Henry Joy McCracken, IHS, May 2021

preaching, travelling, resolving disputes, fleeing persecutors, suffering martyrdom, converting heretics, reforming gamblers, thieves, drunkards and adulterers, cursing and blessing, inveighing against ritual animal sacrifice in Mayo (i, 169), and much more. Landmark episodes, such as the Battle of Kinsale and Cromwell's sack of Drogheda, are also touched upon (i, 23–6; ii, 842).

At the same time, some readers may find frustrating the frequent absence of certain specific details. The vast majority of the persons with whom the Jesuits engaged are not actually named and references made to geographic locations are often rather vague. This partly reflected a strong desire for secrecy, arising from fear of persecution. Indeed, individual Jesuits were themselves only fully identified in the letters once they had died.

These characteristics also reflect the main purpose of the letters. They were not designed for communicating to Rome the minutiae of life on mission in Ireland but rather for edification. The letters were intended to be published and circulated, to encourage benefactors and to attract new recruits to the order. What we are shown, therefore, is a small body of heroic Jesuits consistently achieving remarkable results despite the odds, striving amongst uncultured natives and against persecuting enemies. The letters are, in other words, heavily biased and in some respects unreliable. They are a rich and very welcome addition to the range of sources accessible to scholars of religion and society in seventeenth-century Ireland.

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HENRY JOY MCCRACKEN. By Jim Smyth. Pp 112. Dublin: University College Dublin Press. 2020. €17.

MAY TYRANTS TREMBLE: THE LIFE OF WILLIAM DRENNAN, 1754–1820. By Fergus Whelan. Pp 338. Dublin: Irish Academic Press. 2020. €29.95

National idealism had a resurgence in 1898 and for the revolutionary generation taking up arms would complete the unfinished mission of the United Irishmen, while revenging the patriotic sacrifice of the martyrs of 1798. Their martial heroism was inspirational, but so too was their 1790s vision of a democratic Ireland. A steady stream of publications attests to the sustained interest in that foundational epoch. Interestingly, biographies dominate. These two follow on from Kenneth Dawson's magisterial *The Belfast Jacobin: Samuel Neilson and the United Irishmen* (2017), and all three redefine the preponderant role of Ulster Presbyterians in the United Irish project.

Henry Joy McCracken is more present in popular tradition than in formal narrative, but Jim Smyth attributes this to the relatively scant direct evidence about his thoughts and doings, i.e. surviving papers. Smyth is judicious in his use of the two main windows into McCracken's character and beliefs as biased sources: his adoring but in her own right extraordinary sister Mary Ann, and his admiring lieutenant, Jemmy Hope. Yet, McCracken was remembered, and aptly so, as this sharp exercise in synthesis demonstrates. At thirty, he had died young and on the gallows, but had also done his duty for Ireland on the field. His story is fused with the mercantile zest of Belfast, then the thriving third-largest port in Ireland. Born into its leading merchant and entrepreneurial Whig elite, the Joys and McCrackens, he was surrounded by wealth creation but crucially, too, a spirit of civic responsibility, despite his kinsmen's disenfranchisement as Presbyterians.

After an Enlightened education at Mason's where the rod was spared to nurture the child, Henry joined the family's textile business. Born in 1767, he came of age at the end of the American war, and though too young to be a Volunteer, would mature as their failed reform agenda was revived in the 1790s. Town and family shaped his outlook, but did not determine it. Sources are silent on his politicisation and radicalisation, though much is known of the disputatious and Enlightened context of Belfast and its transformation by the early years of the French Revolution. Smyth cautiously does not identify him as a member of the original

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Society of United Irishmen, but sees as characteristic for this man of action that he resurfaces at a pivotal moment, just after the outbreak of war with France in February 1793.

As tensions escalated and soldiers ran amok in Belfast, McCracken fearlessly challenged an armed officer, telling him he was his equal. By June 1795 he was part of the revamped underground United Irishmen, had strategically joined the Freemasons and secured a deputy command in the County Antrim Defenders, thus standing at the intersection of the revolutionary forces challenging both the Protestant ascendancy and the British connection. In an iconic moment he had stood among others with Tone on Cave Hill, before his exile, and pledged to make Ireland a nation. Arrested in October 1796 and charged with treason, McCracken was held in Kilmainham Gaol but due to ill health was released in December 1797. From this (no doubt formative) experience rare letters to his sister survive. When the rebellion broke out, he stepped into the command vacuum and became adjutant general for Antrim, then Down, and finally commander-in-chief for Ulster. Advocating taking the field and not waiting for the French, he attempted to take Antrim town, fled after fierce fighting, and despite the density of informers and traitors, survived on the run for another month; these last weeks of furtive freedom in remote hideaways no doubt bind him closer to the Ulster landscape in social memory. Recognised trying to reach a boat to America, he ended his days in the human intimacy of the heart of Belfast; the gallows afforded him a clear view of High Street, where he was born.

The book closes with an interesting discussion of memory, though one regrets that Walter C. Mills's iconic *Stand to the guns* hagiographical print of McCracken (1895), in full élan at Antrim, was not reproduced. In a series dedicated to short biographies, the opening section on the history of Belfast is possibly too lengthy, and one would have welcomed more extracts from the prison letters. Beyond Smyth's local knowledge, his prose is unburdened by scholarly jargon, yet he embeds incisive comments and sharp reflections on the interpretation of facts and the construction of history.

