IMAGOLOGY AND *IOMARBHÁ*: REPRESENTATION AND CONTENTION IN EARLY MODERN IRELAND

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Abstract: This paper examines John Derricke's *The Image of Irelande with A Discouerie of Woodkarne* and Edmund Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland*. It outlines the origin and purpose of the politics of representation contained therein and shows how a proper interpretation of one illustration subverts the intended meaning.

In 1833 John Small, librarian at Edinburgh University, published an edition of John Derricke's *The Image of Irelande with A Discouerie of Woodkarne*. Derricke had written this work in 1578 and published it three years later in 1581. It was entered in the Stationers' Register in July 1583. The *Discouerie* consists of a dozen woodcut illustrations appended to Derricke's main text. The *Image* has been described as 'one of the most influential Elizabethan books on Ireland.'[1] The attached woodcuts have been termed 'the most famous images of the Elizabethan conquest of Ireland.'[2] In 1833, as now, of the handful of surviving copies of Derricke's work, only the copy in Edinburgh University library was complete in having the full set of woodcuts extant. Small theorized that the 'disappearance of these plates may have been due to their being of a much larger size than the letterpress of the book, or possibly, they may have been destroyed as being considered satirical, and so unpalatable to the Irish people.'[3] This latter theory is unlikely as the whole of Derricke's book is polemical. Morgan's statement that the 'woodcuts must have been stripped out of the other copies – obviously these images were much sought after as posters, and as separated ephemera they have been lost' rings true.[4]

The original book was printed by John Day, whose more famous product, John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, also contained woodcuts. Morgan proposed that Derricke's book 'must have cost a small fortune to produce, being set and cut in John Day's printshop by Dutch experts.'[5] The *Image* has been described as 'a book published in London in 1581, in praise of Sir Henry Sidney, Lord Deputy in Ireland for Queen Elizabeth.'[6] It purports to record Sir Henry Sidney's military campaigns during his second and final term as Lord Deputy. Of the twelve woodcuts, the six which feature Sidney are of a higher quality than their companions. Two of the six are signed with the initials 'I.D.' and the other four 'F.D.'. Small proposed that it 'is possible that the former [initials] may be those of the author, and the other perhaps those of a brother.'[7]As the dedication of the book to Philip Sidney, Sir Henry's son, in Dublin on 16 June 1578 was signed 'Iohn Derricke', Small may well be correct on this. 'Formally', as Fintan Cullen wrote, 'these cuts initially stem from the narrative woodcut designs of Hans Holbein the Younger, of Basle, who

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[1]Willy Maley, *Salvaging Spenser: Colonialism, Culture and Identity*, (Macmillan, London, 1997), p. 25.

[2]Hiram Morgan, 'The Messenger in John Derricke's Image of Irelande (1581)', *History Ireland*, Vol. 15, Issue 1 (Jan.-Feb., 2007), p. 6.

[3]John Small, 'Introduction', John Derricke, *The Image of Irelande with A Discouerie of Woodkarne*, (1581), John Small (ed.), with the notes of Sir Walter Scott, Bart., (Adam and Charles Black, Edinburgh, 1883), p. vii.

[4]Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[5] Morgan, 'An Introduction To The Study of Political Ideas In Early Modern Ireland', www.ucc.ie/celt/Ideology.pdf, p. 20.

[6]W. Sibley, 'Old Dublin Engravings', *Dublin Historical Record*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Dec., 1964), p. 29.

[7]Small, *op. cit.*, p. xxiv.

died in England in 1542. Derricke's designs are also products of the more indigenous English histories produced as pro-Protestant propaganda from the mid-century onwards.'[8]

Little is known about Derricke himself except that he was in the patronage of the Sidney family. Hadfield and McVeigh proposed that he 'may have been the Mr. Derricke employed to make the great seal for Ireland in 1557, in which case the woodcuts extant in some editions might be his work also.'[9] This makes Morgan's positing of Dutch craftsmen problematic. A John Derricke is also listed as a customs officer in Ireland at this period but Morgan held this 'may simply have been a sinecure to pay for Sidney's war artist.'[10] A John Derricke was also listed with Sir Robert Sidney among the Earl of Leicester's forces in the Netherlands in 1585-87. This would accord with being under Sidney patronage as the Earl and Sir Henry Sidney were brothers-in-law.[11]

Derricke's *Image* is a combination of verse and illustration which 'records Sidney's (ultimately unsuccessful) campaign to bring Ireland under the firm control of the English Crown in the 1570s…its ostensible function is to report the historic events for those back in England. But…Derricke's book offers a pointed political position on the Irish situation…'[12] Sir Henry Sidney's final period in Ireland ended in the same year Derricke wrote the *Image* with his recall to London, having lost his health, fortune and political reputation at court during his Irish campaigns. Derricke's work is a sustained verbal and visual polemic extolling Sidney and presenting his campaigns as successful.

