

Frances Nolan, *The Jacobite Duchess: Frances Jennings, Duchess of Tyrconnell, c.1649–1731*, Irish Historical Monographs series, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2021, pp. xvi + 257, £50.00, ISBN: 978-1-78327-614-1.

Frances Nolan's new biography of Frances Jennings, duchess of Tyrconnell (1649–1731) makes a significant contribution to the history of an individual life, and through it, the history of early modern England and Ireland. This thoroughly researched work takes a scholarly approach to the history and simultaneously remains a pleasure to read.

The biography follows Frances's life chronologically from her youth at the Restoration court of Charles II to her death as wealthy and influential widow in Dublin. Chapter 1 introduces Frances's family circumstances and the romances of her court life. Chapters 2 and 3 deal with Frances's first marriage to George Hamilton, residence in Paris, and widowhood, during which time she established herself in the émigré community. Chapter 4 looks at the duchess's political involvement in Ireland and the court of James II after her marriage to Richard Talbot, future Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. At the Revolution, Frances supported the Jacobite cause, and Chapter 5 follows her once more into exile and charts her struggle to overcome attainder for treason against the Williamite government. Chapter 6 examines Frances's life in the Low Countries after 1700, where she appears to have acted as a Jacobite agent, and as patron within the Catholic and émigré community. In 1708, Frances returned to Ireland, and Chapter 7 discusses her activities among the wealthy elite, her (often divisive) management of family affairs, and patronage of the Dominican convent in Dublin. This chapter makes an important contribution to Frances's history, and the historiography of elite women. Where others have enclosed the last twenty years of the duchess's life as that of a retired 'duchess-nun', a consequence of their failure to pay attention to Frances when the men in her life disappeared, Nolan's research proves that her life at this stage was 'neither static nor retiring' (p. 169). The biography concludes with Frances's death and legacy.

Nolan's work has succeeded in recovering some of the personal details of this elite woman's experience, such as her marriages, life as emigrant, and family relationships. Frances's life as one surrounded by sisters and daughters is noticeably a female one. As such, the biography foregrounds the experiences of elite women and how they navigated political and economic challenges. Frances's sister, Sarah, duchess of Marlborough, was a constant and important contact for Frances, who helped her achieve social, as well as material, stability.

As the politics of their lives diverged in 1688 between Jacobite and Williamite causes, the sisters continued to support one-another. Through the dynamics of this relationship sustained across two dividing lines—dynastic loyalty and faith—Nolan reminds us that categories of distinction for early modern individuals must often be used with flexibility.

Frances's Catholicism was another important thread in her life. As well as a question of faith, Frances's religion assisted her assimilation into the émigré community in France, secured her favour in the French court, and aligned her with the court of James II. Nolan treats this element of Frances's life with nuance and shows how the duchess continued to work within Protestant elite circles, and that her faith, especially with reference to the last years of her life, was not the sole defining feature. Nolan is careful to point out that the particular context of her social status, familial relationships, and wealth meant that she 'clearly occupied a space that was unequivocal to most of her religion' (p. 183).

The financial concerns and complexities of an elite woman, twice widowed, are recounted in detail throughout the biography. The story of Frances's financial affairs is also the story of her power and agency. Accused in her lifetime of 'unscrupulous ambition and grasping greed' (p. 35), Nolan shows that many of Frances's decisions, her personality, and the public reputation they informed were shaped by her experiences of financial insecurity and efforts to acquire stability for herself and her family. Furthermore, as a prominent figure in an exiled community, as well as family matriarch, her status relied on the dispensation of material and financial patronage. While negative accounts of Frances's character are not without foundation, the biography shows how they were to some extent rooted in gender and religious politics of the period. Frances's involvement, as a woman, in Irish politics of rule during James II's reign exposed her to accusations of corruption. After Talbot's death in 1691, Frances's attempts to claim her jointure were blocked by an indictment for treason. That indictment was based on accusations that she had 'exceeded most others of her sex' (p. 117) as vicereine and during the Jacobite-Williamite war. The prosecution was also bound up with politics of land and influence in Ireland. Nolan argues that hostility towards Frances as a landowning Catholic woman in Ireland must be read in the context of the insecurity of the minority Protestant ruling elite and the post-Revolution land settlement.

