

Promoting 'English Civility'
in Tudor Ireland: Ideology and the Rhetoric of Difference



The Formation of Europe
Historische Formationen Europas
Band 12

Begründet von Günther Lottes (†)

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Wehrhahn Verlag

Bibliographical information of the German National Library
The German National Library lists this publication in the German National Bibliography;
detailed bibliographical information is available via <https://portal.dnb.de>.

1st Edition 2021

Wehrhahn Publishing House

www.wehrhahn-verlag.de

Typesetting and design by the publisher

Cover illustration: Lucas de Heeres “Théâtre de tous les peuples et nations de la terre avec leurs habits et ornemens divers, tant anciens que modernes, diligemment depeints au naturel par Luc Dheere peintre et sculpteur Gantois,” Gent, 1570s
(Ghent University Library, BHSL.HS.2466)

Printing and binding: Sowa, Piaseczno

Printed in Europe

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ISSN 1864–1814

ISBN 978–3–86525–873–1

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Für Opa Alfred.

Acknowledgements

“If I take one more step, it’ll be the farthest away from home I’ve ever been.” Although, I am not a Hobbit on my way to Mount Doom to save the fate of this world, Samwise Gamgee’s – or rather J.R.R. Tolkien’s – words feel oddly relatable at this point of time. They relate to two things at once, the beginning and the ending of this PhD thesis and its transformation into a monograph. In order to commence my work on the present study, I had to go the farthest I have ever been from home. This was the beginning of a journey that took me eight years to complete. Like Samwise Gamgee I did not walk this winding road by myself and therefore I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to the fellowship of this project. First of all, I would like to thank Professor Steven G. Ellis for accompanying me on my journey. When in December 2011 I asked my former Professor at the University of Potsdam, Günther Lottes, whether he could refer me to someone in Galway who might be willing to take me on as a PhD student, I was utterly unfamiliar with the name Steven Ellis. But now I know, I could not have wished for a better supervisor. Professor Ellis gave me the necessary space I needed to develop my ideas and enabled me to combine my academic training in Scandinavian studies as well as history. He was patient enough to accept my many changes to the form of this study and uncomplainingly read everything I presented to him. He has been supportive of me in every way whether it was in an academic context or regarding private issues such as my pregnancies in 2014 and 2020. Steven, you are more to me than just a supervisor, you are my Doktorvater – my Gandalf.

Second, my sincere gratitude goes to the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Science for providing me with a full four year scholarship without which this project would not have been possible. This probably makes you the council of Elrond.

Third, I would like to, once again, thank the History Department of the University of Stockholm who provided me with an office, a PC and library access so that I could indulge in my research on the Scandinavian aspect of my thesis. In this context, I have to thank all my fellow PhD students at the History Department in Stockholm and in particular Dr. Elisabeth Elgán and Magdalena Hernow for all the help prior to and during my stay. Also I want to thank Dr. Marko Lamberg who I had the pleasure of talking to on multiple occasions while in Stockholm and who helped clarify a lot of my questions regarding the peculiar relationship between early modern Sweden and Finland. Thank you all for having me in Lothlorien.

Fourth, a very special thank you to my trusted friend, Sarah Deegan, who proofread my thesis and now finally knows what I have been doing those long four years, when I have not met with her for walks in the lovely Merlin Woods. Also, a heartfelt thank you to Ryan and Tony Tombacco for their help with certain Latin translations. Additionally, I have to thank Ryan for being the greatest neighbour and uncle to my son that I could have ever asked for. Thank you for being my Merry and Pippin – after all, you are family.

Fifth, after giving birth to my son Hugo in March 2015 and raising him without a local familial network, the PhD project got considerably more difficult to organise. Therefore, I am grateful to all those people who provided their support. First of all, thank you to Lisa Mähler for moving in with us for four months to take care of the baby. Next, I need to thank Cara Childcare centre in Roscam who took Hugo in on very short notice and who I trust completely. My gratefulness also extends to my parents-in-law Tine and Berni Schmidt for taking Hugo and me in after what seemed endless months of numerous infections that tied the family involuntarily to the bed. In their home, Hugo could enjoy the time with his grandparents and cousins while mummy could retreat to a quiet place and write those thousands of words. Of course, I need to thank the people who will always have my gratitude for being who they are: my parents Ulrich and Regina Lessing. Without the financial and emotional support you have given me throughout all my life I could have not done this – or any other thing. Thank you for putting your trust in me. I would also like to thank the “PhD and Early Career Researcher Parents” group for their virtual support on matters private and professional as well as the “Thesis Bootcamp” organised by Dr. Rachel Hilliard and conducted by Dr. Peta Freestone that gave me the necessary boost back into my research after my five month maternity break. Thank you all for creating this “Shire” of comfort to support me.

