above is “conscious.” How consciously neutral can historians of Ireland be about Irish history? It seems to be a field that begs taking sides, intentionally or otherwise—an impression that the aforementioned fragmentation in the historiography seems to confirm.

Jackson begins his discussion by summarizing the Act of Union, Britain’s unilateral reaction to the Theobald Wolfe Tone’s abortive rebellion in 1798. To Jackson, Great Britain intended the act to address two key issues in Great Britain’s administration of Ireland: its legislative structure and Catholic exclusion from politics. The first four articles of the Act of Union reorganized Great Britain’s political relationship with Ireland. In addition to the aforementioned dissolution of the Irish Parliament and the reduction of Ireland’s legislative representation from three hundred members in an Irish Assembly to one hundred members in the British Parliament, these four articles also restructured the nature of the Irish political representation. According to Jackson, this new structure constituted a more democratic assembly than the former, more oligarchic arrangement. Article V united the Church of England with the Church of Ireland, while Article VIII united the judicial structures.⁵

Articles VI and VII, touching on economic issues, proved the most disputatious. They established a customs union and regulated tariffs.⁶ These articles leveraged British control of Ireland’s production and trade, and later gave ammunition to Irish radicals’ claims that the act disempowered the Irish people. Historians of the Great Famine find this assertion particularly flammable. Jackson writes, however, that it is “possible to exaggerate the economic consequences of the Union.” He claims that Ireland’s economy depended on trade with England since the eighteenth century and that the Union itself “did not, therefore, create British economic ascendancy in Ireland.”⁷ When Jackson applies this view to the Great Famine, he contends that British relief policies, not its laissez-faire approach, failed those whom the famine most affected. He seems to imply instead that nationalist and neonationalist postures have evolved over the years because of Great Britain’s dogged determination

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

not to interfere with the free market economy during the crisis. He describes British commercial policies such as those permitting merchants to export food during the famine instead of distributing the product among the needy as simply wrongheaded, but not the vicious exploitation of an imperialist:

The government was undoubtedly characterized by a cussed faith in a self-regulating market and by an exaggerated view of the economic strength of the Irish landed class: no other interpretation can adequately explain the emphasis on public works in 1846–7 at the expense of cheap food.⁸

Certainly, Jackson concedes, the public avowals during the crisis by British administrators such as Sir Charles Trevelyan, the Crown's treasurer and the administrator of relief measures during the famine, that it was God's revenge on the superstitious papists, add evidence to the nationalists' contention that British policies during the famine were extractive and oppressive. However, Jackson sees no evidence that postures such as Trevelyan's had the vicious intent that the radical viewpoint espouses. Instead, Jackson argues that Britain botched its stewardship of Ireland through ineptitude, not bad spirit. For him, the nationalist view of Britain as Ireland's bogeyman has no merit, but merely echoes the nationalist polemics of the radical firebrand John Mitchel, who declared, "the Almighty indeed sent the potato blight, but the English created the Famine."⁹

Jackson challenges Christine Kinealy's early assertions that the famine was, in fact, "a crude mechanism for social reform."¹⁰ Kinealy, a scholar of the Great Famine, contributed "Was Ireland a Colony? The Evidence of the Great Famine," to Terrence McDonough's edited volume *Was Ireland a Colony? Economics, Politics and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*. Kinealy uses the Great Famine as a framework to build her argument that, as she says, "Ireland was not an equal partner within the Union but was to continue to have a quasi-colonial status."¹¹ Most Irish agricultural production, according to Kinealy, was exported to Britain, which depended on Irish agricultural exports. In the face of five years of widespread deprivation, Kinealy claims, "vast amounts of food left Ireland"—exports that British and Ascendancy merchants managed

⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Christine Kinealy, "Was Ireland a Colony? The Evidence of the Great Famine," in *Was Ireland a Colony? Economics, Politics, and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, ed. Terrence McDonough (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2005), 55.

with the assistance of a British Parliament that believed the Great Famine was the fault of the Irish lack of industry, their faith in a false God, and a low moral condition.¹²

The evidence that Kinealy presents to answer the research question seems to support a thesis that Britain managed Ireland as it would a colony. Kinealy, however, equivocates. Why, for example, does she describe Ireland's status as "quasi-colonial"? From Kinealy's paper, it seems that if Britain perceived Ireland as its collaborator in empire after the Act of Union, it had an unusually autocratic approach to an alliance. She stops just short, however, of pointing a finger of blame at British imperialism.