William Drennan had in contrast possessed an eloquent, restless and often impudent pen. His surviving writings, both public and private, poetry and propaganda, are arguably comparable to Tone's (if not in genre and volume), in that he seems familiar to us, namely through his insightful private letters with William Bruce, and especially his vivid correspondence with his sharp and spirited sister Martha McTier. Born in the Belfast cradle of non-subscribing new light Presbyterianism — his father's manse — Drennan gloried to be a Protestant dissenter. For his veneration of individual liberty and the rights of mankind, he remained indebted to the liberal rationalism handed down to him.

A physician by profession, he was quickly drawn into reforming politics and the Volunteers. Fergus Whelan opens the book by stating that as a prolific writer he was unequalled in the Dublin United Irish society. Some of the output however predated their formation in 1791, and though Drennan's reputation was secured with his patriotic *Letters of Orellana* (1785), we learn of his first bold strike, an open *Letter to Edmund Burke* (1780) when he was aged but twenty-six, and his sustained contempt for that 'venal' individual who vilified Unitarians. *Orellana* had (briefly) rekindled the waning Volunteer movement, split over Catholic enfranchisement, and lucidly framed the failures of 1782: without political reform Ireland could not be free. He called on Irishmen to unite across the confessional divide, though (like others) questioned Catholic readiness to enjoy the blessings of liberty.

Whelan openly confronts how historians have dealt with his supposed bigotry and unguarded statements on 'papists', despite his lifelong commitment to Catholic emancipation. But Drennan was not alone in this regard and this is one of several issues deconstructed in the book which await ripostes. As the instigator of the Belfast Society of United Irishmen in October 1791, he wrote its test and its iconic pledge to forward a brotherhood of affection and union of power amongst Irishmen of all religions. In Dublin he was a leading member until that pivotal moment, his trial for seditious libel in June 1794 as author of a defiant address to the Volunteers-cum-National Guard in December 1792, when he was president of the Dublin society. Though acquitted, the strain deeply affected him and he withdrew from radical agitation as the revolutionary conspiracy was evolving, hence his dismissal from the hard narratives of 1798. Yet the conclusion reframes him as an advanced republican who had privately written to Bruce of separation from Britain. In his bold (and overlooked)

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Letter to his excellency Earl Fitzwilliam (1795), Drennan proposed improving education, presaging one of his post-union endeavours.

Seemingly as 'Marcus' he had contributed to the short-lived *Press*, in which he also published his poetic 'Erin' and his stirring and provocative 'The wake of William Orr'. Anti-union pamphlets followed, but returning to Belfast he championed liberal causes with former radicals, the 'natural leaders'. They founded the Belfast Academical Institution (1810), the most successful and enduring of his public projects. Drennan neither died a martyr of liberty nor attained martial glory. If, in the public and militarised consciousness of 1798, posterity has been unkind to him, he was never forgotten in his native Belfast, nor in academia where he is ever popular with students. An engaging character, he is possibly the most vivid face of the later Irish Enlightenment, but also foremost among its republican radicals.

This is the first book-length study, and though aspects of its popularising genre may irk readers of this journal, Whelan has unearthed new facets of its worthy subject. Nor is Drennan opportunistically moulded into a political commodity for historical discussion: this is a full, detailed account of his life, public and private. Footnoting is ethereal and referencing is unshackled by convention. To some the lateral research needed to contextualise Drennan will appear lean, i.e. in pertinent primary sources, the contemporary radical press and a few key journal articles. Rosamund Jacob as a secondary source is not authoritative but an historiographical artefact. Proofreading would have prevented conflating the marquis de Choiseul with his wife, Peter (presumably) Finnerty with William Paulet Carey, and some errors in dates. Yet, time was clearly devoted to an index with user-friendly sub-entries. This is both a provocative and thought-provoking work, but by no means definitive. It could be followed with a collection of extracts from Drennan's writings as a resource book for students. He was well placed to promote Tone's skills as a writer, as he too had possessed a ready and excellent pen.

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Ireland's empire: the Roman Catholic church in the English-speaking world, 1829–1914. By Colin Barr. Pp 566. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2020. £75.

There is a great deal to admire in Colin Barr's hefty tome on the development of an Irish Catholic, or in his term, 'Hiberno-Roman' infrastructure across the globe in the nineteenth century. His third monograph, following previous studies of the Catholic University and the Callan schools controversy, *Ireland's empire* is certainly his most ambitious yet in terms of its scope, and is a fitting companion to the volume he edited with Hilary Carey on *Religion and Greater Ireland: Christianity and Irish global networks, 1750–1950* (Montreal, 2015).

The concept of 'Greater Ireland' is also at the heart of Barr's analysis here. Despite the sub-title referring to the 'English-speaking world', Barr conceives of 'Ireland's empire' as something not quite contiguous with either the British equivalent or the more expansive British world, to which historians of this period often refer. There is, as he explains in his admirably clear introduction, not a lot to be said on some obvious parts of the Anglosphere: barring South Africa, little on a continent which was rapidly (and forcibly) adopting English as a *lingua franca* but would see Irish religious flood in only after Barr's 1914 cut-off date; not much Scotland; and, strikingly, no England. The fact that both Scotland and England had some of the largest Irish populations outside Ireland, often as fervently Catholic as any at home and routinely served by Irish-trained clergy, is not enough to merit inclusion in this iteration of 'Ireland's empire'. The reader quickly gathers that it is, quite specifically, the places where English was spoken with an Irish accent not only in the pews and in the parochial houses but in the episcopal palaces that most interest Barr.

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