Knapp suggested that in Derricke's *Image* 'we have an example of a thoughtful manipulation of form in the service of a specific political message.'[13] This manifests itself in that 'the author was at particular pains to picture the primitive state of Irish society beyond the Pale', that is the small area under English control at that period.[14] The *Image* deliberately sets up a binary opposition between civilization represented by Sidney and his army and barbarism represented by the native Irish. Derricke puts forward a carefully crafted image of 'the nature of the Irish woodkern, strictly speaking soldiers, but clearly serving metonymically for all the native Irish.'[15] Thus Derricke is an early example of 'the representation of Ireland in visual modes determined by the coloniser…'[16] The *Image* was produced at a turning point in the development of English policy in Ireland. Previously, attempts to extend full government control beyond the Pale were intermittent and incomplete. The political *status quo* was accepted by the authorities, however grudgingly, as being preferable to the rigours and expense of military campaigns to effect change. Sidney's regime set out to alter this policy.

The six unsigned woodcuts which do not feature Sir Henry Sidney 'depict the activities of the Irish kern…The contrast that divides the series – echoed in the poem's verse…makes the case for Englishness on the grounds of form, as the barbarity of the disobedient kern is

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[8]Fintan Cullen, *The Representation of Ireland 1750-1930: Visual Politics*, (Cork University Press, Cork, 1997), p. 7.

[9]Andrew Hadfield and John McVeigh (eds.), *Strangers To That Land: British Perceptions of Ireland from the Reformation to the Famine*, (Colin Smythe Ltd., Buckinghamshire, 1994), p. 41.

[10] Morgan, *History Ireland*, p 6.

[11] See Nicholas Canny, 'Review article: Revising the revisionist', *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. XXX, No. 118 (Nov., 1996), pp. 242-254.

[12] James A. Knapp, 'Fantasies of the Primitive in John Derricke's Image of Ireland', www.ualberta.ca/~englishd/knapp.htm.

[13]James A. Knapp, *Illustrating the past in early modern England: the representation of history in printed books*, (Ashgate Publishing, Hampshire and Vermont, 2003), p. 212.

[14]R.W. Dudley Edwards and Mary O'Dowd, *The Sources of History: Studies in the Uses of Historical Evidence*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002), p. 94.

[15] Hadfield and McVeigh, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

[16] Cullen, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

presented literally "to the view".[17] This visual contrast between imputed civility and barbarity is illustrated in Plate 7 of Derricke's *Discouerie*.

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The accompanying verse reads:

> Which for to prove in every poynt, (to his eternall fame)
> He standeth forth in open field, for tryall of the same,
> Round compast with a worthy crewe, most comely to be seene,
> Of Captaines bolde, for to beholde the honor of that Queene.
> And they begarded with the like, of valiaunt Souldiars then:
> Whereof the meanest have been founde, full often doughty men.
> All which are in readynes, to venture lyfe and bloud:
> For safeguard of her happy state, whereon our safeties stoode,
> Bute ere they enter mongest those broyles, Syr Henry doth prefarre:
> (If happe to get) a blessed peace, before most cruell warre,
> Which if they will not take in worth, (the folly is their owne)
> For then he goeth with fire and sworde, to make her power knowne.

The picture contrasts the serried ranks of well-armed and equipped troops with the rough dress and spear of the Gaelic messenger 'donolleobreane' (Dónal Ó Briain/ Donal O'Brien). Moroney could have been speaking of this Plate as well as of the whole work when she wrote that at 'the center of the *Image* is the figure of the woodkerne, the armed footsoldier and wild man whose marginal place in the social world is marked by his low birth, bestial habits, and grotesque refuge in woods and bogs. All exemplars of Gaelic identity…inhabit the physical and metaphysical

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[17] James A. Knapp, ' "That moste barbarous Nacion": John Derricke's *Image of Irelande* and the "delight of the well disposed reader" ', *Criticism*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Fall, 2000), p. 417.

space Derricke assigns to the kerne…'[18] In his 'Introduction' Small quoted Sir Walter Scott's notes on Derricke's work ; '…the inhabitants of Ireland in Queen Elizabeth's time, those, at least, who resided beyond the English pale [*sic.*] were little better than tribes of absolute savages.'[19]

