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Liam Harte, Yvonne Whelan and Patrick Crotty

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An Eighteenth-Century Version of Diasporic Irish Identity

Thomas Byrne

In this paper I would like to look at two contrasting examples of Irish identity in the long eighteenth century.¹ The port of Amsterdam provides an appropriate point of entry for our first example, since it was there in June 1685 that a young man boarded one of three ships bound for an attempted invasion of England. The ships riding at anchor in Amsterdam bore the Protestant Duke of Monmouth and his small, but loyal, party of followers. This expedition was intended as a final and most extreme attempt to carry forward the aims of the Whig Party in England (Zook, 1999: 29). From the early years of the 1670s this growing faction in English politics had increasingly taken issue with the prospective succession of a Catholic, James, Duke of York and brother of Charles II, to the thrones of England, Ireland and Scotland. Divisions within the English political nation had descended into extreme hostility and bitterness, giving rise to the hysteria surrounding the fictitious popish plot of 1678. As one scholar puts it:

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"The corruption of the Stuart polity by Catholicism was equated with the destruction of laws and liberties, parliaments and Protestantism" (Doyle, 2004: 35). A faction led by the Earl of Shaftesbury manipulated the panic caused by the plot to demand, in three successive but short-lived parliaments, the exclusion of James from the succession. The most viable of a number of alternatives proposed by James's enemies was adjudged to be the replacement of James in the line of succession by Charles's illegitimate son James Scott, Duke of Monmouth.

Charles II was equally adamant that the divinely ordained principle of hereditary succession should not and would not be challenged. This poisoned state of affairs culminated in a royal backlash in 1683, in the wake of an alleged assassination conspiracy against the royal brothers (the Rye House plot) and the flight of many of the most ardent Whigs into exile in Holland. There, they planned, plotted and schemed, seeking ways to undo the Stuarts (Walker, 1948). One of their means of attack was an avalanche of hostile pamphlets disseminated throughout the three kingdoms designed to evoke public sympathy for their cause.² The second element of their plan was an armed intervention with the aim of triggering widespread revolt against the prevailing monarchy and the installation of the Duke of Monmouth as king. In February 1685 Charles II died and his brother James II succeeded without hindrance to the thrones of England, Ireland and Scotland. For the exiled Whigs the time had come to put their plans into action.

The young man who boarded the ship on the day of departure was there in his role of personal chaplain to the Duke of Monmouth. He was deeply committed to the righteousness of the Whig cause, a fact attested to in a letter he wrote in which he said: "I am ready to shed my blood in the defence of [my religion] &

my country's rights against all deceivers who would corrupt the one, & usurpers who invade the other."³ While such views were to be expected, what was unusual about this young gentleman, barely twenty-one, was the fact that, unlike the vast majority of the other members of the expedition, he was not English.

The exact nature of his identity is difficult to determine. He was born in 1664 in a small village near Drogheda in County Louth.⁴ This would, in terms of place of birth (*jus soli*), make him quite discernibly Irish. However, his family, successful merchants in Dublin, were quite recent English settlers in the Irish capital. Ethnically (*jus sanguine*), then, our young gentleman is, in historical terms, New English, or New Protestant. His grandfather had integrated himself, to some extent, into the commercial life of the capital by the early 1640s (Barnard, 1975: 82). However, his real rise to prominence comes in the wake of the Cromwellian invasion and subsequent period of Parliamentary rule. By subscribing money and supplies to the Parliamentary cause, and becoming a leading member of a religious sect heavily supported by the army, he improved his position in city politics, eventually becoming Mayor of Dublin in 1654 (Dunlop, 1913). His ability and reliability saw him deeply involved in the Cromwellian administration, including the transplantation to Connacht of those adjudged guilty of rebellion (Hardinge, 1862: 67).

This family involvement in the Cromwellian regime, combined with strong Protestant beliefs, deeply influenced the outlook and world view of our young Irish rebel. While attending Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge (Oliver Cromwell's alma mater) he became ever more deeply involved with radical politics and the various machinations of the Whig Party (Zook, 1999: 29). Eventually he became so deeply immersed within this shadowy underworld that he was forced to seek refuge in Holland, where he established himself in the Duke of Monmouth's household,

² Two pamphlets published in 1684 are of particular note: Henry Danver's *Murder will out; or a clear and full discovery that the earl of Essex did not murder himself, but was murdered by others* and Robert Ferguson's *Enquiry into and detection of the barbarous murder of the late earl of Essex*.

³ British Library Additional Manuscript 41817 f. 86, Nathaniel Hooke to Fr. Ambrose Grymes, Brussels, 3 June 1685.

