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Thieves, Apostates, and “Bloody Viragos:”
Female Irish Catholic Rebels in the Irish Rebellion of 1641

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of History
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Masters of Arts in History

by
E. Marshall Galloway
August 2011

Brian Maxson., PhD, Chair
Melvin E. Page, PhD
Judith B. Slagle, PhD

Keywords: Ireland, Irish Rebellion of 1641, 1641 Depositions, Gender

ABSTRACT

Thieves, Apostates, and “Bloody Viragos.”

Female Irish Catholic Rebels in the Irish Rebellion of 1641

by

E. Marshall Galloway

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss the roles played by Irish Catholic women in the Irish Rebellion of 1641. The primary goal is to examine the factors that determined the nature of those roles. To achieve this end, I used the information contained in the 1641 depositions, a collection of sworn statements given by the victims of the rebellion. The depositions are valuable in two ways. First, eyewitness testimony contained therein is generally reliable, and can be used to construct an accurate narrative of the rebellion. Second, less reliable hearsay evidence is crucial to understanding the fears of English and Scottish Protestants and their perceptions of female rebels. I was aided by the earlier efforts of historians such as Nicholas Canny and Mary O’Dowd. In the course of this thesis, I intended to argue that the actions of Irish Catholic women in the rebellion were largely determined by their social status, geographic location, and prior relationships between female rebels and their allies and victims.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On Friday, October 22, 1641, Irish rebels seized several strategic English military strongholds in Ulster, taking the occupying English completely by surprise. In the wake of this organized rebellion by prominent Irish Catholics against English military targets, several smaller “popular” rebellions spontaneously erupted all over Ulster and to a lesser extent throughout the rest of Ireland. The implications of these localized rebellions have been debated by historians ever since.

Five years after the start of the rebellion, Sir John Temple published *The Irish Rebellion or, an History of the Attempts of the Irish Papists to Extirpate the Protestants in the Kingdom of Ireland; Together with The Barbarous Cruelties and Bloody Massacres Which Ensued Thereupon*. *The Irish Rebellion* was a blatant work of English Protestant propaganda. Temple highlighted the worst rumors of atrocities that had circulated during and after the rebellion and portrayed the Irish rebels as irredeemable savages. Unfortunately, Temple’s interpretation defined English perceptions of the rebellion and the nature of the Irish people for the next two centuries. Later commentators who published accounts of the rebellion—beginning with Edmond Borlase—heavily borrowed their “evidence,” conclusions, and opinions of the Irish from Temple. *The Irish Rebellion* itself remained popular through the early nineteenth-century: new editions continued to appear whenever there was a perceived threat of rebellion or invasion in Ireland.¹

¹ Kathleen M. Noonan, “‘Martyrs in Flames:’ Sir John Temple and the Conception of the Irish in English Martyrologies,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 36, no. 2 (Summer, 2004): 223-225.

Temple borrowed heavily from official sources to lend credibility to his work, and many of his anecdotes were gleaned from depositions given in 1642 and 1643 by English Protestants who were seeking compensation for property taken during the rebellion. These manuscripts, commonly known as the “1641 depositions,” are now housed in the library of Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland. Because many modern historians believed Temple’s excerpts to be indicative of the larger body of depositions, this rich historical record was largely ignored until relatively recently.²

The 1641 Depositions: History, Arrangement, and Use

In December 1641 a Commission for the Despoiled Subject was created to take statements from displaced Protestant refugees who streamed into Dublin—one of the last English strongholds in Ireland. Henry Jones, Dean of Kilmore, was appointed to head the commission. Jones personally oversaw testimony in Dublin, while Archdeacon Philip Bisse was dispatched to Munster as a sub-commissioner to oversee the collection of testimony there. Together, these commissions were responsible for the production of the majority of the depositions in 1642 and 1643. In the 1650s, Charles Fleetwood—Oliver Cromwell’s son-in-law and Lord Deputy of Ireland—established high courts of justice across Ireland to punish those implicated in the 1641 rebellion. As part of this effort, over seventy army officers and local officials were appointed as commissioners to collect additional testimony. These later manuscripts were eventually combined with those taken in 1642-1643 to form the collection now known as the 1641

² Nicholas Canny, “The 1641 Depositions: A Source for Social and Cultural History,” *History Ireland* 1, no. 4 (1993): 54; Aidan Clarke, “The 1641 Depositions,” in *Treasures of the Library, Trinity College Dublin*, edited by Peter Fox (Dublin: The Royal Irish Academy, 1986), 111.

depositions.³ In the late 1640s, the original Commission's clerk, Thomas Waring, attempted to make a copy of the entire body of depositions, which he intended for publication. According to Aidan Clarke, Waring eventually became frustrated by his lack of progress and decided to edit the original depositions for publication instead of making his own copies. This unfortunately resulted in large blocks of text crossed out and summarized by Waring. While the original text remained legible, Waring's alterations left it scarred and resulted in some confusion for later editors and historians, one of whom suggested that the marks represented testimony that was "intentionally invalidated" and another who posited that the statements were abbreviated to be used in court.⁴

In 1741, Bishop Stearne of Clogher donated the collection to Trinity College, Dublin, where it remains today. As soon as Trinity College obtained the manuscripts, they were reorganized by County and bound, resulting in the creation of thirty-one volumes, each containing between 154 and 457 sheets, and totaling around 19,000 pages. Unfortunately, the original arrangement of the depositions had been lost long before their donation to the college, forcing historians to piece together their original composition. Aidan Clarke noted in 1966 that the collection comprises five different types of materials. These include the depositions taken in Dublin in 1642-1643, the statements taken by Bisse in Munster, the copies made by Waring in the late 1640s, the depositions created in the 1550s, and statements made by individuals before a judge or Privy Councilor. Recently, historians of the depositions have simplified this categorization into two groups: depositions created by the Commission, including

³ Jane Ohlmeyer et al, *1641 Depositions Project*, (2007-2010). [website]: <<http://1641.tcd.ie/>> [January 13, 2011].

⁴ Clarke, "The 1641 Depositions," 113-119. Waring himself testified to having abbreviated some of the depositions.

those taken by Bisse, and those created in the 1650s.⁵

Walter D. Love was the first historian to call for a systematic analysis of the depositions. He argued that the depositions could be used to piece together a history of the rebellion's progress and character. Twenty years later, Aidan Clarke sought to outline the history and arrangement of the depositions in "The 1641 Depositions," published in the anthology *Treasures of the Library: Trinity College Dublin*. Clarke also used the depositions to debunk one of the persistent myths of the rebellion: that the depositions contain evidence of a planned general massacre of English and Scottish Protestant settlers, which was meant to coincide with the beginning of the rebellion. Instead, Clarke argued, the depositions reveal that the myth of the massacres in fact preceded the indiscriminate killings and the few "small-scale" atrocities that did take place.⁶ Clarke maintained that, although the English immediately assumed the occurrence of a planned massacre from the outset of the rebellion in October 1641, this assumption preceded not only the supposed evidence of a massacre (the depositions) but also the incidents themselves. When the killings of Protestant civilians did begin, which did not occur until November—over a month after the beginning of the rebellion—they served to perpetuate the pre-existing myth of a planned general massacre of English Protestants.⁷

Nicholas Canny corroborated Clarke's assertion in his essay "What Really happened in 1641," published in the anthology *Ireland from Independence to Occupation*. According to Canny—who also used the depositions as his primary evidence—the "mobs" of the localized popular rebellions were initially concerned with reclaiming the land they believed to be theirs or

⁵ Clarke, "The 1641 Depositions," 111-119; Jane Ohlmeyer et al, *1641 Depositions Project*, (2007-2010). [website]: <<http://1641.tcd.ie/>> [January 13, 2011].

⁶ Clarke, "The 1641 Depositions," 120.

⁷ Walter D. Love, "The Civil War in Ireland: Appearances in Three Centuries of Historical Writing," *Emory University Quarterly* 22, no.1 (Spring 1966): 57-72; Clarke, "The 1641 Depositions," 120; Nicholas Canny, *Making Ireland British* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 485.

driving away their creditors. They were motivated by resentment over being demoted to an inferior position by the implementation of the English plantations and by a need to destroy evidence of indebtedness to the newcomers.⁸

Canny asserted that most of the early encounters with the English and Scots settlers were almost never bloody until Protestant resistance stiffened. The two worst atrocities of the rebellion were committed in retaliation for a bloody battlefield defeat. At Portadown several Protestants—men, women, and children—were forced into the river and drowned; at Kilmore, a cottage housing Protestant prisoners was set on fire. These incidents were probably the result of anger over the Catholic defeat at Lisnagarvey where Protestant settlers had chased down and slaughtered the fleeing Irish rebels, and Canny ultimately concluded that the indiscriminant killing of Protestant settlers could be dated from that battle.⁹ Other English refugees were robbed and killed by bandits while trying to reach safety, and these murders were erroneously blamed on the rebellion.¹⁰

In addition to making a case for the use of the depositions to discover the true nature of the 1641 rebellion, Canny has maintained that the depositions can be an indispensable source for local Irish history, as demonstrated in his article “The 1641 Depositions as a Source for the Writing of Social History: County Cork as a Case Study.” Using the depositions, Canny claimed one can discover facts about population distribution, occupation, the origins of the English settlers, and tenurial practices.¹¹

⁸ Canny, “What Really Happened,” 31-33.

⁹ Canny, “What Really Happened,” 34.

¹⁰ Canny, “What Really Happened,” 36.

¹¹ Nicholas Canny, “The 1641 Depositions as a Source for the Writing of Social History: County Cork as a Case Study,” in *Corke: History and Society*, edited by Patrick O’Flanagan and Cornelius G. Buttimer (Dublin: Geography Publications, 1993), 254-270.

Despite conceding that “there can be little doubt that the... sworn statements, collected from those Protestant settlers in Ireland who endured the onslaught that had been launched against them in the autumn of 1641, is a body of material which is emotional and which seeks to represent Irish Catholics in the worst possible light,” Canny, who is possibly the most prominent expert on the depositions, has argued convincingly for the dependability of the depositions and the veracity of much of the testimony therein. According to Canny, the key lies in making a distinction between testimony based on hearsay and eyewitness testimony based on personal experience. Canny concludes that eyewitness testimony in the depositions is often, in his words, “so clinical in detail as to be entirely plausible.” Furthermore, through his analysis of the manuscripts, Canny has been able to find multiple instances of independent corroborative testimony for the eyewitness evidence given by an individual.¹²

Hearsay testimony is almost always untrustworthy, especially when it relates to rumors of atrocities. Still, Canny has argued that “even the most ghoulish of such stories are important, if only to explain the terror of the settlers’ and why so many of them fled their homes even when they were not obliged to do so.”¹³ It can be further argued that these unsubstantiated rumors of atrocities are worthy of scrutiny because they formed the core of the myth of a general massacre in Ireland, which had a direct impact on English perceptions of the rebellion. These perceptions stoked anti-Catholic paranoia in England, further heightened by the rumor that King Charles had encouraged the rebellion. Charles’s enemies in parliament used this fear to attempt to strip the king of his control over the militia. Therefore, for proponents of the “three kingdoms” approach to seventeenth-century British and Irish history, the 1641 rebellion led directly to the military confrontation between Charles and Parliament in the English Civil War.