This illustration is an example of an imagology of the foreign 'other.' 'Imagology,' wrote Leerssen, 'may be loosely defined as the study of the discursive or literary expression of national attitudes.'[20]Leerssen based his insight on the work of Hugo Dyserinck and the Aachen School of comparative literature which stresses *Fremderfahrung*, the writer's 'experience of the foreign, in the very aspect of its foreignness, i.e. that which distinguishes it… from the writer's own position or presuppositions.'[21] The result is an image of the foreign other which enters the textual tradition as an accepted trope, an 'imagotype', which is analogous to a stereotype but even less mutable. Thus the 'dress, manners and culture of the Gaelic Irish are described in the language of ethnic disdain.'[22] Concomitant with this disdain, the 'inner workings of Gaelic culture seem to have remained a closed book to English observers, as is evinced by their wholesale denigration of the Gaelic Irish as uncivilized barbarians….'[23] In actual fact, as well as a martial reaction to colonial military expansion there was also a literary reaction to cultural encroachment. *Iomarbhá* was one Bardic term for this cultural contention.

Negative perceptions of Gaelic culture began in the late medieval period with the arrival of the Normans. These varied in intensity 'until the sixteenth century when as part of the expansion of English rule and the attempted transformation of the indigenous culture, such prejudices were articulated with renewed vigor [*sic.*].'[24] As Vincent Carey observed, 'Derricke and Sidney's world view was based on the assumption that they represented civility, justice, and divine retribution.'[25] As a concomitant of this 'it follows that the imputed barbarism of the natives is the main excuse for whatever ruthless policy may be deemed expedient.'[26] There were a number of books and pamphlets in the years following Derricke's publication supporting this view, of which Edmund Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland* 'is the best-known example. A common element in such writings was the tendency to deny civility, be it in religious or socio-cultural terms, to the natives…equating them with animals.'[27]

Spenser's *View* is presented in dialogue form. This is an important facet as it locates the text firmly in the Renaissance humanist context. It is not a Platonic dialogue where two contrasting views are expounded, however, but a Ciceronian one which is expository of one definite viewpoint only. In humanist terms, it is a rhetorical rather than a philosophical text. Coughlan argued that, as a dialogue, the text is 'the generic embodiment of civility – in the case

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[18]Maryclaire Moroney, 'Apocalypse, Ethnography, and Empire in John Derricke's*Image of Irelande* (1581) and Spenser's *View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596)', *English Literary Renaissance*, Vol. 29, Issue 2 (Sept., 1999), p. 368.
[19]Derricke, *Image*, Small, 'Introduction', p. xiii.
[20]Joseph Th. Leerssen, *Mere Irish &FíorGhael: Studies in the idea of Irish nationality, its literary expression and development*, (John Benjamins Publishing Co., Amsterdam, 1986), p. 3.
[21]*ibid.*
[22]Vincent P. Carey, 'John Derricke's *Image of Irelande*, Sir Henry Sidney and the massacre at Mullaghmast, 1578', *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. XXXI, No. 123 (May, 1999), p. 314.
[23]Leerssen, *op. cit.*, p. 291.
[24]Christopher Highley, *Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Crisis in Ireland*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997), p. 3.
[25]Vincent P. Carey, 'Icons of Atrocity: John Derricke's *Image of Irelande* (1581)' in Allison B. Kavey (ed.), *World-Building and the Early Modern Imagination*, (Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire and New York, 2010), p. 246.
[26]Leerssen, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
[27]*ibid.*

of the *View*, itself an instance of that civility whose lack in Ireland it inveighs against.'[28] Moreover, as McCabe pointed out, the 'dialogic format of *A View*…effectively functions to exclude the Gaelic voice…'[29]

The *View* was written in 1596 but 'was not, for reasons still unclear, printed during Spenser's lifetime…'[30] It circulated in manuscript form until it was printed, in an expurgated format, in 1633. Hadfield proposed that the *View* was 'a work designed for manuscript circulation not publication' as it proposed directly the type of ruthless war needed, in Spenser's view, to ensure conquest.[31] The fact that at least twenty manuscript copies are known to survive shows it did have a wide circulation. Canny argued that the 'immediate importance of a formal text such as this was… that it elaborated upon ideas, prejudices, and responses that were widespread among those … who were involved in government service in Ireland…'[32] When the printed edition appeared, 'Spenser's status as an Elizabethan man of letters positioned his text as a central authority on the Elizabethan view of Ireland.'[33]

Spenser loses no time in telling the reader the purpose of the *View*. It is to show a method of 'reducing that savage nation to better government and civility.'[34] Spenser's second interlocutor responds that 'the evils…are very many and almost countable with those which were hidden in the basket of Pandora…'[35] The most pernicious of these evils are of three kinds.

