

Roisín Healy, *Poland in the Irish Nationalist Imagination, 1772–1922*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2017, 321 pp.

Although Poland and Ireland have long been perceived as having a shared history to the point where they were respectively termed as ‘the Ireland of the East’ and ‘the Poland of the West’, the subject has received little academic attention. Indeed, given that the Polish community and language has been a prominent part of Irish society for well over a decade, it is surprising that only a small number of collections of articles and monographs, not all of which have concerned historical questions, have appeared in Ireland. Thus, Roisín Healy’s *Poland in the Irish Nationalist Imagination, 1772–1922*, as the first stand-alone history of Ireland and Poland, is a most welcome and necessary development, not only regarding the history but historiography of these two familiar strangers.

Indeed, the book begins by examining how two countries at either end of the European continent with little or no direct contact ended up viewing each other as part of an imagined community of oppressed stateless nations. While Catholicism was, of course, a common denominator, Healy points out that this perceived affinity was driven primarily by political issues, especially when key events seemed to coincide, providing a structural analogy. Thus, the Kosciuszko rebellion of 1794 is a precursor to Ireland’s 1798 rebellion while the Third Polish Partition of 1795 is analogous to the Act of Union of 1800 by which the British government abolished the Irish parliament. Although the analogy became stretched during the late 19th century, both countries achieved independence within a few years of each other, Poland in 1918 and Ireland in 1922.

Indeed, even by the Second Polish Partition, the Irish view of Poland was as ‘politically progressive and fiercely independent’ country. Influenced by the American and French revolutions, the separatist and religiously tolerant United Irishmen organisation had great admiration for the 1791 Polish constitution as ‘an expression not of what Poland had achieved but of what these radicals hoped to achieve for Ireland.’ Moreover, as he was about to be sentenced to death, Wolfe Tone, the leader of the United Irishmen’s failed rebellion of 1798, made a point of comparing his actions to those of Kosciuszko. Within a few short years, both the partition of Poland and

the subjugation of Ireland were seen as originating from a common source, namely the rise of despotism.

One of the recurrent themes of the book is the hypocrisy of the British government in calling for greater liberty for Poland while denying it to Ireland. Thus, having strongly condemned the Polish partitions, Britain soon entered a military coalition against revolutionary France with two of the culprits, Prussia and Austria. Following the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Lord Castlereagh, who had brutally crushed the 1798 rebellion in Ireland, now became the main promoter of Polish independence as a way of restoring the balance of power regarding Russia, even threatening war over the issue. It is at this time that Poland becomes a *cause celebre* among Irish radicals, artists, writers and poets, especially following the Polish November Uprising of 1830. Ireland's own 'Liberator', Daniel O'Connell, actively supported Poland's cause in British parliamentary debates in both calling for intervention against Russia and adding Kosciuszko to the pantheon of the world's 'Great Liberators', alongside Washington and Bolivar. Polish representatives actively sought out Irish MPs in order to secure their help in promoting the Polish cause in the British parliament. However, leading Irish figures in the Roman Catholic Church, such as Archbishop Murray, were not so enthusiastic, fearing that Irish priests may follow the example of their Polish counterparts in becoming actively involved in politics and violent uprisings.

Indeed, as Healy also outlines, the mid-19th century saw national movements in Ireland and Poland move from welcoming those of all faiths who supported the national cause to linking their respective nationalities with Roman Catholicism. Another interesting aspect is how Irish nationalists, such as O'Connell, who supported exclusively peaceful means to achieve their goals attempted to justify why the Poles were justified in resorting to violent uprising whereas the Irish were not. Indeed, Poland's uprisings partly inspired the failed *Young Ireland* rebellion of 1848 while the Fenian movement was a strong admirer of the Polish cause, especially regarding the justification of violent uprisings and compared the brutality of the Russian suppression of the Polish 1863 Uprising with that which had taken place in Ireland in 1798. In fact, Irish people reacted to the 1863 Uprising by raising funds, giving speeches, writing poems, even calling for 100,000 Irish volunteers to fight the Polish cause. Fenian leader Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa even managed to organise a public rally in support of Poland attended by 6,000 people in Skiberreen, a small town of only 3,700. Ignoring the fact that Poland was much more ethnically and religiously diverse than Ireland, senior Irish Catholic bishops also began to promote Russian actions in Poland as an assault on the Roman Catholic Church itself, with one stating that the Irish had a special responsibility to Poland due to their common religion. Later, Bismark's anti-Catholic campaign in Prussian Poland would give rise to similar concerns being raised in Ireland.