¹² Canny, “What Really Happened,” 27-28; Canny, “The 1641 Depositions,” 53-54.

¹³ Canny, “The 1641 Depositions,” 53-54.

Jane Ohlmeyer is another prominent historian of the depositions who believes the depositions can be used to arrive at a better understanding of seventeenth-century Ireland. A professor at Trinity College, Dublin, Ohlmeyer was recently involved a project to digitize the entire manuscript collection. The 1641 Depositions Project is a collaborative effort between professors at Trinity College, Dublin, the University of Cambridge, and the University of Aberdeen to conserve, digitize, transcribe, and make the depositions available online. In addition to Dr. Ohlmeyer, the project has involved the efforts of several other noted historians, including Aidan Clarke and English historian John Morrill. The digitization of the depositions relating to the counties of Ulster was completed in December 2009, and the rest of Ireland was completed in September, 2010. Thanks to the efforts of the many historians and students involved in the project, this rich historical source is now available to scholars worldwide.¹⁴

Historiography of Women in the Irish Rebellion of 1641

The large body of testimony provided by women is one of the most striking aspects of the depositions, one that sets it apart from many early modern sources. Martin Bennett has suggested the testimony of women comprises as much as a third of the depositions. A large segment of the deponents were females who swore depositions in their own right and on behalf of deceased family members. Internal evidence suggests that many of the female deponents had lost husbands during the rebellion, and one is struck by the constant use of the term *relict*—an

¹⁴ Jane Ohlmeyer et al, *1641 Depositions Project*, (2007-2010). [website]: <<http://1641.tcd.ie/>> [January 13, 2011].

antiquated word for widow—to describe the marital status of the deponent. This was the most likely cause for the ubiquity of women’s voices in the depositions.¹⁵

Despite this wealth of evidence for the roles women played on both sides of the rebellion, research in this area has been minimal. Martyn Bennett and Nicholas Canny have both given some thought to the topic. In *The Civil Wars in Britain and Ireland*, Bennett briefly discussed the military roles played by some women in the rebellion, as well as the reasons for the presence of so many female deponents. Canny has noted that most women who gave depositions did so because they had become involved in the fighting or because of the death of a husband as a result of the rebellion. As a result, he maintained, the depositions of women generally relate to exceptional events, rather than mundane ones.¹⁶

Northumbria University Professor Andrea Knox has argued that, while the depositions are an important source for the involvement of women in the rebellion, attention should also be paid to the Gilbert Manuscripts, which show a connection between Irish female criminal networks (such as prostitution rings) and attempts to raise money for the rebellion. Using both sources and the English Calendar of State Papers, Knox concluded that Irish women in the rebellion often acted outside the authority of men, sometimes leading men, and at other times, acting without the knowledge of their families. Knox also maintains that during the rebellion—and as a result of pressures caused by English colonization—Irish women often came to identify themselves as Irish, rather than as members of a particular kin group.¹⁷

¹⁵ Andrea Knox, “Testimonies to History: Reassessing Women’s Involvement in the 1641 Rising,” in *Irish Women and Nationalism*, edited by Louise Ryan and Margaret Ward (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004), 14-15; Canny, *Making Ireland British*, 345; Martyn Bennett, *The Civil Wars in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 67.

¹⁶ Bennett, *The Civil Wars in Britain and Ireland*, 67; Canny, *Making Ireland British*, 345.

¹⁷ Knox, “Testimonies to History,” 2-29.

Mary O’Dowd undertook the most comprehensive study of women in the rebellion in her essay “Women and War in Ireland in the 1640s.” O’Dowd, who studied the experiences of women on both sides of the conflict, noted that female participation in the war depended heavily on the class and economic background of the woman. If she were from a wealthy family, she might find herself in charge of the defense of her castle. Others participated by dressing as men and enlisting.¹⁸ Far more took part in local rebellions. In the early stages of the rebellion, local risings often took the form of a large crowd composed of both men and women. These groups attacked and looted the homes of Protestant settlers, often driving them off of their lands. Women participated in and sometimes led these groups.¹⁹ This was especially the case when they were mainly composed of members of the same family.

O’Dowd then described several instances in which women took part—including an incident where a Protestant woman was stoned to death by Catholic women, and an occasion on which three hundred women marched through Galway encouraging attacks on Protestants. Some women were even able to take on the male roles of jury, judge, and executioner in mock trials of Protestants.²⁰

In addition, some rebel women took an active role in the looting and distribution of stolen goods, while others gave shelter and comfort to victims of the rebellion. Many of these victims were also women. Beaten, robbed, and stripped of their clothes, women were probably also raped, though rape is seldom mentioned in the depositions. O’Dowd concluded that “for the vast majority of women in Ireland...the war years were not years of opportunity and independence.

¹⁸ Mary O’Dowd, “Women and War in Ireland in the 1640s,” in *Women in Early Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1991), 91-94.

¹⁹ O’Dowd, “Women and War,” 95.

²⁰ O’Dowd, “Women and War,” 95-96.

For most they were a time of great misfortune and family tragedy as thousands of women were widowed, left homeless and without financial income.”²¹

Despite these insights into the roles of women in the rebellion, much work remains to be done. For instance, while O’Dowd mentioned economic background as a significant factor influencing women’s roles in the war, no one has made the same argument for geographic location, even though it is often implied for the development of the rebellion as a whole. In other words, where English Protestants were densely settled and oppression of the native populace more prevalent, violence was more likely. On the other hand, violence was less likely to occur if the land was thinly settled by English Protestants or—at least initially—was settled by Scottish Protestants, who were generally not targeted in the early stages of the rebellion.

Another important factor that determined the behavior of female rebels was their prior relationship to their victims. Often, because of these relationships, female rebels took pity on the victims of the rebellion and did their best to shelter and protect them. This was more likely for upper-class women whose husbands figured prominently in the rebellion. At other times, pleas for mercy possibly based on prior acquaintance fell on deaf ears, which often colored the portrayal of female rebels in the depositions.

The primary goal of this thesis is to argue that the roles played by Irish Catholic women in the rebellion of 1641 were to some extent determined by their social status and geographic location, as well as the prior relationships between female rebels and their allies and victims. Chapters are divided by region so that a comparison may be made between the Ulster counties and the rest of Ireland. Where related depositions are plentiful, accounts of female rebels are examined on an individual basis in an attempt to determine the reasons for their actions, their

²¹ O’Dowd, “Women and War,” 98-101.

relationship to their allies and victims, and any biases the deponents might have had. In some cases, deponents gave the reasons for which they supposed they were being attacked—for their religion or because their attackers owed them rent. While these statements should be used with caution, they can at least be compared to the rebels' actions in an attempt to identify their veracity. While no historian should view historical sources credulously, this study followed Nicholas Canny's assertion that eyewitness testimony in the depositions is usually credible, while hearsay testimony is almost always unreliable. Where possible, several additional depositions were consulted to corroborate an individual deponent's story. These methods help to paint a clearer picture of the roles women played, to posit some explanations for those roles, and to distinguish common roles from extraordinary ones.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

An understanding of the historical background of the English presence in Ireland is crucial to an understanding of the actions taken by Irish Catholic women in 1641. Three major historical developments contributed to the volatile religious and political situation in Caroline Ireland. The first was the history and presence of four distinct groups who differed in culture and religion to varying degrees: the native Irish, the old English, the new English, and the Ulster Scots. The second important development was the implementation of a policy of confiscation and “plantation” by Tudor and Stuart governments in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The third was the role played by religion. Religion influenced English policy towards Ireland in the early seventeenth century and religious grievances—alongside economic and political ones—motivated the Catholic Irish to rebel in 1641.

The Native Irish and the Old English, c.100 BCE – 1534 CE

The Old Irish, or Gaelic Irish, were the descendants of the first inhabitants of Ireland and later Celtic invaders. Although human occupation of Ireland began around 60,000 BCE, the culture most commonly associated with Ireland arrived in the second century BCE. These were the Celts, or more properly, La Tène culture. The newly arrived Celts came to dominate earlier cultural groups—including the Cruithni—known to the British Celts as the Pritani or Picts—and had assimilated them into their culture by the fifth century CE.²² Christianity came to Ireland around the same time, and the ensuing flowering of Christian Irish culture produced some of the

²² F.J. Byrne, "Early Irish Society," in *The Course of Irish History* (Lanham, MD: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 2001), 25-26.

most beautiful art of the early middle ages, most notably illuminated manuscripts such as the Book of Kells. After weathering the Viking invasions of the ninth and tenth centuries, Christian Ireland again flourished culturally, but remained divided politically. The presence of one to two hundred petty kingdoms and no central authority made the Irish vulnerable to invasion and conquest. Many of the more powerful Irish kings competed for the title of “High King of Ireland,” but most were never able to claim authority over the whole island. Worse, the Irish petty kingdoms frequently interfered in each others’ affairs and often fought among themselves.²³

One such feud resulted in the English invasion 1169 and the establishment of the Old English in Ireland. In 1152, Dermot MacMurrough of Leinster abducted the wife of Tiernán O’Rourke of Breifne. Despite recovering his wife the following year, O’Rourke never forgot the humiliation. In 1166, after O’Rourke’s overlord Rory O’Connor defeated Dermot and significantly weakened his power, O’Rourke moved to finish his old enemy. Dermot fled Ireland and appealed to Henry II of England for help. Henry himself was too busy defending and administering the vast Angevin Empire to intervene in Ireland, so Dermot instead enlisted the help of the powerful Anglo-Norman Marcher Lords.²⁴

The invasion, led by Richard FitzGilbert de Clare (also known as “Strongbow”), succeeded in defeating O’Connor and O’Rourke, as well as the Norse towns of Wexford, Waterford, and Dublin. Strongbow married Dermot’s daughter as part of their agreement, ensuring that the dynasty would be an Anglo-Norman one. Strongbow’s success alarmed King Henry, who arrived in Ireland with an army in October 1171. Contrary to Henry’s fears,

²³Brian O Cuiv, “Ireland in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries,” in *The Course of Irish History* (Lanham, MD: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 2001), 87, 93.

²⁴F.X. Martin, “The Normans: Arrival and Settlement,” in *The Course of Irish History* (Lanham, MD: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 2001), 95-98.