Firstly, the natives follow their own laws rather than those of the government and 'it seemeth hard to plant any sound ordinance, or reduce them to a civil government…'[36] Furthermore, 'it is vain to speak of planting of laws, and plotting of policies till [*sic*] they be altogether subdued.'[37]

Secondly, the customs of the people are barbaric as Spenser traces their origins mainly to the Scythians, 'the most barbaric people known to the ancient world.'[38] Among the evil customs that Spenser the humanist scholar highlights are pastoralism, whereby the natives become 'the more barbarous and live more licentiously…'[39] As Hadfield pointed out, Spenser 'would have known that this representation did not accurately describe the more sophisticated and complex reality of Irish agricultural and social practices. Spenser's description is a deliberate piece of propaganda…'[40] Even native hairstyles are deplored as giving them 'their savage brutishness and loathly filthiness…'[41] Native dress is described as 'a fit house for an outlaw, a meet bed for a rebel, and an apt cloak for a thief.'[42]

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[28] Patricia Coughlan, ' "Some secret scourge which shall by her come unto England": Ireland and Incivility in Spenser' in Patricia Coughlan (ed.), *Spenser & Ireland: an interdisciplinary perspective*, (Cork University Press, Cork, 1989), p. 59.

[29] Richard McCabe, *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment: Elizabethan Ireland and the Poetics of Difference*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005), p. 2.

[30] Elizabeth Fowler, '*A Vewe of the Presente State of Irelande* (1596, 1633)' in Richard A. McCabe, (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010), p. 314.

[31] Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser, A Life*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012), p. 168.

[32] Nicholas Canny, *Making Ireland British 1580-1650*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001), p. 58.

[33] Knapp, *Illustrating the past in early modern England: the representation of history in printed books*, p. 209.

[34] Edmund Spenser, *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, (1596, first publ. 1633), W.L. Renwick (ed.), (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1970), p. 1.

[35] *ibid.*, p. 2.

[36] *ibid.*, p. 9.

[37] *ibid.*, p. 12.

[38] Canny, *Making Ireland British 1580-1650*, p. 48.

[39] Spenser, *A View*, p. 50.

[40] Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser, A Life*, p. 215.

[41] Spenser, *A View*, p. 53.

[42] *ibid.*, p. 51.

Thirdly, as regards religion, not only are the Irish 'all Papist by their profession, but in the same so blindly and brutishly informed, for the most part as that you would rather think them atheists or infidels…'[43] Thus, they 'shall all die in their sins, for they have all erred and gone out of the way together.'[44] Spenser has his main interlocutor give a lurid account of how the Irish fighters say prayers to their swords before battle and seal oaths with bowls of blood. He even reports that they turn into wolves once a year.[45] There are more than echoes of Derricke when Spenser writes 'the Kerne…be the most loathly and barbarous conditions of any people I think under heaven…they do use all the beastly behaviour that may be…'[46] Having outlined the ills, the *View* is equally trenchant on the solution. Spenser states that 'where no other remedy may be found nor no hope of recovery had, there must needs this violent means be used.'[47] This must be done 'by the sword, for all those evils must first be cut away with a strong hand before any good can be planted, like as the corrupt branches and the unwholesome boughs are first pruned.'[48] As Derricke's work eulogised Sidney, Spenser seeks to vindicate a later viceroy, Lord Grey, and discount the 'complaint…made against him, that he was a bloody man, and regarded not the life of …subjects, no more than dogs…'[49] This was a reference to Grey's execution of Spanish and Italian prisoners at Smerwick harbour. Spenser 'vigorously defended the enforcement of order through ruthless suppression, exonerating Lord Grey de Wilton from charges of needless cruelty and representing him as a singular figure who truly had grasped the real nature of England's difficulty in Ireland.'[50] Like Derricke, '*A View* makes no secret of its attitudes, its use of the concept of "necessity" is both frequent and unashamed.'[51] Thus Spenser says that 'in that sharp execution of the Spaniards at the fort of Smerwick… myself being as near then [to Grey] as any…There was no other way but to make that short end of them which was made.'[52] As Hadfield pointed out, Grey's account of the proceedings at Smerwick survives in a letter in Spenser's handwriting; Spenser was Grey's secretary at that time. Grey related that following the surrender 'I sent straight certain gentlemen in to see their weapons and armures laid downe & to guard the munition and victual there left for spoile. Then putt I in to certain bandes , who fell straight to execution. There were 600 slayne…'[53]

The representation presented in picture and text by both Derricke and Spenser is consistent. These are colonial documents with a particular politics of representation. 'Justifying early modern English expansion overseas,' noted John Morrissey, 'the Irish were "imagined" in Tudor England as the richest and most enduring source [of] demonology…'[54] It is necessary to recall that the 'Latin word *colonum* (farmer) spawned the English twin terms *colony* and *colonel*, while agricultural "plantation" became the word for settler colonizations that effectively left little

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[43]*ibid.*, p. 84.