Virginia Crossman also fails to answer the question in her article "Local Government in Nineteenth Century Ireland," in McDonough's volume. Crossman argues, "the administrative history of the British Empire in the nineteenth century was dominated by two apparently contradictory developments: the moves toward colonial autonomy and imperial unity."¹³ While purporting to incorporate Ireland into the Union with the empire, Britain built administrative structures in Ireland that had no precedent elsewhere in the United Kingdom.¹⁴

Crossman writes that while Britain aimed to model its governmental structures in Ireland on those in England and espoused the official line granting autonomy or near autonomy in local government administration, its Ascendancy collaborators, in fact, dominated post-Union Ireland. If this structural arrangement sounds as if two different factions of Parliament formulated the post-Union administration in Ireland, Crossman leads us to believe that it is because that is precisely what happened. The administrative divisions reflected the chasm between the Protestant Ascendancy and the Catholic majority that Kinealy noted in her essay. This time, these differences in how to administer Ireland's local government played out through the factionalizing of local government into those advocating administration through a system of locally elected guardians that were largely Catholic and nationalist, and those advocating administration through grand juries, which were Protestant and pro-Union.¹⁵ Crossman quotes Sir Henry Robinson, a Local Government Board functionary, who said he "endeavoured to ensure that his [Robinson's] staff contained a mixture of nationalities, believing that it

¹² "Ascendancy" refers the Great Britain's Protestant collaborators in Ireland. See James Kelly, "Popular Politics in Ireland and the Act of Union," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 10, no. 1 (2000): 263; Kinealy, 58.

¹³ Victoria Crossman, "Local Government in Nineteenth Century Ireland," in McDonough, *Was Ireland a Colony?* 102.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

was unwise to rely on Irishmen alone.”¹⁶ This is a revealing statement that bears elaboration, but one that Crossman elides. Robinson’s statement prompts one to ask that if Ireland were a member of the United Kingdom and thus British, why did he refer to the Irish as if they were a nationality apart?

Crossman notes that the close supervision that the Protestant Ascendancy exercised over local administration was intended “to protect the interests and influence of the Protestant minority.”¹⁷ As the differences between the largely pro-British Protestants and the mostly anti-British Catholics that Kinealy notes expressed themselves through local administration as Crossman observes it and became politicized, then we can explain how Irish government administration morphed into a two-headed monster under the Act of Union. That observation might also explain the contradicting bureaucracies that may, in fact, have prevented effective government reform in Ireland under the Union, and may therefore have served as an ignition point for the frustration that the Irish felt with Great Britain—a frustration that eventually turned into violent opposition.

Crossman’s paper, however, points to no conclusions about Ireland’s status under the Union. Indeed, we see noncommittal conclusions throughout the McDonough volume. For example, Sean Ryder opens his chapter “Defining Colony and Empire in Early Nineteenth-Century Irish Nationalism” by positing “we can see that nineteenth-century Ireland exhibits characteristics of a colony, whether or not nineteenth-century commentators had the ability or insight to say so.”¹⁸ He presents no evidence, however, to support this statement. Instead, he qualifies his article’s purpose as one that “is not to determine in a purely empirical sense whether Ireland was in fact a colony in the nineteenth century,” which seems an evasion of McDonough’s purpose in assembling his volume.¹⁹ Denis O’Hearn’s essay “Ireland in the Atlantic Economy” hedges the argument as well: “Was Ireland a colony? In many senses,” he writes in beginning his article on Irish trade, “this is a semantic question and the answer depends on how we define colonialism.”²⁰ Charles Orser’s essay “The Material Implications of Colonialism in Early Nineteenth-Century Ireland”—an article that immediately follows Kinealy’s ambivalent essay—proceeds directly from the assumption that Ireland was, in

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁸ Sean Ryder, “Defining Colony and Empire in Early Nineteenth-Century Irish Nationalism,” in *ibid.*, 166.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Denis O’Hearn, “Ireland in the Atlantic Economy,” in *ibid.*, 3.

fact, a colony.²¹ There is no transition between the articles nor is there any supporting evidence in the preceding articles. We are left only with Orser's basic assumption as a starting point. The lack of continuity and the failure to build to a theme are two of this book's three major failures. The third is that the book does not answer its own research question. The very title of the book suggests that the essays within intend to help answer the question "Was Ireland a Colony?" It is perplexing that the authors do not seem to try.