Strongbow remained loyal and paid homage to the king, as did the rest of the Anglo-Norman nobles and Irish princes.²⁵

Although the Anglo-Norman foothold in Ireland was now nominally part of Henry's empire, he and his successors allowed the Anglo-Norman nobles the freedom to administer it and to expand further into areas still controlled by the native Irish princes. By 1250, the Anglo-Normans controlled about three-fourths of Ireland, but then Gaelic resistance began to stiffen. The Anglo-Norman advance slowed and then began to be reversed. By the time the Tudors came to power in England, the Anglo-Norman colonies had been reduced to a small strip of land around Dublin known as the Pale. Beyond the pale, the Gaelic chieftains of the native Irish were still nominally subjects of the English crown but were fiercely independent in reality.²⁶

The relationship between the native Irish and the newcomers was a complicated one during the middle ages and throughout the sixteenth century. Despite the distinction made by the Anglo-Normans between the "land of war" (Gaelic Ireland) and the "land of peace" (Anglo-Norman Ireland), the fighting occurred mainly on the border between the two realms and affected most of their inhabitants very little with the exception of the loss of warriors and the necessity of contributing to the war effort by supplying money or food. However, even as the two groups fought, they grew closer culturally.²⁷

From the beginning, the small numbers of the Anglo-Irish necessitated an amount of cooperation between themselves and the Gaelic Irish. While Gaelic leaders were killed or displaced, it is important to note that Irish commoners were not massacred or driven from their

²⁵ Martin, "The Normans," 100-104.

²⁶ Martin, "The Normans," 104-111; J.F. Lydon, "The Medieval English Colony," in *The Course of Irish History* (Lanham, MD: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 2001), 113-124; Art Cosgrove, "The Gaelic Resurgence and the Geraldine Supremacy," in *The Course of Irish History* (Lanham, MD: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 2001), 125-138.

²⁷ Lydon, "The Medieval English Colony," 120.

lands. As in England after the Norman Conquest, the native population continued to work the land as they had under their previous masters.²⁸

Cultural assimilation was further accelerated by intermarriage, beginning with Strongbow's marriage to Dermot MacMurrough's daughter Aoife. Several other Anglo-Norman nobles followed Strongbow's example including the de Courcys, the de Lacys, and the de Burgos. The frequency of intermarriage may reveal something about the way Anglo-Norman nobles perceived their Irish counterparts. It is likely that intermarriage on such a scale would not have occurred if the newcomers had not thought of the greater Gaelic leaders as social equals. Still, there were more practical reasons for intermarriage. The Anglo-Normans were few in number, and the creation of marriage alliances with the great Irish families was necessary for the survival of their colony.²⁹

Anglo-Normans who married into Irish families soon quickly learned the Gaelic language. Like in England after the conquest, this was necessary for communication within the family, as well as communication with the commoners living on and working the nobles' lands. In time, Irish became the primary language of many Anglo-Norman families. The Anglo-Normans eventually began to adopt Irish customs as well and became patrons of Gaelic poets. Some, like the de Burghs, went further, assimilating almost completely into Irish culture. In many ways, the Anglo-Normans were becoming "more Irish than the Irish themselves."³⁰

The Anglo-Norman authorities in Dublin were so alarmed by the intermarriages and adoption of Irish customs that they passed legislation to prevent the mixing of the two groups, but their efforts had very little effect on the process of assimilation. Still, despite their marriage

²⁸ Martin, "The Normans," 108.

²⁹ Martin, "The Normans," 108.

³⁰ Lydon, "The Medieval English Colony," 122-123. The de Burghs eventually came to be called the Burkes of Connacht, reflecting their estrangement from Anglo-Norman culture.

into Irish families and their adoption of Gaelic language and custom, the Anglo-Norman settlers retained their identity as a separate group. Fighting continued along the ever-shrinking borders of Anglo-Norman Ireland, and mistrust between the two groups must have remained high.³¹

Tudor Policy in Ireland, 1494-1603

The Tudor Dynasty, perennially insecure on the throne of England, saw Ireland as a threat due to its close proximity to England. English monarchs feared that Ireland could be used by England's enemies as a base from which to invade England itself. These fears proved to be well founded. More than anything else, this perception drove English policy during the reigns of Henry VII, Henry VIII, and Elizabeth. The 1530s saw another volatile element added to the already unstable political situation in Ireland: religion. Over the next century, the Protestant Reformation drove a wedge between the English and the old English of Ireland and brought the old English and native Irish closer together. Religion may have also been the reason for the escalation of brutality in Irish wars. Historian G.A. Hayes-McCoy argued that, while war in Ireland was frequent, it had never been bloody. This changed with the English response to the rebellion of Thomas Fitzgerald, the tenth Earl of Kildare, known to posterity as "Silken Thomas."

Ireland was composed of three groups in the early years of the Tudor dynasty. The first group was the remnant of the Anglo-Norman invaders who resided in the Pale. A second group—commonly referred to as the "English Rebels"—was of Anglo-Irish descent but had been almost completely absorbed into Gaelic Irish culture. These wayward families included the Fitzgeralds, Roches, Barrys, Powers, Butlers, Dillons, Tyrells, Burkes, and Savages.

³¹ Lydon, "The Medieval English Colony," 122-123.

The “Irish Enemies” made up the final group. They were descended from the original Irish inhabitants of the island and included such notable families as the O’Neills, the O’Reillys, the O’Kellys, the Maguires, and the MacMahons.³²

The Earls of Kildare were the most important members of the Fitzgerald family, the most powerful Anglo-Norman family in Ireland. Successive Earls of Kildare were further ennobled by the Yorkists who granted them the title “Lord Deputy of Ireland.” Henry VIII harbored doubts about the loyalty of the Fitzgerald family because of their prior relationship with the House of York as well as their brief support of pretenders Lambert Simnel and Perkin Warbeck. As a result, in 1494 Henry stripped the title of “Lord Deputy” from the eighth Earl of Kildare and briefly gave it to an Englishman named Sir Edward Poynings. Henry changed his mind in 1496 and gave the title back to the Fitzgerald family. This proved to be a fateful decision thirty-seven years later.³³

In 1533, the Earl of Ormond—a member of the rival Butler family—questioned the ninth Earl of Kildare’s conduct as Lord Deputy. Kildare was called to London to answer the allegations but died before he could return. Kildare’s son Thomas Fitzgerald believed that his father had been murdered by the English and so rose in rebellion against the crown. Taking advantage of King Henry VII’s quarrels with Rome and Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, “Silken Thomas” sought aid from both. When Kildare declared his loyalty to the Pope, Irish Catholic clergy and Gaelic leaders who feared the spread of the Protestant Reformation to Ireland flocked to his banner. Kildare quickly attacked Dublin, taking the city, but failing to take the castle. The English responded by attacking Kildare’s castle of Maynooth. English artillery

³² Hayes-McCoy, G.A., “The Tudor Conquest,” in *The Course of Irish History* (Lanham, MD: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 2001), 142.

³³ Hayes-McCoy, G.A., “The Tudor Conquest,” 139; Robert Bucholz and Newton Key, *Early Modern England 1485-1714: A Narrative History* (Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), 87.

demolished the castle, compelling its garrison to surrender. The entire garrison was promptly executed, the first of many atrocities committed in Ireland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By 1535, Kildare was compelled to surrender on the understanding that his life would be spared. Instead, Kildare, five of his uncles, and seventy other participants in the rebellion were executed.³⁴

The rebellion of “Silken Thomas” Fitzgerald compelled Henry to devise a new strategy for Ireland, one that called for more direct English involvement in Irish affairs and the Anglicization of the Irish. In 1536, the Act of Supremacy was extended to Ireland, making Henry the head of the Church of Ireland. Five years later, Henry was declared King of Ireland and embarked on an ambitious program of political and cultural reform. Henry’s program, known as “surrender and regrant” was an attempt to anglicize both the native Irish and Anglo-Normans and to bring them firmly under royal control by removing their Irish titles and granting them land and English titles, as well as attempting to introduce English legal and inheritance reforms. Additionally, the Irish were expected to forego Irish clothes and the Irish language in favor of English garments and the English language. Instead of uniting the native Irish and Anglo-Irish in an anglicized realm of one language and one culture, the policy served to further embitter both groups.³⁵

When Queen Elizabeth ascended the throne of England, she initially rejected her father’s project of Anglicization in favor of compromise and toleration. Slowly, however, Elizabeth began to bring Ireland under royal control.³⁶

Plantation, a policy that caused so much trouble for Stuart monarchs, was part of Tudor

³⁴ Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England*, 87-88; Hayes-McCoy, “The Tudor Conquest,” 140-141.

³⁵ Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England*, 88; Hayes-McCoy, “The Tudor Conquest,” 142-143.

³⁶ Hayes-McCoy, “The Tudor Conquest,” 145-146.

Irish strategy. Queen Mary was the first to experiment with the policy, creating plantations in King's County and Queen's County (modern day Offaly and Laois). Other attempts were made in the 1560s by Elizabeth's Lord Deputy of Ireland Henry Sidney and in the 1570s when a plantation was created in County Down's Ards peninsula.³⁷

The English colonization of Munster was by far the greatest attempt at plantation during Elizabeth's reign. In 1579, the lords of Munster, led by Gerald Fitzgerald, 15th Earl of Desmond, rebelled against Elizabethan attempts to assert English authority over their lands. The rebellion lasted for three years before Fitzgerald was killed and the rebellion brutally crushed. As a result, the Munster nobles' lands were confiscated and given to loyal English settlers.³⁸ Unlike the now abandoned plantations in Ulster, Queen's County, and King's County, Munster seemed to be an ideal location. Many of its Irish inhabitants had fled or been killed in the rebellion or had died during the ensuing famine. Thanks to the support of Elizabeth's government, several thousand English settlers "repopulated" Munster and by 1589 the colony was firmly established.³⁹

Connacht proved much easier to subdue. In 1585, reluctant to repeat the experience of Munster, the lords of Connacht submitted to the English and were rewarded by being confirmed in their estates. In return, they promised to charge money rents rather than be paid in goods or services and to abolish hereditary local jurisdiction.⁴⁰

By 1590, as a result of Elizabeth's policy of Anglicization and plantation, Ulster was the only province of Ireland not completely under English control.⁴¹ In 1594, however, a rebellion began that threatened to completely undo the Tudor conquest of Ireland. The rebellion had its

³⁷ Foster, Robert Fitzroy, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972* (London: The Penguin Group, 1988), 13.

³⁸ Hayes-McCoy, "The Tudor Conquest," 146. The FitzGerald of Desmond were distant cousins of the FitzGerald of Kildare, but are considered to be a separate branch of the family.

³⁹ R. Dunlop, "The Plantation of Munster 1584-1589," *The English Historical Review* 3, no. 10 (April 1888): 250-269; Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 13; Hayes-McCoy, "The Tudor Conquest," 146;

⁴⁰ Hayes-McCoy, "The Tudor Conquest," 147.