As well as offering a thorough biography of an individual life, Nolan's work makes an important methodological contribution. Rather than relying only on Frances's explicit presence in the historical record, this biography considers the individual's more 'abstracted' presence in the sources and thinks around the meaning of her 'archival silences' (p. 13). The scholarly introduction sets the tone for a

considered use of the archives which is conscious about what has (and has not) survived, and why. An impressive range of archival sources – epistolary, diaristic, and legal documents – alongside printed pamphlets and older biographies have been used to reassemble the life under question. While Frances herself is often absent from the archive, Nolan draws on the evidence which surrounds her, combining specific details with wider context to offer an informed outline of the missing individual. At times, it appears as if Frances is being overshadowed by narratives relating to others, but Nolan shows how their actions and the circumstances they created impacted Frances, her decision making, and her reputation. For example, Frances's life in Paris, her attempts to insert herself firmly within the structures of the French court, as well as her conversion to Catholicism, is explained by the context of Hamilton's military career as émigré Catholic Irishman in the service of the French king (and excluded from service to his own because of his religion).

Nolan also effectively uses fabricated accounts of Frances to uncover her real history. Frances's life is one upon which, according to Nolan, her contemporaries and historians 'have imposed meaning and intent' (p. 3). Her public reputation, as ever, reveals as much about attitudes towards what she represented as her individual personality or actions. Nolan makes an in-depth discussion of the 'Warming Pan Scandal' in which Frances was implicated. At the birth of a prince to queen Mary Beatrice and James II in 1688, rumours abounded that the infant had been smuggled into the queen's chamber in a warming pan to fabricate a male heir for the royal couple. This prince would supplant James's Protestant elder daughters, Mary and Anne, and thus ensure a Catholic line of succession. A pamphlet published in 1696, several years after the birth, claimed that Frances had helped to supply the child, birthed by one of her ladies. While 'founded upon nothing but the threads of controversy' (p. 92) the narrative's roots in and consequences for public perceptions of Frances are worth considering. From the spurious accusations, Nolan extracts the reality of Frances's proximity to the queen, her reputation as an individual attached to the Jacobite cause, and dislike of her and her husband's influence as Catholic elite in England and Ireland.

Overall, Nolan reveals Frances Jennings to have been a physically, socially, economically, and politically mobile woman of the early modern period. The biography is a worthwhile resource for anyone interested in her life. Furthermore, as a woman who lived in a 'changing and changeable world' (p. 3), the duchess's life offers a lens through which to examine several notable themes in the interconnected history of England and Ireland: politics and influence at the post-Restoration Stuart courts, the émigré and exiled English and Irish communities in France, the struggle for/against Catholic power in Ireland, and

Jacobitism. Importantly, Nolan's biography provides an example of how the lives and contributions of elite women can be recovered from the archives when their presence there is limited.

*National Museums Scotland*

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T.A. Birrell, *Aspects of Recusant History*, eds. Jos Blom, Frans Korsten, Frans Blom, Abingdon, Routledge, 2021, pp. xiii, 236, ISBN, ISBN 9780367364434

Thomas Anthony Birrell played an important role in establishing the Catholic Record Society and in ensuring that the post-Reformation English Catholic experience was reflected in mainstream history. This edited volume of his essays ensures that his work is available in one collection, which is of value to historians and students of early modern England. Birrell's interests lay with the later seventeenth century, a period which often attracts less attention from scholars. This may account for the lack of prominence of many of these pieces in other contexts. Birrell's work raises a number of important questions in two broad categories: firstly in terms of the inclusion of the role of Catholic history in the wider context of national history and secondly in relation to the value of interdisciplinary study.

The volume's editors (Jos Blom, Frans Korsten, Frans Blom) have compiled several other texts relating Birrell's work other notable Catholic authors and bring this expertise to editing this volume. They provide a short preface which sets the scene for the book. The essays are presented in the order they were written, which reflects the presentation of this work as a biography of Birrell's academic career. The chapters vary in length and nature; for example, chapter four, 'English Catholics without a Bishop' is a substantial piece of work, and was originally an article in *Recusant History* in 1958; whereas other essays, for example chapter three are primarily extended book reviews. This is to be expected given the volume aims to bring together a corpus of Birrell's work, and the book reviews and some of the shorter articles at the close of the volume will be of interest to scholars focusing on the nature of book culture.

Birrell was Professor of English and America Literature and thus many of the essays reflect the cross-over between the literary and the historical. Modern readers will be familiar with interdisciplinary approach taken by Birrell. The fact that he felt the need to defend his choice to present Catholic history to literature students illustrates the challenges in successfully communicating the value of both interdisciplinary study and Catholic topics in 1950s academia. Birrell's work is very much a product of an era where a history of the Catholic experience had to justify itself and this does date the essays.