While McDonough's strategy of answering the research question fails because of its ambiguity, Alvin Jackson's book commits to a stance. Jackson parses out significant issues in Irish history and analyzes them through the lens of British imperialist practice in its periphery, an imperialist practice that requires a clear mission and efficient practical application. Jackson's evidence seems to support his argument that Great Britain did not, either through intention or application, administer Ireland as a colony.

Like Jackson's and McDonough's books, Bruce Stewart's edited volume *Hearts and Minds* discusses details that create a cross section of Ireland's status under the Act of Union. Stewart asks his contributors to answer the question "Was the political attempt to suture [Ireland and England] in 1800 never more than an act of cultural and political hegemony which might as well be branded colonialism as anything else?"²² In this book, Claire Connolly, James Murphy, Norman Vance, and R. F. Foster examine the Union through fiction and poetry. Connolly sees marriage in Romantic fiction as a political metaphor for Union; Murphy interprets Home Rule novels to analyze post-Union radical renegades' readiness to fight; Vance examines the work of Catholic writers whose frustrated hopes for Catholic Emancipation may have grown into the national cause for secession from the Union; and R. F. Foster examines the letters and poetry of W. B. Yeats to reveal that writer's involvement with nationalist causes. These are interesting essays that offer some evidence to help answer the question "was Ireland a colony under the Act of Union?" More germane to that issue, however, are the essays by Anthony Cronin, J. W. Foster, W. J. McCormack, Thomas Bartlett, Luke Gibbons, and Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh.

Anthony Cronin evaluates Ireland from the perspective of the present in "Ireland under the Union: Looking Back." According to Cronin, after the Act of Union, Ireland seemed to reject Britain's ad-

²¹ Charles E. Orser, Jr., "The Material Implications of Colonialism in Early Nineteenth-Century Ireland," in *ibid.*, 66–86.

²² Bruce Stewart, ed., *Hearts and Minds: Irish Culture and Society under the Act of Union* (Buckinghamshire, UK: Colin Smythe, 1999), 1.

vances. "Ireland became," he states, "steadily less like England as the century advanced . . . [T]here now began to arise in Ireland a new sort of nationalism."²³ Cronin concludes that Ireland spurned Britain's attempts to assimilate the Irish population at least in part because it feared British attempts to evangelize it away from its traditional Catholicism. Luke Gibbons follows with his essay "The Mirror and the Vamp: Reflections on the Act of Union." He argues that textual analysis of literature of the time reveals that Ireland was not culturally or socially prepared for Union with Great Britain. "The experience of the Act of Union," he writes, "was less one of fusion than transfusion."²⁴ His examination of Maria Edgeworth's novel *Castle Rackrent* reveals the contradictions underlying the Act of Union:

Though the rhetoric of a union of hearts and minds conveys the impression of an agreement between equals, Edgeworth leaves no doubt that what we are dealing with is a process of absorption in which the identity of one party is subsumed into that of the other.²⁵

For Gibbons, then, the Act of Union was destined for failure from the outset because of its implied demand for Irish assimilation.

J. W. Foster's analysis entitled "Tyndall, Darwin and the Ulster Presbyterians" in Stewart's volume claims that the act made sweeping changes that remain in Irish life. "Native ways (or at least the long established ways)," he writes, "often degenerated, or else developed in anglicized forms."²⁶ Foster's essay concerns the relationship between science and religion in Ireland, a relationship fraught with the peculiar tensions between Protestant, scientifically permissive, and well-funded Unionist institutions versus an academically segregated Catholicism that could be hostile to science. "Irish science in the Victorian period was largely British science," he writes, whereas "Ireland before the Union with its own parliament and institutions generated sufficient scientific autonomy."²⁷ To him, Ireland was a colony prior to Union, and vestiges of colonial practice remained after the Union, not entirely to the detriment of scientific enquiry in Ireland.

W. J. McCormack's contribution to the Stewart book examines the Union through the language of "progress," certainly a relative term

²³ Anthony Cronin, "Ireland under the Union: Looking Back," in *ibid.*, 16.