⁴¹ Hayes-McCoy, "The Tudor Conquest," 147.

genesis in several smaller uprisings to prevent English incursions into Ulster, which included the imposition of English sheriffs and lawyers and an attempt at establishing a regional presidency. Hugh O’Neil, Earl of Tyrone—the most powerful of the Ulster lords—initially supported the English, hoping that Elizabeth would appoint him to the presidency of Ulster, allow Ulster to remain autonomous, and grant toleration to Ulster Catholics. Tyrone quickly came to the conclusion that the English would not grant these concessions without a fight and joined the rebellion in 1595.⁴²

The war went badly for the English at first. English attempts to invade Ulster were repulsed and the rebellion spread from Ulster to the south and east. The Munster plantation was overrun in 1598, forcing most of its English settlers to return to England. The Irish hoped to prolong the war until Elizabeth died, hoping to obtain more favorable terms from her successor. Then, in 1601, the English retook Munster and Leinster and succeeded in penetrating Ulster’s interior. Tyrone was defeated in battle that same year in an attempt to join a Spanish invasion force that had landed in Kinsale Bay. After Kinsale, the English, led by Lord Mountjoy, marched north and laid waste to Ulster causing a famine that resulted in the deaths of several thousand Irish men, women, and children.⁴³

Tyrone held out for another several months, long enough to outlast Queen Elizabeth, who died in March, 1603. Although Tyrone was unaware of the queen’s death at the time of his capitulation, his hope of obtaining more favorable terms as a result of that event was validated. Elizabeth’s successor James I was feared to be sympathetic to the rebellion, which had led the English to offer terms that Tyrone would find acceptable enough to end the conflict before James

⁴² Hayes-McCoy, “The Tudor Conquest,” 147-148.

⁴³ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 37; John McCavitt, “The Political Background to the Ulster Plantation, 1607-1620,” in *Ulster 1641: Aspects of the Rising* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queens University, Belfast, 1993), 7-9.

could come to the throne. As a result, O'Neil kept his life, much of his property, and retained his position as the most powerful Ulster chieftain.⁴⁴

In 1605, the current Lord Deputy of Ireland Arthur Chichester began to implement an anti-Catholic policy in Ireland in the hope that the conversion of the Irish would stabilize the island. Tyrone, who had been rebuilding his power in Ulster, hoped to use Catholic anger to fuel another rebellion against the English. Once again, he asked the Spanish for monetary and military support. This time, Tyrone also hoped to enlist the help of the Old English who had remained neutral during the “Nine Years War.” Before he could act, however, Tyrone became convinced that his plot had been betrayed and fled to the continent with several other Ulster lords and their followers in what became known as the “Flight of the Earls.” In doing so, they set in motion a chain of events that ultimately—though not inexorably—led to the establishment of the Ulster Plantation and the rebellion of 1641.⁴⁵

The Ulster Plantation, 1608-1641

Following the Flight of the Earls in 1607, Lord Deputy Chichester formulated a plan to redistribute their lands. Most of the land was to be distributed among the native Irish inhabitants of Ulster and English servitors. Each prominent Irish inhabitant of Ulster was to be given “so much [land] as he can conveniently stock and manure by himself and his tenants and followers, and so much more as by conjecture he shall be able to so stock and manure for five years to come.” Most of the rest was to be granted to “servitors”—English soldiers who had served in

⁴⁴ McCavitt, “Ulster Plantation,” 9; Hayes-McCoy, “The Tudor Conquest,” 148-149.

⁴⁵ McCavitt, “Ulster Plantation,” 10-11.

the Nine Years War and local government officials. The remainder was to be set aside for English and Scottish settlers.⁴⁶

This plan might have been implemented but for a relatively minor rebellion in Ulster led by Cahir O'Doherty and rumors of Tyrone's return. In the wake of O'Doherty's Rebellion, King James and his advisors took over planning for the Ulster Plantation from Chichester. Over Chichester's objections, James and his council increased the amount of land to be confiscated from the native Irish, re-granting them less than a quarter of Ulster. James' plan also granted less land to servitors. The vast majority of Ulster was reserved for Protestant English and Scottish "undertakers," as the settlers were called. The plantation was to cover six counties of Ulster: Armagh, Cavan, Coleraine (renamed Londonderry), Donegal, Fermanagh, and Tyrone. Private enterprises had already established plantations the Ulster counties of Monaghan, Antrim, and Down. Antrim and Down had been especially successful, attracting settlers from the lowlands of Scotland.⁴⁷

The Ulster Plantation, on the other hand, was not immediately successful due to frequent local attacks by the native Irish who resented the unfair distribution of land and who expected the return of Tyrone. Migration from England increased from 1614 to 1619, and the 1630s saw an influx of Scottish settlers. When Protestant undertakers arrived, they frequently violated the expectations they "undertook" to fulfill. Often, this included allowing the native Irish to remain on their lands. Like the Normans four hundred years earlier, the newcomers faced a shortage of manpower that could only be overcome by taking native Irish tenants. Although the consequences of this decision proved disastrous in 1641, it may have temporarily eased the anger of the dispossessed native Irish. Historian John McCavitt has argued that over time, many of

⁴⁶ Quoted in McCavitt, "Ulster Plantation," 11.

⁴⁷ McCavitt, "Ulster Plantation," 14-17.

them may have reconciled themselves to the presence of the plantation and that at least a few attempted to conform to the British way of life. These tentative attempts at assimilation were thwarted, however, as many of the native Irish became deeply indebted to their English landlords or were removed to make way for newly arrived Protestant tenants.⁴⁸ Still, by 1641, a “vener of cohabitation” had settled over Ulster. Members of the Gaelic Irish and Old English gentry maintained positions in local government, and intermarriage was common between both groups and the New English and Scots at all levels of society. Many of the tenants farming lands owned by New English undertakers were native Irish or Old English, and a few Gaelic and Old English landlords—including Sir Phelim O’Neill—had New English and Scots tenants.⁴⁹

In short, throughout the development of the Ulster plantation, the native Irish and the Protestant newcomers developed complex relationships based on social and economic interaction that became important at the outbreak of the 1641 rebellion. The nature of some of these relationships can be discerned in the 1641 depositions through the thefts, threats, murders, and acts of mercy reported by deponents. Often, these relationships meant difference between life and death. Importantly, these relationships also blinded Ulster Protestant settlers to the grievances of their Catholic neighbors and the possibility of an armed uprising.

The Destabilization of Caroline Ireland, 1613-1641

During the early years of the seventeenth century, it became increasingly apparent that the government in London no longer trusted the Catholic Old English who had heretofore remained loyal to the crown. The Old English were understandably distressed by the influx of Protestant settlers in Ulster which eroded their power in the Irish Parliament. Furthermore, they

⁴⁸ McCavitt, “Ulster Plantation,” 17, 22.

⁴⁹ Bennett, *The Civil Wars*, 90; Nicholas Canny, “What Really Happened,” 31.

feared that their status as Catholics might put their lands in danger of confiscation. In 1628, Charles I—who needed money for his war against Spain—granted concessions to the Old English in the form of the “Graces” which guaranteed to Irish Catholics the right of political participation and guaranteed the titles of Catholic landowners.⁵⁰

Although the Protestants held a slight majority in the Irish Parliament by 1613, Irish Catholics were still numerous enough to prevent Anti-Catholic legislation from being passed. This last semblance of security evaporated when Charles’s Lord Deputy of Ireland Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford convened a Parliament in 1634 but refused to allow it to conduct any business that was not officially sanctioned by the government in London.⁵¹ In short, Charles and Strafford were attempting to rule Ireland without the Irish Parliament. This was in keeping with Charles’s history of attempting direct rule without a Parliament—at the same time he and Strafford were trying to make the Irish Parliament irrelevant, Charles was in the fifth year of his period of personal rule in England.

Parliament now under his control, Strafford repudiated the Graces and moved to confiscate one quarter of Catholic land in Connacht, making no distinction between native Irish and Old English landowners. In 1639, Strafford was recalled to England. In his short time in Ireland he had managed to anger all four of the major groups that populated Ireland. Although he had managed to keep the peace in Ireland, he had also succeeded in alienating the Old English who had remained mostly loyal to England throughout the centuries. Conversely, Strafford’s absence may have made Catholics in Ireland feel less secure. By 1641, the Presbyterian Scots were victorious against Charles I, and in England Charles’s parliament was temporarily united

⁵⁰ Aidan Clarke, “The Colonisation of Ulster and the Rebellion of 1641,” in *The Course of Irish History* (Lanham, MD: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 2001), 156.

⁵¹ Clarke, “The Colonisation of Ulster and the Rebellion of 1641,” 157.

against him. On May 10, 1641, Charles was forced to sign a Bill of Attainder for the execution of Strafford, who was beheaded two days later.⁵²

Catholics all over Ireland feared that the Scots or the English Parliament would use their newly acquired power to confiscate Catholic lands and force the conversion of Irish Catholics to Protestantism.⁵³ Besides fear, the Irish rebels of 1641 may have been driven by the hope that the success of their plan would force King Charles to grant Catholic toleration in Ireland. In this way they possibly hoped to emulate the success of the Presbyterian Scots who had forced Charles to grant religious concessions in the Bishops' wars. According to Aidan Clarke, if they had succeeded, they may have been in a position to dictate terms to Charles and the English Parliament.⁵⁴

Though many deponents, looking back, believed that the rebellion must have been in the planning stages for some time—possibly for years, it was not formulated until the summer of 1641. The plotters were a small group of Gaelic Ulster nobles that included Rory O'More, Lord Maguire, and Sir Philem O'Neil. Some contemporaries, including the Duke of Ormond, believed that the Old English of the Pale were complicit in the rebellion, but there is very little evidence for their involvement in the initial uprising. Unlike Tyrone, who had hoped to establish a personal suzerainty over Ireland, the aims of these plotters were limited: it is likely that they hoped only to establish a Catholic kingdom, separate from England, but ruled by Charles I.

⁵² Clarke, "The Colonisation of Ulster and the Rebellion of 1641," 159.

⁵³ Clarke, "The Colonisation of Ulster and the Rebellion of 1641," 159.

⁵⁴ Clarke, "The Colonisation of Ulster and the Rebellion of 1641," 159-160; Jane Ohlmeyer, *Civil War and Restoration in the Three Stuart Kingdoms* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 101. For a more detailed discussion of the complex reasons for the rebellion and the historiographical debate surrounding them, see Nicholas Canny, "What Really Happened in 1641," in *Ireland From Independence to Occupation: 1641-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 24-42 and Jane Ohlmeyer, *Civil War and Restoration*, 100-101.