⁴ B.L. Add. Ms. 72873 (A).

and became energetically involved in preparations for the invasion of England.⁵ Despite his commitment and hard work, however, the Monmouth invasion of south-west England was a short-lived affair, eventually crushed by a military force that included John Churchill, the future Duke of Marlborough and Patrick Sarsfield, later to be Earl of Lucan (Earle, 1977; Clifton, 1984). Our young Anglo-Irishman was lucky to escape the tender mercies of "Hanging Judge" Jeffries in the bloody aftermath of the rebellion, managing to flee back to safety, renewed exile in Holland and life as a fugitive from English justice (Greaves, 1992: 309). Our first example of Irish diasporic identity, then, is that of a Protestant, New English, Whig commoner.

Our second, contrasting, example of Irish diasporic identity in the long eighteenth century died in Paris in 1738 having reached the rank of major general in the French army. He had, like many others, arrived in France as part of the migration of defeated Jacobites after the signing of the Treaty of Limerick in 1691. In subsequent years he fought as part of the Irish regiments on battlefields throughout Europe. In a natural progression from, and in addition to, his role as a soldier he became involved in the closely aligned fields of espionage and diplomacy. In fact, he was so successful in fulfilling this position that he transferred to direct French service in 1701, although he continued to retain close links with the exiled Jacobite court located at St Germain.

This was an exceptionally intense period in the history of European diplomacy. Both prior to and after the outbreak of the War of Spanish Succession in 1702 overt and covert diplomatic initiatives were pursued actively and vigorously (Bély, 1990). These efforts went hand in hand with continuing military endeavours. As the fortunes of war increasingly saw France hard pressed on three fronts in Europe, Louis XIV and his ministers sought some means of removing or at least grievously weakening one of the Allies ranged against them, either the United Provinces, Britain or the Habsburg Empire. Of the three, Britain seemed the

⁵ B.L. Add. Ms. 41817 ff. 13, 49, 56, 64, 199-200.

most vulnerable candidate. After all, the rival claimant to the British throne James Francis Edward Stuart, James VIII of Scotland and III of England, was resident on French soil and to a large extent therefore dependent on French aide.

Our Irishman — at this stage a colonel in the French army but still a committed Jacobite — was entrusted with the task of secretly visiting Scotland to assess support and recommend a plan of action to Louis XIV and the French Council of State. On the basis of his submission a full-scale attempt was made to send a fleet of 30 ships, carrying 6,000 men, mainly Irish, to land in Scotland and restore James VIII to the throne (Hooke, 1760: 131-36). This attempt would, at the very least, divert British troops from the continent, thereby relieving pressure on the French armies. The attempt was launched in March 1708, successfully evaded the English navy and reached the coast of Scotland. However, due to circumstances never quite satisfactorily explained, no landing was made and the endeavour ended in failure (Hooke, 1760: 147-65). Not only did our Irish colonel escape the blame for this military fiasco, he was promoted to brigadier and raised to the peerage as a baron of Ireland by James III. He went on to have a successful diplomatic career in France, where his application for naturalisation was confirmed in 1720. In 1728 his career was crowned by investiture into the prestigious Royal and Military Order of St Louis as one of only 52 living Knight Commanders. On 25 October 1738 our second example of Irish diasporic identity died as a Catholic, Irish, Jacobite noble.

The strange and intriguing fact about these two contrasting versions of identity, polar opposites in terms of religion, politics, social status and nationality (using that term advisedly in the context of its limitations in the period under discussion), is that we are actually speaking of the same person. The Protestant, New English, Whig commoner and the Catholic, Irish, Jacobite noble are both versions of identity embodied in one man: Nathaniel Hooke.

The missing element in this surprising tale of identity formation and reformation emerges in the wake of Hooke's return to

Holland in 1685 after the failure of Monmouth's rebellion. He spent three years on the run during this period, constantly in danger of being apprehended by English agents or even of being dispatched on the spot, such as James II's desire to apprehend those mixed up in rebellion (Miller, 1984: 197). Reduced to a state of near psychological despair by the summer of 1688, Hooke took his life in his hands. Declaring that in his present state "life itself was not worth living", he returned to London, surrendered to James II and requested pardon or death (Ellis, 1829: 103). His audacity paid off. James II was impressed by his sincerity and bravery and granted the young Irish rebel a full pardon. Hooke in turn was so grateful for this display of mercy from his former, much demonised enemy that he entered James's service and converted to Catholicism. Thereafter he remained loyal in the wake of Prince William of Orange's invasion of England in November 1688, despite enticements then and later to defect.