²⁴ Luke Gibbons, "The Mirror and the Vamp: Reflections on the Act of Union," in *ibid.*, 22.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁶ J. W. Foster, "Tyndall, Darwin and the Ulster Presbyterians," in *ibid.*, 40.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 44, 43.

depending on if one is a Unionist or a Nationalist.²⁸ He writes of the Union's "manifestly insufficient arrangements which resulted then contributed to that restless, driving 'progressive' politics."²⁹ For him, the Union, its "constitutional permanence," and its rhetoric of progress created the political discontent that ultimately opened the door for most of Ireland to reject the Union.³⁰

Thomas Bartlett's entry in the Stewart volume is entitled "'An Union for Empire': The Anglo-Irish Union as an Imperial Project" and examines Ireland's relationship to England prior to union. Bartlett writes, "Ireland's position within the old British Empire (1600–1783) was profoundly ambiguous."³¹ This ambiguity did not change after the Union, which explains the popular contentiousness and ambiguity concerning the issue of Ireland's status. Ireland more or less defaulted into the category of "colony" after "few of the promises held out by Unionists were realised . . . [T]he Union did in fact prove to be a gateway to Empire."³² For Bartlett, then, the Union was the defining act of an incrementally installed British imperialism in Ireland.

If the status of indigenous language is an important measuring stick of national status, then Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh's essay "The State, Sentiment & the Politics of Language" has a special importance in Stewart's collection. Language adoption and language preservation may indicate how an indigenous people regards itself in relation to another resident group—such as resident colonialists—and it may also measure an indigenous people's willingness to assimilate or incorporate the culture of another. Ó Tuathaigh evaluates Ireland's status under the Act of Union through a framework of Britain's policies on the Irish language. In spite of a decline in the use of Irish during the years of the Union (a significant part of which he attributes to the loss of Irish speakers during the famine), Ó Tuathaigh finds a remarkable willingness on the part of the British administration in Ireland to preserve the Irish language.³³ He found little significance to the overheated debate between Nationalists and Unionists on this issue:

In its vigour and occasional bitterness the debate was more than anything else a bitter family row within Nationalist Ireland on the issue of

²⁸ W. J. McCormack, "Some Versions of Progress under the Union," in *ibid.*, 90.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Thomas Bartlett, "'An Union for Empire': The Anglo-Irish Union as an Imperial Project," in *ibid.*, 249.

³² *Ibid.*, 257.

³³ The authors in these reviewed works refer to the indigenous language of Ireland as Irish rather than Gaelic. I have done the same.

whether the Irish language had a symbolic or an essential significance as a defining constituent of Irish national identity.³⁴

Ó Tuathaigh's findings contradict those of John Coolahan. In "Education as Cultural Imperialism: The Denial of the Irish Language to Irish Speakers 1831–1922," in *Paedagogica Historica*, Coolahan examines British policy regarding the Irish language through the framework of British administration of Irish public schools. He describes the British practice of suppressing the Irish language by mandating that only English be spoken in Irish public schools. According to Coolahan, this practice created great difficulty for Irish speaking children to succeed in their school work. Coolahan writes that school administrators argued at length with British policymakers in Ireland on the exclusion of the Irish language from the schools. He quotes one contemporary commentator:

English is in truth a *modern or foreign* language to these children—a language which they hear not a word of in their homes or intercourse with one another . . . This method of teaching English in Irish-speaking districts has been in operation for the past half century and has signally failed.³⁵

If the debate over the exclusion of the Irish language reached into the corridors of the British administration in Ireland, then Ó Tuathaigh's claim that the discourse over language was nothing more than a "bitter family row" appears a gross understatement. We could be tempted to construe the deliberate suppression of the indigenous Irish language as an act of *de jure* and *de facto* imperialism.

James H. Murphy confirms Coolahan's findings. In his book *Ireland: A Social, Cultural and Literary History 1791–1891*, Murphy writes of the British effort to suppress the Irish language. By the middle of the nineteenth century, less than one quarter of the population spoke Irish, and most of them lived in the remote western counties.³⁶ Murphy reports that the greatest effort to preserve the use of the Irish language in the nineteenth century came from the Protestant churches, who found it to be a suitable tool for evangelizing the mostly Catholic Irish speakers. Murphy writes that Ireland's "contested status—country, region, nation, or colony . . ." and its lack of peculiarly Irish political institutions subjected its literature and social practices to close inspection by those

³⁴ Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, "The State, Sentiment & the Politics of Language," in *ibid.*, 87.

³⁵ John Coolahan, "Education as Cultural Imperialism: The Denial of the Irish Language to Irish Speakers, 1831–1922," *Paedagogica Historica* 37 (2001): 23–24.