Nicholas Canny has argued that many of the Irish would never have rebelled if they had not believed that their actions were supported by King Charles.⁵⁵

The rebellion was planned for October 22, 1641. The Ulster rebels, led by Sir Phelim O'Neil, hoped to capture the main Protestant fortifications in Ulster: Carrickfergus, Charlemount, Coleraine, Emskillen, Lisburn, Londonderry, Newry, and Tandragee. The plot may have also included an attempt to capture Dublin Castle and the members of the Dublin government, though this facet of the plan may have been fabricated by the lords justices in Dublin.⁵⁶ If such an attempt was planned, it failed due to betrayal or indiscretion the night before the rebellion began. Nevertheless, the first months of rebellion in Ulster proved to be a success.

⁵⁵ Bennett, *The Civil Wars*, 91-92; Canny, "What Really Happened," 27-29, 37.

⁵⁶ Brendan Fitzpatrick, *Seventeenth Century Ireland: The War of Religions* (Totawa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble Books, 1989), 133; Ohlmeyer, *Civil War and Restoration*, 101.

CHAPTER 3

ULSTER

Ulster was the epicenter of the rebellion. It was in Ulster that the presence of the Protestant English and Scots was most keenly felt by the Catholic Irish. While the rest of Ireland was dotted with English plantations, there was one in every Ulster county. Ulster was also where the rebellion began on October 22, 1641, when Irish rebels led by Sir Philem O'Neill attacked and captured the key English strongholds of Charlemont, Moutnjoy Castle, Tandragee, and Newry, taking their garrisons completely by surprise. The rebels failed to take Derry, Coleraine, Enniskillen, Lisburn, and Carrickfergus, and in early December they began to receive a series of setbacks.⁵⁷

On December 6, 1641, a Royalist army was routed at Lisnagarvey. The Parliamentarians chased down and killed around 1,500 royalists. The rebels, who had pinned their flag to the royalist cause, suddenly felt their rebellion threatened. Additionally, native Irish had participated and been slaughtered in the battle. Many historians, including Nicholas Canny, have argued that the anti-Protestant atrocities associated with the rebellion began after the Lisnagarvey massacre. Afterwards, the killings of Protestant civilians began and continued on such a scale that the English perceived them to be a planned aspect of the initial rebellion.⁵⁸

Given this background, it comes as no surprise, therefore, to see female participation in the Ulster rebellion. What is extraordinary is the fact that three Irish Catholic women are associated with some of the most infamous and best documented atrocities of the war.

⁵⁷Jane Ohlmeyer, "A Failed Revolution?" in *Ireland From Independence to Occupation: 1641-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 11.

⁵⁸Canny, *What Really Happened*, 34.

The Bloody Viragos: Jane Hampson, Anne O’Kelly, and Rose O’Reilly

A *virago* is a woman of great stature, strength, or courage. The word comes from the Latin root *vir*, meaning man. In other words, when a deponent refers to a female rebel as a virago, he or she means that that female rebel is conducting herself in what they perceive to be a masculine way: leading soldiers into battle, leading an angry mob, or personally murdering innocent victims. Three women gained such a reputation in Ulster in the 1641 rebellion. They were Rose O’Reilly, Anne O’Kelly, and the most infamous of all, Jane Hampson.

Rose O’Reilly and her relatives Donnell and Henry O’Reilly were servants of Ann and Hilkieah Read before the rebellion. One of the first mentions of Rose is in the combined deposition of Faithfull Teate/Tate, Elizabeth Day, and William Thorp. Elizabeth Day recalled that “Rose nie Rely wife of the foresaid Philip o Rely came to [Dr. Tate’s house] with a *Petronell* charged in her hands & the cock up & most imperiously demanded a note of Dr. Tate’s wife of all her goods, & then she & her retainers took away all her and her husband’s goods horses, mares, cows, sheep, plate, burnt his books in the fire [and] threw some in the dirt so that by their procurement & rebellious felonies [he] lost his whole estate.” It immediately becomes apparent from this deposition that Rose was assertive and the leader of the group that robbed Dr. Tate. Because Tate was a Doctor of Divinity, it can be inferred that the books burned by Rose were religious in nature, probably including Bibles and Books of Common Prayer, as well as other theological texts. By burning some and throwing others into the dust, then, Rose was making a religious statement.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Deposition of Ann Read, 12 July 1642; Deposition of Faithfull Teate, Elizabeth Day, and William Thorpe, 20 April 1642, in 1641 Depositions Project, <http://1641.tcd.ie/>, sv Elizabeth Day. Hereafter, all citations to depositions regarding the 1641 Rebellion are listed by the name(s) of the depositee(s) and the date of the deposition. Unless otherwise indicated, the depositions may be located in the online collections of the 1641 Deposition project by entering the name of the depositee(s) in the online search utility provide at the project’s URL.

Deponent Marmaduke Batemanson also lists Rose as a member of (though not the leader of) a group of rebels who robbed him of his possessions in the early days of the rebellion. Rose and her confederates stripped Batemanson's house of everything portable, including bedding. According to Batemanson, when he requested some bedding to sleep on until he could leave, Rose refused, saying that he must learn to lie on straw, as he was sure to do. The deponent may have also overheard Rose say of the English and Scots that she was "never well that day that she saw either of those nations," though it is unclear whether Batemanson witnessed this statement or heard it secondhand.⁶⁰

Batemanson's deposition is also where eyewitness evidence on Rose ends and hearsay testimony begins. Batemanson alleged that Rose wanted to kill him and all of the other Protestants she came across but was prevented from doing so by her husband Hugh McShane O'Reilly who argued that the day would come when they may be "beholding to the poorest amongst them," and added that if she still wanted to kill them she could, but that he would forsake and never come near her again. This exchange seems too extraordinary to be credible, but it was also mentioned by another deponent, Symon Wesnam, who added that Rose so often participated in acts of violence with the male soldiers that she had earned the name "colonel O'Neil."⁶¹

Her husband's alleged demand to the contrary, Bateman alleged that Rose O'Reilly was later the chief instigator of the drowning of around forty Protestants at Belturbet in January 1642. This could be written off as a case of mistaken identity if the same claim had not been made by deponent Elizabeth Pole, who was being held prisoner in Belturbet at the time. Elizabeth also

⁶⁰ Deposition of Marmaduke Batemanson, 13 April 1643.

⁶¹ Depositions of Marmaduke Batemanson, 13 April 1643, and Symon Wesnam, 22 July 1642.

named Rose as the chief instigator of that atrocity, as well as the murder of two Protestants who were hung in town on the same day.⁶² However, several additional depositions relating to the incidents at Belturbet do not record Rose's presence or participation. A butcher named William Gibbs was to be the third man hanged that day but was spared. Gibbs thus witnessed the two hangings and claimed to have witnessed the drowning but made no mention of Rose O'Reilly. Irish Catholic witness Peter Rickbee gave a detailed account of the drowning to one of Cromwell's men over ten years later, mentioning Donnell O'Reilly as the perpetrator of the atrocity, not his kinswoman Rose.⁶³ It is likely that Bateman and Pole were mistaken about Rose O'Reilly's involvement, or that she was at Belturbet but because Bateman and Pole were impressed by the authority she exuded and by the hatred she expressed for English and Scottish protestants when they encountered her, they assumed her to be the instigator of the murders. Given the evidence, it is possible that Rose O'Reilly was a prominent leader whose earned reputation caused events in which she had never taken part to be attributed to her.

The story of Anne O'Kelly is a more verifiable example of this mythmaking process. Anne was the wife of Brian Kelly, a rebel leader and a governor of the town of Loghgal. The only eyewitness accusation against Anne was made by deponent Ellenor Fullerton. Ellenor told of having gone to Anne's house to retrieve some clothes which had presumably been stolen after the beginning of the rebellion. Upon arrival, Ellenor noticed that Anne was already wearing her clothes. When she confronted Anne about this, she allegedly responded by threatening to cut off Ellenor's hand. If this event occurred as Ellenor said it did, it must have been an intense

⁶² Depositions of Marmaduke Batemanson, 13 April 1643, and Elizabeth Pole, 26 April 1643, sv Rose O'Reilly.

⁶³ Depositions of William Gibbs, 31 January 1644, Ann Read, 12 July 1642, and Elizabeth Croftes, 8 March 1643; Examination of Peter Rickbee, 1 April 1654, sv Belturbet.

confrontation between neighbors who possibly knew each other well, but it was not a bloody one. In fact, no eyewitness ever reported Anne killing anyone. Despite this, she gained a reputation for being one of the worst individual murderers of the rebellion.⁶⁴

Ellenor Fullerton herself claimed to have overheard one of Anne's servant's complaining that his arms were so tired from killing and knocking Protestants into a bog pit that he could barely lift them. She also reported a rumor that Anne had personally drowned 20 protestant men, women, and children because two of her husband's soldiers, who were English Protestants, had fled from him at the siege of Tredarth (February, 1641/1642). Ellenor would have believed this rumor, whether it was true or not, because of the threat she had received earlier from Anne.⁶⁵

Ellenor's deposition is the only one from the 1640s that mentions Anne. As the years passed, Anne's reputation apparently grew. By the time Cromwell's judges were taking depositions in 1652, Anne was said to have murdered forty-five English Protestants "with her own hands." A native Irish deponent named Thirlache O' Hamill reported that in the early days of the rebellion, Anne kept "a great many of the English in her house for a certain time and made them work for her" until one day when she learned of her brother's death at the Lisnegarvie massacre. After hearing the news, Thirlache recounted, Anne told her servants to drown them. A third deposition from the 1650s may come nearer to the truth, if there was any truth in the accusations against Anne at all. Michael Harrison reported that Anne O'Kelly had drowned a dozen Protestants in a pit.⁶⁶

There is no eyewitness evidence that Anne murdered anyone at all, so the rumors of her

⁶⁴ Depositions of Christian Stanhawe, 23 July 1642 and Ellenor Fullerton, 16 September 1642.

⁶⁵ Deposition of Ellenor Fullerton, 16 September 1642.

⁶⁶ Examination of Thirlache O' Hamill, 9 May 1653 and Deposition of Michael Harrison, 11 February 1642, sv Michael Harrison.

actions may have been as untrue as many were in those years. Nevertheless, if Anne was guilty, a simpler story can be pieced together from the evidence available. It is likely, as Thirlache reported, that Anne kept a handful of English Protestant servants in her household. This would not be surprising, especially if her husband was leading English Protestant soldiers in the field. When the rebellion started to experience setbacks, beginning with the massacre at Lisnagarvey in November, or when the English soldiers deserted at Tredarth three months, Ellenor may have begun to see the Protestants in her home as a potential fifth column and ordered her servants to kill them. Whatever her actions, it is obvious that the myth of her ferocity grew, until it was reported that she had killed forty-five with her own hands.

Ellenor's Fullerton's comment about English soldiers serving under the Irish rebels also reveals a tantalizing clue about the development of the popular rebellion in Ulster and the commencement atrocities. The conversion of English and Scots Protestants to Catholicism for protection is a well-known aspect of the rebellion. Could some, perhaps many, have also at one point or another fought with their neighbors, the rebels when it seemed that the rebellion might be successful, only to desert when the rebellion started to go against the Irish? If so, could such betrayals have shattered what remaining trust Irish Catholics had in their Protestant neighbors and fueled the murders for which the rebellion in Ulster has become infamous? For now, there is only some evidence for such conjectures, but a further inspection of the depositions may reveal more.