[44]*ibid.*, p. 85.

[45]*ibid.*, p. 58.

[46]*ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

[47] *ibid.*, p. 95.

[48] *ibid.*

[49] *ibid.*, p. 106.

[50] Nicholas Canny, 'Introduction: Spenser and the Reform of Ireland' in Coughlan (ed.), *Spenser & Ireland: an interdisciplinary perspective*, p. 39.

[51] Richard A. McCabe, ' The Fate of Irena: Spenser and Political Violence' in Coughlan, (ed.), *Spenser & Ireland: an interdisciplinary perspective*, p. 111.

[52] Spenser, *A View*, pp. 107-108.

[53] Quoted in Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser, A Life*, p. 165 and Renwick's commentary on *A View*, p. 215.

[54] John Morrissey, 'Contours of colonialism: Ireland and the early colonial subject', *Irish Geography*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2004), p. 89.

subsistence for the original inhabitants.'[55] Irving pointed out that 'this conception of empire was a legacy from the Roman language of *imperium*.'[56] Inherent in this was the Roman legal concept of *res nullius* whereby 'unoccupied or under-utilized land remained the common property of humanity until it was brought into efficient use by an enterprising people who might then become its owners.'[57] This was also a humanist trope in the early modern period; Thomas More, for example, wrote in *Utopia* that its inhabitants made colonies only in neighbouring territories whose inhabitants did not properly or fully utilise the land they had. It was therefore necessary to have negative images of the indigenous population in common currency to establish the notion that the land was effectively waste. As Burlinson noted, ' "Waste" is here a topographical description… denoting unproductive land with special resonance in sixteenth-century writings about Ireland.'[58] Such negative depictions were also potentially profitable to those crafting them. Spenser went from being Grey's secretary to a substantial landholder on being granted a castle and hundreds of acres in the Munster plantation.

The indigenous occupants were, therefore, depicted as being a wild 'other' outside civil society. As Coughlan noted, the 'Wild Man was often portrayed as dumb or a meaningless babbler, thus lacking the most essential qualification for civility, language.'[59] Knapp's comment that 'the justification for the harsh treatment of the Gaelic-Irish relies on an aesthetic understanding of civility' can be applied to both Derricke and Spenser.[60] In Small's edition of Derricke's work, his note on Plate 7 reads: 'Sidney's army drawn up and ready to march is shewn in this plate; on one side the horse, and on the other the foot soldiers. Sidney himself is delivering a letter to an Irish Karne who had a very rude kind of spear in his hand. Under his feet is written "DonolleObreane, the messenger," and out of his mouth proceeds the word "Shogh".'[61] This latter word is a phonetic representation of the Gaelic word 'Seo' , meaning 'Here'. This shows that the messenger is delivering the message to Sidney rather than the other way around. This reversal of the balance of power in the transaction subverts the notion of Sidney, the representation of civility, condescending from horseback to the 'savage'. In fact the transaction is going the other way. This also subverts Spenser's thesis in the *View* that no intercourse except violence can be countenanced with the native inhabitants. Instead of the rude savage, the indigenous inhabitants become those described by Seamus Heaney:

> Perhaps I just make out
> Edmund Spenser,
> dreaming sunlight
> encroached upon by
> geniuses who creep
> 'out of every corner of the woodes and glennes'…[62]

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[55] Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide from Sparta to Darfur*, (Yale University Press, Yale, 2007), p. 169.

[56] Sarah Irving, ' "In a pure soil" : Colonial anxieties in the work of Francis Bacon', *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 32, Issue 3 (2006), p. 252.

[57] Canny, *Making Ireland British 1580-1650*, p. 133.

[58] Christopher Burlinson, *Allegory, Space and the Material World in the Writings of Edmund Spenser*, (D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 2006), p. 28.

[59] Coughlan, ' "Some secret scourge…', p. 49.

[60] Knapp, ' "That moste barbarous Nacion", p. 417.

[61] Derricke, *Image*, Small (ed.), p. 178.

[62] Seamus Heaney, 'Bog Oak' in *Opened Ground: Selected Poems 1966-1996*, (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1998), p. 46.

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