³⁶ James H. Murphy, *Ireland: A Social, Cultural, and Literary History 1791–1891* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 29.

who needed to judge the Irish as “normal or eccentric, as civilized or savage.”³⁷ He attempts to read Irish political discourse through its non-political production, but he does not avoid addressing directly the messier political and social topics. For instance, Murphy analyzes Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* through a different lens than Gibbons did in the Stewart book. Where Gibbons emphasized Edgeworth’s role as an author carrying the Protestant Ascendancy message of assimilation of the Irish people to her largely English readership, Murphy sees that novel as one conveying to her English readers the need for reform in Ireland’s British administration.³⁸ For Gibbons, Edgeworth implies a deterministic inevitability of British dominance in Ireland. Murphy, on the other hand, sees Edgeworth cautioning her English readers that British presence in Ireland could not be guaranteed under the circumstances of the period. Murphy writes that *Castle Rackrent* represented Edgeworth’s effort to “promote a society both in Britain and Ireland based on merit and money rather than on interest and patronage,” an evaluation that aptly summarizes the pro-British Ascendancy stance in Ireland.³⁹ Murphy’s analysis proves Edgeworth’s subtext in *Castle Rackrent* to be prescient.

Murphy’s other analyses are equally astute. In his chapter “Crafting Celts, 1760–1893,” for example, he writes of the rise of Celtic studies and the construction of the Celtic persona. The Ascendancy-dominated Irish Archaeological Society published antiquarian articles on the Celts and scrutinized—then constructed—Celtic culture to shape a British picture of the essential Celt. As Celticism grew into a fad, writers such as Ernest Renan and Matthew Arnold published tracts on Celts and Celticism. Arnold’s essentialist enterprise claimed that the Celts were “a beaten race which could never aspire to autonomy” because their “child-like qualities . . . needed proper guidance.”⁴⁰ The Irish and the English could reconcile their differences, according to Arnold, if only the Irish would subordinate themselves to British administration. Arnold’s view won popularity because the British consumed voraciously these cartoonish images of the Irish based on crude reductions.⁴¹

Murphy clarifies key points that the other volumes left vague. For example, he attributes the Catholic Church’s involvement with education after the famine to its fear of Protestant evangelizing and its desperation to build a wider base of middle class Catholics to resist Protestant

³⁷ Ibid., 9.

³⁸ Ibid., 54.

³⁹ Ibid., 55.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 48.

⁴¹ Ibid., 83.

incursion.⁴² He explains succinctly the regional nature of the famine's impact and the "differing economic strengths" that these regions could bring to bear against that disaster.⁴³ Of the three authors in this review who evaluated the famine that followed the potato blight, Murphy makes the strongest statement as to British culpability:

The net effect of providentialism, political economy and the less than inclusive embrace of Ireland in the United Kingdom was to make the British response to the crisis far from creditable. Though the charge of genocide cannot be sustained, the moral outrage against the British government . . . is now acknowledged by historians as valid and warranted.⁴⁴

For Murphy, the Act of Union ultimately brought about changes in Irish life that are still seen decades after Partition, when Ireland was separated into a nationalist Free State and a northern sector that remained loyal to Britain and joined in union with it.⁴⁵ His evidence shows that the British imposed those changes with some degree of coercion—coercion of the type that is frequently labeled "imperialist" in practice.

Of the authors reviewed here, Keith Jeffery makes perhaps the most concise statement of Ireland's status under the Union. In his edited volume *'An Irish Empire'? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire*, Jeffery acknowledges "much academic writing about Ireland, its history and culture, is dominated by the vocabulary of imperialism."⁴⁶ He adds that England found many willing Irish Nationalist collaborators during the era of the Union, collaborators who "came to see the Empire as a liberating framework within which Irish autonomy might successfully be secured."⁴⁷ Willing collaborators or not, by the end of World War I, British imperialism everywhere was coming apart at the seams and British cabinet committees were scurrying to negotiations "from Ireland to Hong Kong" to patch up the holes.⁴⁸ Revolution in Ireland, resistance in the British periphery, and the Great War had drained Great Britain of the resources and the will to continue its imperialist enterprises. Some in the British government urged Prime Minister Lloyd George to exercise political restraint in hopes of minimizing the possibility of colonial revolts that would surely occur if a weakened Great Britain overplayed its

⁴² *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁴⁶ Keith Jeffery, ed., *'An Irish Empire'? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1996), 1.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

hand in its imperial periphery. One weary committee member, H. A. L. Fisher, begged the Prime Minister to grant concessions in Egypt, saying “all I am concerned with is to send [the Irish moderate John] Redmond with a good offer for fear that we may have to deal with a [revolutionary Irishman] Michael Collins.”⁴⁹

