British treatment of Africans, whilst demanding that Irishmen be treated differently from indigenous peoples. Charles Stewart Parnell certainly did so.

Equally, Townend recognises the issue of imperialism also divided Irish opinion. Unionists were closely bound up with the empire, and, he argues, gained confidence from it; whereas nationalists drew negative inspiration from its expanding excesses, and celebrated British military reverses. One part of Ireland saw its interests strengthened by Britain’s expanding empire; the other perhaps hoped that, as in Gibbon’s Rome, the huge size of the imperial edifice would cause it to implode under its own weight. Empire strengthened both sides of Irish politics and marked their distinctness from each other. Ireland became a source of some of the most vocal criticisms of British imperialism. Denouncing expansionist wars in Africa, the Irish were especially stern opponents of Britain’s wars with the Dutch descendants in southern Africa. As Donal McCracken has shown in the case of the second Anglo–Boer conflict (1899–1902), as well as being political critics at home, some Irishmen and Irish Americans fought alongside the Boers. Townend, here, focuses on the first Boer War (1880–81), thus providing a fascinating accompaniment to McCracken’s account of the later war.

Overall, what Townend does, which no one previously has done, is to bring together the sheer mass of opinion and thought that clearly shaped an anti-imperial dimension of the home rule movement. He does this well. All of the main Irish nationalist players in Ireland, Westminster, and Irish-America, evinced strong views on this subject, and Townend shows, in a rich, closely-argued work just how this was so, and what effect it had.

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This collection of twenty-two essays edited and introduced by Senia Pašeta honours Roy Foster who recently retired as Carroll Professor of Irish History at the University of Oxford. The editor is to be congratulated for producing such a consistently high quality collection. Roy Foster has had a very public and often controversial place in Irish public life since the publication of Modern Ireland in 1988. Foster’s book incorporated a wealth of recent and often revisionist research, providing new insights in many aspects of Irish history. The book infuriated many traditional nationalists but was welcomed by others in Ireland grappling with the sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland and the nature of Irish nationalism.

The first three essays examine Foster’s writings, his role as an Irish historian in Britain and his impact on Oxford. Tom Dunne provides a detailed assessment of Foster’s life and writing. He discusses the ways in which critics misunderstood Foster’s work (often willfully), emphasising the positive role that revisionism plays in historical research. Marianne Elliot and Tony Barnard document Foster’s influence on the growth of Irish history within British universities and how the Carroll chair helped to promote this positive outcome.

It is impossible to offer more than a cursory description of the contributions in a short review. The essays range widely: from Vincent Comerford’s insightful discussion of the land question in the nineteenth century to David Fitzpatrick’s provocative elaboration of alternative versions of Irish history. Fitzpatrick’s essay reminds us of the importance of words, their context and how they are used. What other essays show is that a word or phrase is never neutral but engages with the received understanding of the individual or community. The other point shared by the contributors is the political demands made on historians, particularly in times of conflict and crisis. Richard English discusses the challenge of teaching history and politics in a zone of conflict such
as Belfast. English draws attention to the weakness of comparative approaches in Irish history writing, noting that students in Queen’s University re-work conflicts elsewhere to suit the aims of their respective nationality. Alvin Jackson discusses how Ireland has been used (or not used) by both unionists and nationalists in Scotland when developing their respective positions during the recent independence referendum. Ian McBride’s review of I.R.A. memoirs reminds historians that, though valuable, these sources have to be interpreted cautiously. The political is always present for these writers; the most notorious example is Gerry Adams’s denial that he was a member of the I.R.A.

Moving back to the nineteenth century, Theo Hoppen traces the impact of Ireland on British politics, while Marie-Louise Jennings explores the advantages and disadvantages of Gladstone’s intellectual engagement with the Irish question. Marc Mulholland estimates that there were seventy-six Land War fatalities over a ten-year period (including executions and unintended deaths due to punishment beatings, etc.). He also notes that the most intensive violence during this period occurred in urban Belfast rather than in rural areas. Paul Bew discusses the influence of William Parnell on Charles Stewart, suggesting that this may have been much greater than previously thought. He also adds further insights into the Parnell–Churchill relationship.

There are a number of contributions addressing Foster’s literary interests. These include a discussion of Yeats and Synge by Ben Levitas, a sensitive assessment of Elizabeth Bowen by Hermione Lee, and Lauren Arrington’s evocation of Yeats and Pound at Rapallo 1928. Matthew Kelly makes the provocative yet persuasive case that Roddy Doyle’s *The last roundup* trilogy is ‘evidence for the broad cultural reach of historical revisionism’ (p. 199). Erika Hanna draws on oral histories from the Urban Folklore Project to reconstruct aspects of the lives of inner city residents. Residents recall neighbours, characters and popular customs, evoking in most cases a communal past with less threat than the present.

Colin Read’s reassessment of Denis Gwynn’s contribution to historical studies is welcome. He provides considerable insight into Gwynn’s political Catholicism and his attraction to Maurras’s *Action Française*. What is notable is that Gwynn developed a notion of Catholic democracy similar to that elaborated by Jacques Maritain. Complementing this is Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid’s study of the political trajectory of children whose fathers had died during the revolutionary period. Cases include Sean MacBride and Ruairí Brugha, but also Owen Sheehy-Skeffington, perhaps the most distinctively independent of the post-revolutionary generation.

Charles Townshend asks whether war was inevitable in the search for Irish independence or whether a non-violent alternative would have provided the means to achieve a similar outcome. What his essay suggests is the strength of the legal-constitutional tradition in Ireland but also the uncertain nature of Britain’s legitimacy in nationalist Ireland. In a striking contribution, Tim Wilson demonstrates how loyalist Monaghan was militarily subdued by the I.R.A. in 1921 despite considerable mobilisation on their part against the prospect of being excluded from the United Kingdom. The use of violence on both sides in this county supports the conclusion that in ethno-religious conflicts violence will be used to achieve the preferred outcome.

Ultán Gillen uses Hubert Butler’s evocation of Theobald Wolfe Tone as secular republican to trace Tone’s influence on the strategy adopted by Cathal Goulding during the 1960s to push the I.R.A. and Sinn Féin in a left-wing direction. However Gillen emphasises the differences between the two men in respect of Tone: ‘Where Butler stated Tone’s greatness stemmed from having no ideology, republicans located it in his founding a new one’ (p. 217).

At the heart of this collection is revisionism. If the aim of the historian is to challenge, confirm or amend existing views, then these essays, and indeed Foster’s work, demonstrate the richness of the study of Irish history in the twenty-first century.

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