While Anne O'Kelly may have drowned a small number of protestants, her reputation both then and now pales in comparison to that of Jane Hampson. Deponents Anne Smith and Margret Clark named Hampson as the leader of a group of native Irish rebels who set fire to a thatched house in Shewie, Armagh with a large group of Protestants inside. Anne and Margret

were the only survivors of what became the second most infamous atrocity of the rebellion after the massacre of over a hundred Protestants at the bridge of Portadown.

According to Margret, their ordeal began when Irish rebels drove a large group of Protestants into the house, which was owned by her. The rebels then set fire to the house in several places, and soon the building was in flames. Margaret recalled that she, Anne, and about ten other Protestants fell to their knees and begged Jane Hampson “the most forward and cruelest rebel amongst them” to let them come out of the house and be beaten over the head, rather than to be burned in the fire. Hampson denied the request, saying that she would be “a blacksmith among them.” As the house was consumed, several protestants tried to escape, but were forced back into the house with pitchforks and other weapons, after which the doors were blocked shut. Anne and Margret were lucky enough to escape through a hole in the wall but were immediately clubbed and left for dead.⁶⁷

In Margret’s account, Jane does appear to be the leader, or at least a very authoritative figure in the group of rebels. Margret does not, however, say that Jane instigated the murders. For over three hundred years, Margret’s story has been the accepted version of events, but there may to have been more going on at that house in Shewie than Margret explicitly stated in her deposition.

According to deponent Joane Constable, Jane Hampson had until recently been a Protestant, despite being a “mere”—native—Irish woman.⁶⁸ She had recently, however, “turned to Mass.” Being native Irish by birth and a Protestant, Jane may have been seen as a traitor in a religious and in a culture sense at the beginning of the rebellion. If this was the case, perhaps her

⁶⁷Deposition of Ann Smith and Margret Clark, 16 March 1643.

⁶⁸Deposition of Joane Constable, 6 June 1643.

actions at Shewie were an attempt to gain the trust of the rebels. Alternately, Jane may have gotten mixed up in the incident as it was occurring. She may have not wanted to participate, but because of her background she would have had no choice. A third possibility is that genuine religious conviction may have driven her actions. Converts are often more zealous than those who have grown up in a particular confession, and Jane's zealotry may have been increased by the rebellion's nature as a reaction against religious, cultural, and economic oppression.

Jane's erstwhile Protestantism opens the possibility for another alternate interpretation of Margret and Anne's experience. Margret and Anne believed that they had been left for dead, but it is entirely possible that they were spared. According Margret's deposition, as the fires were being set she, Anne, and ten other Protestants begged Jane to club them over the head, rather than let them burn in the fire. It is not clear whether they hoped to be knocked unconscious before being killed, or hoped for survival, but in either case they were begging for an act of mercy. Why, then, did they beg Jane...the "most forward and cruelest" of the rebels? There are two possibilities: first, they may have perceived Jane to be the leader of the rebels and thus have the authority to spare them. Alternately, the ten Protestants may have hoped that Jane would spare them based on their prior relationship with her. Jane was formerly a Protestant, and the victims were probably fellow parishioners. As in many attacks in Ulster, victim and perpetrator probably knew each other well. When Margret and Anne escaped, instead of being shoved back into the fire or stabbed with the pikes and pitchforks carried by the rebels, they were clubbed over the head—which is exactly what they begged for. Finally, Anne and Margret were able to escape while the rebels "busied themselves with the burning of the house." It is hard to believe that the rebels would have been so distracted that they would have let the two women

escape. It may be that such a horrific act stunned even the perpetrators so much that they hesitated before shoving Anne and Margret back into the fire, perhaps the rebels saw their escape as the will of God, or perhaps they allowed themselves to commit one small act of mercy towards two of their former neighbors.

Theft and Apostasy in Ulster

For a province that saw so much violence, it is surprising that Ulster has so few female rebels listed in the depositions. Besides Jane Hampson, Anne O’Kelly and Rose O’Reilly, only four other women are mentioned. In Cavan, Jean Beatach allegedly forced her way into the house of Alexander Comine and removed his furniture. Also in Cavan, the widow McCabe led a band of rebels comprised of a servant and several family members who robbed Protestants throughout the county. During the robberies, the group stripped their victims of their clothes before sending them on their way. According to deponent John Wheelwright, McCabe and her family killed around twenty Protestants in his refugee group and sent the rest naked or nearly naked into the harsh Irish winter. Some were already sick, or pregnant, and many died on the way to safety in Dublin. Recent studies have shown that fewer Protestants were killed in the rebellion than even the most conservative estimates claimed. Wheelwright’s eyewitness testimony supports the assertion that many more died of exposure on the road to safety in Dublin than were murdered outright.⁶⁹

When English and Scots Protestants were given the options to be killed or turned out in the middle of winter, some chose to convert to Catholicism. The only two “apostates” listed in

⁶⁹ Depositions of Alexander Comine, 2 March 1642, and John Wheelwright, 18 August 1643.

the depositions for Ulster are Margaret Casar and Ales Cooke from Monaghan.⁷⁰ There has been no explanation provided as to why fewer Protestants converted to Catholicism in Ulster, but one reason may be the existence of a more cohesive Protestant community which enabled Protestants to band together into groups of refugees.

⁷⁰Deposition of Jane Hughes, 28 April 1642.

CHAPTER 4

LEINSTER

Leinster—the Irish province that included Dublin and the Pale—was the heart of Old English Ireland. Even though they maintained a separate identity, the Old English had been becoming more like the native Gaelic Irish and less like their cousins across the Irish Sea in the centuries since their arrival—or so it seemed to the English. This process was accelerated by the English Reformation which widened the gap between the two groups and created an atmosphere of mistrust in London despite the fact that the Old English remained loyal during the Nine Years War. The anti-Catholic policies of the seventeenth century and the English policies of confiscation and plantation which the Old English rightly feared would soon be turned against them embittered the Old English towards the English government. When the 1641 rebellion began, the Old English at first hesitated and then joined the Gaelic Irish rebels in an uneasy alliance in December 1641. As in Ulster, the organized rebellion was accompanied by a popular uprising that resulted in theft and the eviction of Protestants.

Murder or Instigation of Murder

There is only one reliable instance in Leinster of a woman being connected to a murder. In County Kilkenny, a woman named Ellen Butler was not directly involved in a murder but was accused by four deponents of having instigated the hanging of a man named William Stone. In one account, Stone's foster brother arrived and pleaded for his life, but Ellen was said to have refused to leave the scene until it had been done, later telling a neighbor named Dorothy Reynolds that Stone deserved to be hanged. According to all accounts—which it should be

noted were all secondhand accounts told to the deponents by Irish Catholic witnesses who had been present—Ellen’s argument was decisive and Stone was hanged.⁷¹

Theft of Property/Eviction

Theft was the most common way that Leinster women participated in the rebellion. Such acts were the most common in County Kildare, where Catherine Connor was believed to have stolen corn from deponent Thomas Nayler.⁷² Often, Catholic women who did not commit theft themselves acted as receivers of stolen goods. In County Dublin, for instance, Honor Pooley alleged that Mary Cavanagh admitted to acting as a recipient of goods stolen from her home. This was a common role for Irish women in both peace and wartime, according to Raymond Gillespie.⁷³

All over Ireland, Catholic women accused of theft often acted in concert with their husbands, like Rose McRichard, who was accused of robbing deponent Thomas Taylor, and Edith Wall who allegedly robbed Francis Dade.⁷⁴ In County Dublin, deponent Thomas Benet named a large mob of rebels who allegedly robbed him—though the list is so long it seems incredible that he would remember every name on it so long after the fact. While listing the names, Benet revealed that several of the male rebels were accompanied by their wives, namely Margerie McCoan, Margret Ball, and the wives of James McConnell, Patricke Ffanning,

⁷¹ Examinations of Elizabeth Fferrall, 20 August 1652, Luke Kinsalagh, 20 August 1652, Dorothy Reynolds, 19 August 1652, sv Ellen Butler, and Sarah Frances, 16 October 1652, sv Ellen Butler.

⁷² Deposition of Thomas Nayler, 9 May 1642.

⁷³ Deposition of Honor Pooley, 23 February 1642; Raymond Gillespie, “Women and Crime in Seventeenth-Century Ireland,” in *Women in Early Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1991), 49.

⁷⁴ Depositions of Thomas Taylor, 12 January 1642, and Thomas Goulding ex parte Francis Dade, 21 April 1642.

Bartholomewe Harford, and William Taylor. Interestingly, this mob seems to have been composed of a combination of Gaelic Irish and Old English.⁷⁵ In King's County, John Brenan's wife Sarah accompanied him when he forced deponent Margery King off of her land and stole her possessions.⁷⁶

Widows were also especially active: A widow named Katherine Keeray, accompanied by her neighbors Margaret Endras (another widow) and Edmond O Kaly, were accused of robbing an English widow named Temperance Martin.⁷⁷ In Queen's county, a widow named Ellen Vicars, referred to by deponent Sarah Vynes as a "famous she-rebel," was alleged to have led her family—both daughters and sons—on raids of the homes of multiple Protestant families and driven them off of their lands. This was probably the same "Ellenor Vickeres" who raided the home of deponent William Jackson and stole much of his cloth.⁷⁸

Upper-class women from prominent Old English families were also accused of theft, including Lady Margaret Bourke and Lady Elizabeth Fitzgerald of County Kildare and Lady Margaret Ffitzpatrick of Upper Ossory in Queen's County.

Lady Margaret Bourke's mixed record, as recorded in the depositions that refer to her, demonstrates the complexity of the roles played by many women in the rebellion. Alexander Haie/Hay deposed that he had begged Lady Bourke "to leave from being a Rebell, and to become a good subjecte," to which Lady Bourke is supposed to have replied that the Irish had been slaves to the English long enough, and that now it was time for them to assert their rights. Hay should not be regarded as an unbiased witness, however: he also claimed that Sir John

⁷⁵ Deposition of Thomas Benet, 26 February 1642.

⁷⁶ Deposition of Margery King and Margrett Sinnott, 4 May 1643.

⁷⁷ Deposition of Temperance Martin, 5 April 1642.

⁷⁸ Depositions of Sarah Vynes, 12 April 1642, and William Jackson, 11 April 1642, sv Vickeres.