Jeffery’s book examines this fragmenting relationship between Ireland and the British Empire through the essays of eight authors. These essays evaluate this relationship through film, sports, the military, public celebrations, business and commerce, and the activities of loyalists. The essay by Jeffrey Richards examines the myths and stereotypes of Ireland and the Irish that were seen in films. Richards contends that British and American filmmakers constructed and maintained these myths. By analyzing these films, Richards argues that Ireland’s relationship to the British Empire was ambivalent; Ireland had “a desire for emancipation from it at home but a willingness to participate in it abroad.”⁵⁰

In his chapter “Ireland, Sport and Empire,” Alan Bairner contends “the extent to which sport became an instrument of imperial policy is astonishing.”⁵¹ In Victorian England, the British considered sports character builders. Athletics were the glue that held together imperial relationships. The army and the schools disseminated this spirit of sportsmanship. Sports in Ireland became so important that Irish nationalists seized on the need to re-establish long-forgotten Irish sports traditions (e.g., hurling) to revive Irish hunger for a separate national identity.

T. G. Fraser’s contribution to Jeffery’s book, “Ireland and India,” explains the role of the Irish in administering the British Empire in peripheral colonies such as India. Fraser notes an historically “close Irish involvement in the administration of the Raj.”⁵² Ireland’s new independence and “her growing assertiveness in the affairs of the Empire confirmed that Indians could look forward to a similar evolution.”⁵³

Alvin Jackson examines the relationship between the empire and Irish Unionists in his appropriately titled chapter “Irish Unionists and the Empire: 1880–1920.” In this chapter, we see a politically alert and fiercely loyal Unionist minority supporting the empire through politics and business. Jackson examines the impact of the Boer War on Irish nationalism, of which he states, “more Irish people, and therefore more Irish loyalists, were engaged in the war than in any earlier purely

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁰ Jeffrey Richards, “Ireland, the Empire and Film,” in *ibid.*, 31.

⁵¹ Alan Bairner, “Ireland, Sport and Empire,” in *ibid.*, 59.

⁵² T. G. Fraiser, “Ireland and India,” in *ibid.*, 88.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 90.

imperial conflict.”⁵⁴ Did this widespread Irish participation signal an overt Loyalist patriotism, perhaps a backlash to Irish separatist nationalism? Not entirely. According to Jackson, “strained finances, rather than an expensive commitment to the Empire, dictated the career paths of many landed Unionists.”⁵⁵ In other words, the Irish gentry who ran out of money sought employment with the British government in its colonial periphery. What is significant about that finding is that due to their fallen economic circumstances, many “gentleman” Irish Unionists had to participate with British colonial administration out of self-interest rather than loyalty. Perhaps Fraser could have used similar evidence in his essay to explain the predominance of Irish colonial administrators in India.

Also in Jeffery’s volume, Philip Ollerenshaw describes the business climate in Northern Ireland in “Businessmen in Northern Ireland and the Imperial Connection, 1886–1939.” To Ollerenshaw, the need for raw materials drove the interest of business in the empire.⁵⁶ Nationalist rhetoric and talk of Home Rule worried businessmen of the industrialized and predominately Protestant Irish Northeast because of the specter of “an inward looking, Catholic-dominated, agriculture-oriented Dublin government.”⁵⁷ The Home Rule prospect also brought to the North the prospect of Protestant Ireland becoming the ruled, rather than the ruler. For many Protestant Irish, that thought did not sit well.

Most interesting in this collection are an essay by David Hume, “Empire Day in Ireland 1896–1962” and Keith Jeffery’s own “The Irish Military Tradition and the British Empire.” Hume’s essay examines the annual commemoration beginning with Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee that Lord Meath coined to “promote the training of youth in their responsibilities towards the Empire.”⁵⁸ He sold the idea to the Queen on the basis of an old Ascendancy stereotype:

The Irish are perhaps the most delightful, the most witty, and the best mannered people on the face of the earth, if only the subject of land tenure, religion and politics may be eliminated in conversation or dealings with them.⁵⁹

The idea for Empire Day gained traction through the support of schools, newspapers, and the Protestant churches and by 1912 had evolved into a

⁵⁴ Alvin Jackson, “Irish Unionists and the Empire, 1880–1920,” in *ibid.*, 131.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁵⁶ Philip Ollerenshaw, “Businessmen in Northern Ireland and the Imperial Connection, 1886–1939,” in *ibid.*, 169.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁵⁸ David Hume, “Empire Day in Ireland 1896–1962,” in *ibid.*, 150.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 151.