One of the most curious aspects which Healy points out is how as more direct contact between the Irish and Poles and exchange of information occurred during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it became apparent that the traditional para-

digm of 'a shared history' no longer fitted reality. In the decades following the Great Famine of 1845–1849, Britain had begun to make major concessions in Ireland regarding land reform and local representative government while Russia and Germany continued their blatantly anti-Polish and anti-Catholic policies. While the *Young Poland* movement had managed to maintain the Polish language as a central part of Polish national identity, Ireland had become a *de facto* English-speaking country. Moreover, although the Irish economy was woefully stagnant with little real industry and a declining population, Russian Poland was now a major European industrial powerhouse. Irish nationalists wishing to compare the suffering of the two nations now had to match up non-contemporary events to find an appropriate parallel in history, sometimes centuries apart. These differences were further heightened when an unseemly public row erupted among figures in the Polish and Irish national movements over who had it worse off and with a competitive martyrdom over which side was attempting to minimize the other side's suffering. Senior figures in Irish nationalism had already found other comparisons in Europe for Ireland to examine, such as Hungary. While Arthur Griffith admired the effective resistance of 'Polish Sinn Feiners' in Prussian Poland to the Germanisation of institutions and language, there was now a general trend among more radical Irish nationalists to see Germany as a potential future ally. This in turn led to some Irish nationalists attempting to minimize Polish suffering under Prussian rule while accepting Roman Dmowski's ethno-centric model of Poland as exclusively Catholic and Polish-speaking.

Another fascinating aspect of this cooling of relations between Polish and Irish nationalists is the 'envy and resentment' which resulted from Poland leap-frogging Ireland towards independence following the First World War. With over 200,000 Irish volunteers in the British Army fighting for the implementation of Home Rule as promised by the British government, as the war progressed the issue of Poland's full independence rose up the Allies' agenda while that of Ireland fell, especially following the failed Easter Rising of 1916. Indeed, as it became clear that a whole host of 'small nations', including Poland, were to gain full independence after the war, while Ireland had not even achieved Home Rule, British hypocrisy became a central issue in Ireland. To make matters worse, Poland would emerge from partition only for Ireland to be partitioned. Moreover, there was the glaring inconsistency of the British insisting on self-determination for Germans in Danzig and Silesia but ignoring it for Ireland. However, once both countries had become independent entities regaining their place on the map of Europe, they returned to their more sympathetic relationship.

In conclusion, this important work performs an invaluable service by filling a gap which had become glaringly obvious, especially during the last decade. It clearly outlines how Poland was the foreign national cause most consistently followed in Ireland over 150 years, way beyond other popular causes, such as that of Greece. As Roisín Healy demonstrates, this was not merely the concern of the Irish nationalist or Catholic elite but had a significant popular appeal reflected through books, plays

and songs, as well as financial donations. While the Irish did not have a very good understanding of the ethnic and social divisions which made the two countries quite different, Poland was viewed as 'Ireland's Alter Ego', serving as a useful parallel to expose British hypocrisy in its foreign policy. Written in a style which will engage both the specialist and non-specialist, *Poland in the Irish Nationalist Imagination, 1772–1922*, is essential reading for anyone with an interest in Ireland's relations with 'New Europe'. Moreover, one hopes that it kick-starts new courses and research on Polish history at Irish universities, as well as inspiring Polish historians to further examine the issue of Ireland in the Polish nationalist imagination.

Paul McNamara

Postcoloniality Askance — the Discussion of Viatcheslav Morozov's *Russia's Postcolonial Identity. A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World* and Tomasz Zarycki's *Ideologies of Eastness in Central and Eastern Europe* (Routledge, London and New York 2015)

In 2015 two important books tackling the postcolonial perspective on Eastern and Central Europe came out. Viatcheslav Morozov's *Russia's Postcolonial Identity. A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World* (Palgrave) and Tomasz Zarycki's *Ideologies of Eastness in Central and Eastern Europe* (Routledge) are key studies addressing the overlapping areas of identity, political and cultural community, constructions of power, relations between power and community, and, last but by no means least, the reactive developments of self-image in response to the Western gaze by societies whose common denominator based on the general location in the post-Soviet (post-communist, post-socialist) space can be named, with an equal but symptomatic lack of precision, "east of the West." Both researchers coincide significantly on the pivotal role of the West in determining the self-perception and subsequently politics, of the off-centre Eastern and Central Europe (including Russia).

Both authors depart from a related claim that, in general terms, could be summed up as follows: little remains for contemporary Central and Eastern Europe, Russia included, but to follow (emulate) or contest (negate) the West as the core of the Eurocentric world. In either case, it will be a reaction to the terms and conditions of signification determined by the West: "contemporary Central and Eastern Europe is a prisoner of what Edward Said called Orientalism. The region can be seen as both a victim of external colonization and, at the same time, as a locus of intensive production of orientalist discourses" (Zarycki, 1), and: "the empty spot in the centre of Russian national identity, as it is constructed by paleoconservatives, is occupied by a