Bourke had failed to pay him for some iron Hay had sold him—which Hay is careful to note Sir John later used to make pikes for the rebels.⁷⁹

Hay also accused Lady Bourke, her husband, and their tenants of stealing around forty cows and over a hundred sheep from English settlers and then using the profits from the stolen livestock to go on a drinking binge. Hay implicates both of the Bourkes in the incident, but it is likely that most of the thefts, if they did occur, were carried out by the Bourkes' Irish tenants and may have been something over which the Bourkes had little or no control, though deponent Margrett Speare indicated that Sir John may have been involved in at least one of the robberies, despite assuring his English tenants that they would be safe from such theft. The most infamous incident involving Lady Bourke occurred when her coach was stopped en route from Dublin to the midlands and she was caught with two bags of gunpowder as well as other ammunition which she likely intended to give to the Irish Catholic rebels.⁸⁰

On the other hand, while Margaret Bourke may have sympathized with the rebels, her loyalties may have been more divided than some of her actions indicate. In April 1642, Carbery Castle, the home of Lady Anne Colly, was attacked by Lewes Moore. Moore had been ordered by his brother Roger to take the castle and, so Lewis claimed, kill everyone inside. Instead, Lewis offered quarter to the few defenders in return for surrender but threatened to hang Anne's son Dudley if she did not surrender. Anne surrendered the castle which was subsequently looted and burned. Despite the intervention of Anne's friend, Lady Margaret Bourke, Lewis also carried away Anne's trunks, which presumably contained many of her clothes as well other personal possessions. Margaret wrote to Anne assuring her that she was doing her best to

⁷⁹Deposition of Alexander Haie, 25 June 1642.

⁸⁰Depositions of Alexander Haie, 25 June 1642, and Margrett Speare, 17 January 1642; O'Dowd, "Women and War," 94.

retrieve Anne's things—some of which she had already covertly recovered with the help of her servants. She asked Anne to reply quickly, before she was found to be in possession of Anne's things and her plan to return them was discovered.⁸¹

Lady Bourke also cooperated with the Dublin authorities when she was examined in 1652, providing Cromwell's agent with information on the activities of other rebels.⁸² These brief glimpses of the role Lady Margaret Burke played in the rebellion are evidence that loyalty was more complicated than might be supposed.

Lady Elizabeth FitzGerald is another member of the Kildare elite who was accused of theft. Elizabeth was born Elizabeth Nugent. Around the year 1600, she married Gerald FitzGerald, 14th Earl of Kildare which made her the Countess of Kildare. They had one son, who died at the age of nine. When Gerald died soon after, the Earldom of Kildare and the ancestral castle of Maynooth passed to his cousin George Fitzgerald. After her husband's death, Elizabeth was often referred to as the "Countess Dowager of Kildare."⁸³

Elizabeth was accused by one deponent, Erasmus Borrowes, of coming with several of her tenants to seize his cattle and property. Francis Dade and Edmond Hind accused her of using more devious means to rob them. According to Dade and Hind, the Countess Dowager promised to take their possessions to keep them safe from the rebels but then refused to return them. They claimed that she kept some of their valuables for herself and supplied the rest to the rebels. A

⁸¹ Letter from Margaret Bourke to Lady Colly, undated; Deposition of Dame Ann Colly, 19 January 1643; Examination of Dudley Colly, 23 February 1654.

⁸² Examination of Margaret Bourke, 1 December 1652.

⁸³ Thomas W. Fitzgerald, *Ireland and her People, a Library of Irish Biography* (Chicago: Fitzgerald, 1909), 146.

Cromwell era deponent told of a group of Protestant refugees having been turned away from the countess dowager's castle to "shift for themselves."⁸⁴

These stories may or may not have been true, but several facts about the Countess Dowager support their veracity. Elizabeth was from an Old English family and married into another Old English family with a proud history of leadership and a history of defiance against the English. Additionally, she was a widow and may have sided with the rebellion at an early stage for protection from its fury.

It is surprising that, given her reputation at the time, Lady Margaret Ffitzpatrick of Upper Ossory is not as well remembered by historians as Jane Hampson. In a sense, Protestant perceptions of Lady Ffitzpatrick combined the deviousness of Lady Bourke with the supposed viciousness of Jane Hampson and Anne O'Kelly.

Like Lady Bourke, Lady Ffitzpatrick was accused of promising to safeguard the property of one of her Protestant neighbors only to later refuse to return it. Thomas Dungan deposed that around Christmas 1641, Thomas Bingham gave several of his possessions and stores to Lady Ffitzpatrick, including two large trunks of his possessions, sixteen oxen, and a large amount of corn. These items were never returned, according to Bingham's wife (Bingham was later killed in the rebellion).⁸⁵

Another allegation against Lady Ffitzpatrick began similarly but eventually took a more sinister turn. Several deponents, including Elizabeth Baskerville, James Weld, Phillip Sergent, and Margaret Tailor, alleged that Lady Ffitzpatrick had persuaded a married couple, Mr. and Mrs. Nicholson, to come to her house with all of their possessions for safety.

⁸⁴ Depositions of Erasmus Borrowes, 3 March 1642, Francis Dade, 21 April 1642, Edmond Hyne, 6 April 1642, and Samuell Emott, 18 November 1652.

⁸⁵ Deposition of Thomas Dungan, 28 February 1644.

While there, the Nicholsons were said to have witnessed “diverse cruelties and murders” committed on other Protestants and decided to leave before the same happened to them.

The deponents alleged that at that point Lady Ffitzpatrick provided the Nicholsons with a convoy for protection, but that the members of the convoy were actually hired to murder the Nicholsons on the way, which they allegedly did. When the hired killers returned, Lady Ffitzpatrick was said to have reproved them for failing to rip Mrs. Nicholson open and bring back her belly grease for Mrs. Ffitzpatrick to use to make candles.⁸⁶

In a time and place where so many terrible atrocities occurred on both sides, English protestants were surely tempted to believe this account. There is, however, a more likely scenario. It is possible that Mr. and Mrs. Nicholson received the same promises for the safekeeping of their possessions as Thomas Bingham, along with the additional promise of protection. When they realized that they had been tricked, they fled, but were murdered on the road by bandits, a common danger for Protestant refugees. Their neighbors, knowing that the Nicholsons had been tricked out of their possessions (and possibly having been victimized by Lady Ffitzpatrick in some way themselves), blamed Lady Margaret for their murder. The quote about the candle wax was probably a slander added later to spice up the story.

Aiding the Rebels and Apostasy

Like Margaret Bourke, more well-to-do Irish Catholic women could contribute to the rebellion by giving aid and comfort to the rebels. Such was the case in Kildare, where Joane Nolan was accused of meeting with various rebel soldiers and officers and giving them

⁸⁶Against the wife of Florence Fitzpatrick, undated; Deposition of Elizabeth Baskerville, 26 April 1643.

ammunition and other supplies, and Lady Esmond in County Wedford who may have also contributed money to the rebellion.⁸⁷

Leinster seemed to have fewer examples of women converting to Catholicism than other provinces, possibly because of Protestants' relative proximity to safety in Dublin. Among the few who did convert were "turned to Mass" were Mary Ffurnival and her husband Thomas. Lady Bourke's friend Anne Colly was also said to have converted to Catholicism, presumably to avoid further harassment by the Irish rebels who had looted and burned her castle.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Deposition of Thomas Greames, 20 April 1642; Information of Richard Shortall, 16 January 1654.

⁸⁸ Deposition of William Coleman, 1 February 1642.

CHAPTER 5

MUNSTER

Plans for the renewal of the Munster plantation were under way by 1601, only one year after the suppression of the rebellion that decimated the Tudor colony. By 1622, there were around 12,000 Protestant settlers living in Munster.⁸⁹

Murder or Instigation of Murder

Murders by women were less common in Munster than in other parts of Ireland. In one of the rare examples, Shenane Brassell of Moneroode was accused of enticing Jane Bekcnell out of the house in which she was residing, luring with her some distance further from the house, and then murdering her. Shenane was alleged to have previously participated in the robbery of Jane's kinsman Marten Bosten, the owner of the house near which she was killed.⁹⁰

Theft of Property/Eviction

Anti-Protestant robbery was common in Munster and was an activity actively engaged in by the women of the province. Deponent James Pace was surprised in his house and robbed by Joan Barry and "diverse others to the number of one hundred rebels, men and women..." While the number was probably exaggerated, it is interesting to note the presence of both men and women in the group.⁹¹

Robberies in Munster were often carried out by the servants of well-to-do native Irish and Old English Ladies and usually involved the theft of corn (wheat, barley, or oats) or cattle. In

⁸⁹ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 13.

⁹⁰ Deposition of Marten Bosten, 18 June 1642.

⁹¹ Deposition of James Pace, 7 October 1642.

County Clare, the servants and followers of a widow named Slany Dongan were accused of coming onto the property of Thomas Leach and driving away all of his cattle. In Limerick, deponent John Newenham claimed to have been robbed of his corn and cattle by the servants of Ellynor FitzGerald (of the Munster FitzGerald).⁹² In County Cork, the servants and tenants of Ellne Barry allegedly robbed deponent William Holyday of his cows, horses, and pigs.⁹³

Sometimes, matriarchs led their families in the robberies of Protestants, though this was somewhat more common in other parts Ireland. One such case was the robbery of Phillip Chapple by Margrett Tobine, who was accompanied by her son Edmund and her daughter More. Honora Bourke of County Clare and her sons assaulted and robbed Thomas Andrew, despite the fact that Honora's husband John had recently been appointed Provost Marshall.⁹⁴

In most cases, women from the poor or yeoman classes would rob Protestants directly, while upper-class Irish women, like Lady Bourke and Lady Fitzpatrick in Leinster, first convinced Protestants to hand over their possessions to keep them safe from the rebels, then refused to return them. Lady Browne of Kilkenny seems to have employed both methods. Thomas Trayer was allegedly robbed on his property by the servants of Lady Browne in conjunction with two other men, Captain Sугan and Dongogh Mc Ffynnen. Richard Taylor, on the other hand, was convinced that he had no other option for the preservation of his goods, including all of his cattle, than to send them to Lady Browne. When he went to retrieve his cattle, Lady Browne denied that she had them, and warned Taylor out of her castle.⁹⁵

⁹²Depositions of Thomas Leech, 18 January 1653, and John Newenham, 2 November 1642.

⁹³Deposition of William Halyday, 25 May 1642.

⁹⁴Depositions of Phillipp Chapple, 24 June 1642, and Thomas Andrew, 10 September 1642.

⁹⁵Depositions of Thomas Trayer, 17 May 1642, and Richard Taylor, 29 September 1642.