Loyalist rallying point. It is interesting to compare the evidence in this article with that in James Loughlin's essay "Allegiance and Illusion: Queen Victoria's Irish Visit of 1849," which appeared in *History*. Loughlin points out the Queen's reticence to follow Lord Fitzwilliam's suggestion that she visit her subjects during the peak of the disastrous famine.⁶⁰ The Queen never liked the Irish and worried that the Irish felt the same way about her. Lord Palmerston, presaging Lord Meath's use of the Irish stereotype, told the Queen that she "could depend on the effusive nature of the Irish character to ensure a good popular reception" if only the priests and the nationalist agitators could be brought to heel.⁶¹ As it developed, Ireland accorded the Queen an enthusiastic reception. Waifs and ragamuffins ran alongside her carriage waving and smiling at her, while "immense multitudes" cheered her at every appearance.⁶² The display of affection for the Queen disgusted the radical separatist John Mitchel, who remarked, "the debased nation set its neck under her feet in a paroxysm of fictitious 'loyalty.' It is painful to relate, but it is the disgraceful fact."⁶³

How can one explain Ireland's outpouring of affection for the Queen of England during the apex of the Great Famine? Loughlin contends that the visit occurred at a time of Ireland's most severe need. Fiery Irish Parliamentarian Daniel O'Connell had died and the potato blight ravaged a staple crop. The country was ravished, rudderless, and suffering from indifferent policy implementation. Loughlin believes that the island's response to the Queen was merely the outpouring of affection on the presence of any leader who might pay attention to its needs.⁶⁴ One may also speculate that, if Murphy's analysis of Maria Edgeworth's writing is correct, the Irish welcomed the Queen as the visiting boss auditing the mess her employees had made of the country. They may have believed that the Queen determined to make an inspection tour of her rickety government in Ireland rather than make a simple goodwill appearance to her subjects.

Jeffery's own contribution to his volume evaluates an issue that may provide a microcosm of Irish status under the Union. "The Irish Military Tradition and the British Empire" opens with Bernard Shaw's quote "all an Irishman's hopes and ambitions turn on his opportunities of getting

⁶⁰ James Loughlin, "Allegiance and Illusion: Queen Victoria's Irish Visit of 1849," *History* 87 (2002): 498.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 499.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 502.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 505.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 509.

out of Ireland.”⁶⁵ Most young men could fulfill this ambition by joining the military. The Irish have a long and honored tradition of mercenary service in many military branches throughout the globe, and the army of Great Britain had proved a frequent landing pad for Irish militarists. This scenario changed at the beginning of World War I, when a drastic drop in enlistments induced the British government to consider adopting conscription in Ireland. Jeffery uses voluntary enlistment records to determine if the figures reflect a political sympathy to the radicalization of the Irish National movement. He finds that recruitment patterns do not show a significant correlation.⁶⁶ “The progressive (though not consistently so) unwillingness of Irishmen to serve Britain . . . may say as much about contemporary attitudes to the war throughout the British Isles as it does about political circumstances in Ireland.”⁶⁷ Jeffery’s data seems to uphold this contention, especially in his comparisons of recruitment efforts in “nationalist” as opposed to “Unionist” Ulster. What is so striking is that after Partition, British Army recruitment from the Irish Free State *increased*. Indeed, “27 percent of the recruits for the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers came from the twenty-six counties.”⁶⁸ Is this startling statistic a sign of Irish affection for Great Britain after Partition or, as Shaw might suggest, does it simply reflect a desire to get out of Ireland?

Allan Blackstock’s 2000 article “The Union and the Military, 1801–1830” from *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* sheds light on the answer to that question. In this essay, Blackstock examines the military implications of the Act of Union. After the Peace of Amiens in 1802, the army in Ireland was besieged by infighting and intramural bureaucratic power struggles. Blackstock blames the Union not for the clashes, but “the fact that Union left so much ill-defined in military affairs, as it did in legal and ecclesiastical matters, created a battleground for these conflicts to be fought out.”⁶⁹ One of these ill-defined matters was the status of Catholics in the military. Periodically, the army excluded practicing Catholics from service. Army administrators “had received ‘some official reports and many vague rumours that the Roman Catholic soldiers of the army are not to be depended upon.’”⁷⁰ The Irish home guard cavalry, called the Yeomanry, consisted primarily of Protestants. The official

⁶⁵ Keith Jeffery, “The Irish Military Tradition and the British Empire,” in Jeffery, *An Irish Empire?* 94.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁶⁹ Allan Blackstock, “The Union and the Military, 1801–c. 1830,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 10, no. 1 (2000): 341.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 349–350.