Curiosity about Hooke's complicated identity is not only a modern phenomenon. His contemporaries were also aware that there was more to him than initial impressions suggested. Rarely, I suspect, has the question of identity been discussed at such exalted levels. At the centre of power in early eighteenth-century Europe lay the court of Versailles. No less a person than Louis XIV himself, France's renowned Sun King and the most powerful sovereign in Europe, was moved by curiosity to enquire about Hooke's origins (Masson, 1884: 109). In his response to Louis's query his foreign minister, Jean Baptiste Colbert, Marquis de Torcy, gives a glimpse of another enduring facet of Irish identity: begrudgery. He recounted details regarding Hooke that he had gleaned from conversations with an Irish monk. The good friar, obviously unimpressed by Hooke's achievements, rank and titles filled in some of the man's family background, including the fact that "his father was Irish and nothing more than a man from the common people" (Masson, 1884: 109). In other words, there was no reason for Colonel Hooke to be aspiring to ideas above his station! Furthermore, de Torcy explained why Hooke had a number of enemies at the Jacobite court at St Germain. His change in reli-

gious and political identity aroused suspicion, leading to charges of espionage, treachery and irreligion. For his part, Hooke was so disgusted at the constant internal bickering and internecine fractiousness in Jacobite circles that he refused to be involved in later efforts to resurrect the Scottish enterprise (Masson, 1884: 95).

Having such a shifting, convoluted identity caused problems for many contemporaries accustomed to assigning individuals to black and white categories. Difficult questions arose. What to make of a man who was once Protestant and was now apparently Catholic, who previously espoused Whig principles but now seemingly supported the Stuart cause, and who could variously be described as Irish, English and/or French? How is it possible to tell if he is really one of us, if he is our sort of person, when we cannot tell what exactly he is? This uneasiness with Hooke's multi-dimensional identity remained a factor in later representations of him. For an Irishman who was one of the very few to initiate, plan, organise and participate in an invasion of Britain, he has attracted surprisingly little attention. In fact, he has been quite neglected in Irish history. In works where references to him might well be expected he does not feature; in those in which he does, the question of his ambiguous identity still seems to cause problems.

For example, in J.C. O'Callaghan's *History of the Irish Brigades in the Service of France* allusions to Hooke's Protestant New English past are entirely absent (O'Callaghan, 1870). Regarding his family background, O'Callaghan states that Nathaniel Hooke was an offshoot of an old line of that name expelled from their lands in Westmeath by the Cromwellians. As we have seen, however, the Hooke family had been Cromwellians themselves, and far from being victims of confiscation were much more likely to have been the perpetrators. Thomas, Nathaniel's grandfather and family patriarch during the Interregnum, had actually gained land and fortune through his connections and service in the Cromwellian administration. O'Callaghan also refers to Hooke coming to France with King James's Guards but there is no information on his activities prior to this. We can perhaps excuse O'Callaghan because

his work was published in 1870, the same year that also saw the publication of *Correspondence of Colonel Nathaniel Hooke, Agent from the Court of France to the Scottish Jacobites, in [...] 1703-1707*, edited by W. D. Macray. The preface included a long, detailed and largely accurate history of the Hooke family in Ireland, including their Puritan beliefs and intimate involvement with the Cromwellian regime. This rather in-depth treatment of the Hookes' politics may be explained by the fact that Macray, an Oxford scholar and Bodleian librarian, would have viewed the family's Cromwellian associations more benignly than many in Ireland at this time, when the demonisation of Cromwell and his outrages became fixed in the public mind.

The section on Hooke in Richard Hayes's *A Biographical Dictionary of Irishmen in France* (1949) again presents an edited version of his identity, with only the briefest mention of the underlying complexities: "Born at Corballis, Co. Meath in 1664. Entered Trinity College in July 1679, left soon afterwards, became an enthusiastic Jacobite and reverted to Catholicism, the religion of his immediate forbears" (Hayes, 1949: 127). The use of "reverted" here presents a problem. None of Hooke's immediate ancestors were in fact Catholic. Hayes may have been following O'Callaghan's account for some of his extract, but there is no mention of Hooke's attendance at Trinity College in that passage. Quite possibly the *Dictionary of National Biography* (1885-1900) was also used, but this again raises problems as it mentions Hooke's attendance at Glasgow and Cambridge as well as Trinity, his Puritanism and his active participation in Monmouth's rebellion. In addition to the *DNB*, Hooke's correspondence had been in publication for almost eighty years by the time Hayes was writing.

Given the availability of these sources, which reveal the actual history of the Hooke family rather than the romanticised version, we might be justified in concluding that while an Irish Catholic Jacobite officer and gentleman could be accepted in Irish historiography in 1949, a more ambiguously identified Irish/English, Catholic/Protestant, Jacobite/Whig with strong connections to the infamous *bête noire* of Irish history, Oliver Cromwell, could be less

readily accommodated. *When in doubt leave him out*, may have been the guiding motto, with the simplified picture fitting much more easily into the homogenised spirit and outlook of the times. Over a half-century later, it is to be hoped that historians might be more willing to explore the factors which shaped such a heterogeneous identity. Nathaniel Hooke's *volte face* of 1688, while regrettable in terms of the human suffering and mental anguish that preceded and precipitated it, provides for us today an opportunity to gain a unique historical insight into different constructions of political, religious, social and ethnic elements of identity, sharply focused through the experiences of one man.