Aiding the Rebels and Apostasy

Few women in Munster were accused of directly participating in the larger rebellion. Mary Bushen accused a Mrs. Butler of Ballydroit in Tipperary of being a “reliever and harborer of rebels.” Several male members of her family were also connected to various rebel activities in the area.⁹⁶ In County Waterford, Mabel FitzGerald was accused of summoning a rebel army from another county and then handing over her husband’s castle to that army.⁹⁷

Munster had a number of women listed in the depositions as having converted to Catholicism: Ellen Carpenter, Ann Cop, Dorothy Foster, Mary Hawkins, and Anne Joyce of Cork; Anable Browne and Mary Monslow of Limerick; and Mrs. Holmes of Wexford. In County Waterford, Robert Andrew’s wife Juan was said to have converted politically as well as religiously. When the rebels entered the city, she allegedly yelled “God be praised now that friends come to us!” Joane Fflavan’s testimony aside, Juan’s exclamation—if she did in fact make it—was probably as much an act of self-preservation as her religious conversion.⁹⁸

⁹⁶Deposition of Mary Bushen, 27 September 1642.

⁹⁷Depositions of Thomas Tobin, 8 December 1642, Richard Rely, 18 December 1642, and Margery Phillipps, 9 December 1642.

⁹⁸Deposition of Joane Fflavan, 7 July 1642.

CHAPTER 6

CONNACHT

In 1641, Connacht was sparsely populated by Protestants. Plans for confiscation and plantation drawn up by Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford and Lord Deputy of Ireland, were abandoned after Strafford's execution. It is therefore not surprising that there are only three depositions that give accounts of female rebels in Connacht.⁹⁹ Though the Connacht depositions are fewer in number, they reflect many of the same themes seen in other provinces, including the existence of prior relationships between rebel and victim and the frequent necessity of apostasy for survival.

Galway

Though much of Raph Lambart's testimony is hearsay and many of the atrocities he recounts are religiously motivated and should therefore be regarded credulously, some of it bears repeating for the subtextual information his stories provide. One of Lambart's anecdotes involved a man named Hugh Langredge and his son who were allegedly stabbed several times before being left for dead while their attackers left to rob their home. According to Lambart, when Langredge began to sing a psalm, one of his attackers returned to slice his head open, exposing his brain. Lambart also told of a "poor old" Protestant minister who was allegedly decapitated by two Catholic cowherds. One of the cowherds was arrested but released by rebels whereupon he supposedly remarked that he had done God a service by killing an English minister. In another story, two rebels attacked and killed a Catholic soldier in his sleep for no other reason than because he was the son of an Englishman. It is important to keep these

⁹⁹ Clarke, "The Colonisation of Ulster and the Rebellion of 1641," 159.

anecdotes in mind when judging Lambart's perception of Thomasin Brewrton and of Apostasy in general.¹⁰⁰

Thomasin, referred to by Lambart as "Thomasin Brewrton, alias Leicester" was almost certainly a sister or widow of Captain Thomas Leicester who was mentioned earlier in the deposition.¹⁰¹ According to Lambart, Thomasin told a story of an English protestant who converted to Catholicism soon after the start of the rebellion "to save his life and goods." The man was given absolution by a priest who then walked with the man, accompanied by a soldier until they were half a mile from the apostate's house. The then asked him if he was "fully resolved that [he was] in the right way of salvation and fully satisfied in all points of religion." When the apostate replied that he was, the priest allegedly told the soldier to kill him so that he would never again succumb to sin or relapse in his Catholic faith. The apostate was subsequently buried in a shallow grave by the side of the road.¹⁰²

Lambart's stories have two common themes: the perfidy of Irish Catholics and the futility of conversion to Catholicism in return for safety. Taken with Lambart's other anecdotes, this story tell us more about Lambart's opinions of apostates like Thomasin than the activities of Catholic priests in the rebellion. It is likely that Lambart knew someone named Thomasin Brewrton, and that she did convert to Catholicism for safety like many other Protestant women during the rebellion. By telling the story of the murdered apostate through the words of an apostate he knew, Lambart lent legitimacy to the story. This does not preclude the possibility that the story is true—though the "I knew a friend who knew a friend" nature of the anecdote sets

¹⁰⁰ Deposition of Raph Lambart, 9 July 1645.

¹⁰¹ It seems more likely that Thomasin was Thomas's sister because of the similarity in their first names and because Lambart does not mention Thomas having been killed.

¹⁰² Deposition of Raph Lambart, 9 July 1645.

it firmly in the category of hearsay. It is important to keep in mind, however, that people giving testimony are purposeful in the evidence they give and the way that evidence is presented. In any event, Lambart had cause to believe every rumor he heard about the alleged cruelty of the rebels: Lambart's sister and her husband had been killed by rebels in 1642, and one of his children was also rumored to be dead.¹⁰³

Just as Lambart's deposition proves that the practice of conversion as a means of survival was as prevalent in Connacht as in the rest of Ireland, the deposition of William Strangwaies illustrates the betrayal that many Protestants felt when their Catholic neighbors—many of whom had been trusted with their children—turned on them. Before the rebellion, Mary McDermond acted as nurse to one or more of the Strangwaies children. As the Strangwaies fled in the wake of the uprising, however, Mary allegedly confronted the family and robbed them. William testified that Mary stole his daughter's coat, the blanket that she was being carried in, and all of the food the family carried.¹⁰⁴

What could explain Mary's seemingly callous behavior? Often, those who robbed Protestant refugees were in dire need themselves. Like many in Ireland, Mary may have been a victim of the poor harvests of 1640 and 1641. She may have had children of her own to provide for. Whatever their cause, such robberies were common during the rebellion. They were especially serious in western Ireland. Stripped of their food and clothing in the middle of winter and forced to walk to English strongholds, many died of starvation and exposure. The Strangwaies were lucky: safety was a relatively short distance away at Roscommon Abbey.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Depositions of Raph Lambart, 9 July 1645, and John Harrison, 23 April 1644, sv William Stewart; Examination of Edmund Bane O'Connellan, 8 May 1653, sv William Stewart.

¹⁰⁴ Deposition of William Strangwaies, 16 December 1642.

¹⁰⁵ Raymond Gillespie, "Destabilizing Ulster," in *Ulster 1641: Aspects of the Rising* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queens University, Belfast, 1993), 111; Deposition of William Strangwaies, 16 December 1642.

Leitrim

The deposition of Helenor Adshed provides examples from County Leitrim of both female apostates and a female Irish soldier. In 1641, her home was robbed by Irish rebels and her husband was killed while he worked in their field. Helenor's deposition provides a list of the goods she claimed were taken, as well as a list of the rebels who robbed her of her possessions and her husband. Helenor also gave the names of four individuals and their families who had converted to Catholicism. Among the apostates were Metland Lermon, a "Scots widow-woman," Guidie¹⁰⁶ Sheldon, and their families. Helenor does not appear to judge her former neighbors (and perhaps friends) harshly, perhaps understanding that they acted as they did for self-preservation. Instead, she reserves her contempt for a man, Humphrey Loe, who "hath stayed with the rebels from the beginning of this rebellion, though he might have left them, as easily as others his neighbors did..."¹⁰⁷

Interestingly, Helenor also lists a woman named Guidy Jacob among those who "beareth armes with the rebels against the king." As in Ulster, a few Protestants men not only converted to Catholicism and pledged their loyalty to the rebels but also decided—or were coerced—to prove their change of allegiance on the battlefield. If Helenor Adshed's deposition is to be believed, at least one woman did the same.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Guidie and Guidy are both short for Guidwife, the Scots equivalent of "Goodwife," and are therefore equivalent to the English "Goody."

¹⁰⁷ Deposition of Helenor Adshed, 20 August 1642.

¹⁰⁸ Deposition of Helenor Adshed, 20 August 1642.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Based on the evidence of the ways women participated in the Irish Rebellion of 1641, several conclusions can be reached. First, depositions on the activities of women, like those concerning men, offer a large amount of hearsay and rumor and very few eyewitness reports. This fact hampers attempts to arrive at an understanding of what happened—leaving the historian no choice but to rely heavily on conjecture but provides many remarkable insights into perceptions on both sides of the rebellion.

Several conclusions can be made about the reasons why Irish Catholic women chose the roles that they did. Sometimes, these reasons were common across the whole island. Poor harvests in 1640 and 1641 led to a large amount of women committing theft and assisting in efforts to drive the Protestants off of land that had once belonged to them. In other cases, geography helped to determine the roles played by women: in Ulster, more women seem to have participated in violent assault and murder than in bloodless theft, which was more common in Leinster, Munster, and Connacht. The relatively close proximity to Dublin ensured that local uprisings in which women were involved were less violent in Leinster than in Ulster, Munster, or Connacht.

Social factors also played a role, though class was not as much an indicator as marital status. Theft was common among the rich and the poor Catholic women of Ireland. While the poor and yeoman classes tended to rely more on “smash and grab” tactics, well-to-do Irish Catholic women sometimes convinced Protestants to turn over their possessions for protection,

then refused to give them back. In Munster, native Irish and Old English Ladies often sent their servants to rob Protestant settlers of corn and cattle. Married women and widows of all classes were engaged in such activities, while young, unmarried women almost never did unless they were accompanying a larger kin group.

The depositions contain many rumors of killings and atrocities, but a comparatively large amount of rumors of killings and atrocities. Much more common are eyewitness reports of home invasion, theft, and eviction. These attacks were in many instances carried out by women. Sometimes these women participated in or led groups mostly comprised of men, and sometimes they led their extended family including sons, daughters, and in-laws.

There is not one single instance of a young woman of marriageable age participating in or leading a group of rebels. All of the women who led groups of rebels or robbed the homes of Protestants were either widowed or accompanied by their husbands. Widows almost always led raids at the head of their families, while married women usually joined—and sometimes came to lead—the group of rebels to which their husband belonged.

The motivations for these “viragos” to rob, fight, and kill were religious, economic, and cultural in nature, though the cultural aspects could be almost entirely subsumed into the religious. Economic need was obviously the driving force behind many of the thefts, as well as a sense that the Irish were only taking back what was once theirs. Both would have been reinforced by religious conviction. Many “she-rebels” espoused their hatred of the English and Scots and of the Protestant religion. Sometimes these women made memorable religious statements, as when Rose O’Reilly burned some of Dr. Tate’s religious texts and threw the rest into the dust.

Given the role of religion in the conflict, it is not surprising to find many Protestant women, most of them unmarried or widows, converting to Catholicism for safety. When given the choice between possible rape and murder, an uncertain trek through the winter snow to Dublin, or the security that came with conversion, many women opted for conversion. For this, they were reviled by their neighbors and denounced in the depositions in a way similar to the denunciation of native Irish and Old English rebels.

Lest someone should be tempted to argue that the actions of Irish Catholic women in the 1641 rebellion show that the rebellion “liberated” these women in some way, it is important to remember that for every Irish Catholic woman who took up arms against the English or Scots, even in a limited local way, there were thousands who did not. Most Irish Catholic women fared little better than their Protestant counterparts. They were just as susceptible to rape, murder, and eviction as the Cromwellian land settlement proves. The stories of the women on both sides of the Irish Rebellion of 1641, then, bring to mind the famous quote from the “Melian Dialogue:” “The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.”

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