restrictions on Catholics supported the army's official policy of religious assimilation, a policy that, to Blackstock, could have proved catastrophic because of the instability it created.⁷¹ Only the apparent decline in the importance of religious observance among the ranks around the 1830s kept the army's religious mix from becoming flammable.⁷² Blackstock's observation may help answer the question above regarding the apparently enthusiastic enlistment of Irish volunteers after Partition. That is, politics and religion have traditionally been the ignition points between Unionists and Nationalists. If religious observance had become insignificant in the ranks of the army, and the importance of politics diminished after Partition and the establishment of the Irish Free State, two potentially abrasive elements between the British and the Irish in the ranks were removed. The absence of those elements probably would have relaxed potential tensions in the armed services. If we accept that analysis, the answer to the question above as to whether the startling rise in Irish recruit enlistment after Partition represented a newly discovered affection for England or simply a way out of Ireland, then the evidence supports the latter. If nationalism was no longer an issue in the Irish ranks as a result of Irish independence, and religious difference was removed as a source of conflict, then there would be little else preventing an Irish youth who lacked other opportunities from joining the army to create a job and, perhaps, a future for himself. Otherwise, to prove the growth of some kind of affection of the Irish rank and file for Great Britain would require investigating evidence that is not present in these reviewed works.

Does the evidence in these reviewed works succeed in supporting a conclusion about Ireland's colonial status under the Act of Union? Jackson, a liberal historian, proves the efficacy of Union, but does not directly indulge the question of Ireland's political status. Instead, he examines two hundred years of Ireland's history from the standpoint of the Act of Union's intent and the relations it created between England and Ireland. Blackstock supports that approach in his monograph. McDonough and his authors present strong evidence that Great Britain administered Ireland as a colony rather than a partner in a political union, but none seem willing to state conclusively whether this relationship could be formally described as one of metropole and client. Jeffery, like Jackson a liberal, entertains the possibility that Ireland was a colony rather than part of the metropole of Great Britain. The authors in his volume, however, are not convincing that Ireland was a colony in the sense that, for example, India was. Loughlin seems to agree, given the

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 350.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 349.

Crown's high-handed and paternalistic attitude toward Ireland and the unexpectedly boisterous response of Ireland's famine-besieged citizenry to the Queen's only visit there. The evidence in Murphy's monograph supports a conclusion that Ireland was a colony if not *de jure*, then certainly *de facto*. Only Stewart and his authors present evidence that firmly concludes that Ireland was Britain's colony *de facto* and *de jure*. Coolahan's evidence in a separate journal article supports that assertion insofar as education in Ireland was affected by Great Britain's presence.

I, for one, am not convinced that the evidence declares Ireland a colony in the sense that the "non-white" British colonies were.⁷³ Hanging over a judgment about this issue is the legislative endeavor of the Union itself. The Union was an act that purportedly designed to incorporate Ireland and the Irish people into the United Kingdom and make them as British as the English. This research seems to show that Irish resistance to the Union was not predicated by the Act of Union itself, but by a British mind inculcated with an imperialist's approach to policy-making, a mind that determined that those persons not British and not Protestant were childlike, uncivilized, and in need of uplift. Incrementally increasing Irish resistance to this forcible British paternalism instigated incrementally severe British countermeasures. Certainly, that incremental oppression has created the idea that Great Britain colonized Ireland. More than that, however, is the impression that the British did the opposite of what it should have done to win Irish loyalty. The Union might have succeeded in Ireland as it had in Wales and Scotland if the British could have just gotten out of their own way.

James G. Collins is a graduate student in American History at SFSU, specializing in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. He is writing a thesis which he hopes to finish by the end of 2009. He did his undergraduate study at Johns Hopkins University, where he majored in Interdisciplinary Studies with emphases in history and literature. Presently he is the assistant director of the Morrison Institute for Population and Resource Studies, a small think tank at Stanford.

⁷³ The issue of Ireland's racial status in the British Empire compared to, for example, Great Britain's African colonies, is an entirely separate and equally contentious discourse. See G. K. Peatling, "The Whiteness of Ireland under and after the Union," *Journal of British Studies* 44 (January 2005): 115–133. Peatling states emphatically the case for considering Ireland separately from Great Britain's "nonwhite" imperial domains: "... assertions that a white subject 'shares' the plight of an oppressed nonwhite Other can constitute an arrogant attempt to monopolize sympathy and speak for the Other" (119).