And then there is my husband Dennis. When Dennis and I met in February 2008 I would not have been able to predict how important a role he would play in my life. Almost thirteen years later, you are the one who is responsible for the existence of the following pages. Your decision to move to Ireland gave me no other choice than to accompany you and I was lucky enough to be able to pursue my passion for historical research there. You worked hard to support us financially; you supported me when I was about to cast everything out of the window and set me back on track. I know I can always count on you no matter what. Thank you is not a strong enough word to express how grateful I am to you. You are my soulmate, my rock – you are my Frodo and I’d accompany you to Mount Doom any time!

Textual Conventions

The transcription of the Tudor State Papers preserved the original spelling, capitalisation and punctuation of the original manuscripts. Words in the text that the author has been uncertain of, but thinks likely, appear in square brackets with a question mark: [e.g. example?]. Parts of the text that have been crossed out also appear in this form in the transcription and insertions made within the manuscripts are marked in *italics* in square brackets as inserted [*example*, is inserted]. Abbreviations have been expanded and marked in square brackets apart from the examples:

Ma ^{tie}	Majestie
w ^{ch}	which
w th	with
y ^e	the
y ^r and yo ^r	your
hon ^{or}	honor

The transcriptional conventions of edited versions of early modern texts have been maintained. Additions to the text (as inserted by the author) have been made in square brackets. Line breaks have been omitted and marked by | .

List of Abbreviations

- AFNM, Ire* *Account of Facsimiles of National Manuscripts of Ireland, From the earliest extant specimen to 1719*, ed. John T. Gilbert, London, 1884.
- CSPI* *Calendar of state papers relating to Ireland, 1509–1670*, 24 vols., London, 1860–1912.
- Cal. Carew MSS* *Calendar of the Carew Manuscripts preserved in the Archbishopal Library at Lambeth*, eds. J.S. Brewer and William Bullen, 5 vols., London, 1867–73.
- Cal. Pat. Rolls, Ire* *Calendar of the Patent and Close Rolls of Chancery in Ireland, Henry VIII–Elizabeth*, 2 vols., ed. James Morrin, London 1861–2.
- HC* *Hatfield Compendium (Hatfield House Archives, Hertfordshire, Cecil Papers MS 144, fos 1–16)*, in: Christopher Maginn/Steven G. Ellis (eds.), *The Tudor Discovery of Ireland*, Dublin, 2015, 67–109.
- SP Hen. VIII* *State Papers, Henry VIII*, 11 vols., London, 1830–52.
- Stat. at large, Ire* *The Statutes at Large passed in the Irish Parliaments held in Ireland, 1310–1786*, 13 vols., London, 1786.
- TNA, SP* The National Archives of the UK, State Papers.

1 Introduction: An English Discourse about Ireland

In the year 1520 John Kite, the Archbishop of Armagh, delivered the compelling argument to O'Neill, the prince of Ulster, that a reconsideration of the latter's relationship with the King of England was advisable if he wanted to live out his life in peace:

Your safety depends on the King, and you should therefore show him all observance. You should cultivate a mind worthy of your abilities and character, and no longer take delight in wild and barbarous manners, and be unacquainted with the comforts of life. It is much better to live in a civilized fashion, than to seek a living by arms and rapine, and to have no thought beyond pleasure and the belly. I therefore beseech you to consider how many evils and perils you will be exposed to, if you make the King your enemy, and on the other hand how happy you will be, if you gain his favour.¹

Kite's words resonate more than just in the attempt to save O'Neill from entering into open conflict with the forces of King Henry VIII. His advice suggests that the only possible way for O'Neill to escape utter ruin was to forsake his own Gaelic Irish heritage and aspire to live like an Englishman.

The words chosen by Kite to express this transformation are representative of the sixteenth-century English mentality regarding the dichotomy between Irishmen and Englishmen in Tudor Ireland: the former were uneducated, bellicose, marauding barbarians while the latter lived in a society that was constituted by the complete opposite and which prospered in a 'civilized fashion' under the protection of the English crown. This rhetoric of difference neither originated with Kite nor was he the last Englishman to employ it in his descriptions of Irish society.

Civility and barbarism are part of an age-old rhetorical tradition to articulate differences between two or more opposing groups. Englishmen picked up on this rhetoric in a public manner after King Henry II's forces had landed in Ireland and commenced their conquest of the land and her people. Almost immediately, an English sense of superiority was revealed that found its manifestation in the juxtaposition of English civility and Gaelic Irish barbarism. According to Gerald de Barri's² *Expugnatio Hibernica* (1189), Henry's Englishmen

1 *Cal. Carew MSS., i, John Kite to O'Neill, 1520*, pp. 15–16.

2 cf. John Gillingham, 'The English Invasion of Ireland', in: idem (ed.), *The English in the Twelfth Century. Imperialism, National Identity and Political Values*, Woodbridge/Rochester, 2000, p. 155.

encountered a people ‘*tam barbare nacionis*’ – ‘lawless and rebellious’ – whose ferocity needed to be tamed.³ This sentiment of having to civilise the wild Irish had not lost any of its relevance even at the close of the Tudor period over four hundred years later. Accordingly, in 1602 the Lord Deputy of Ireland, Lord Mountjoy, and Council informed the Council in England about certain efforts to bring the Irish ‘into the waie of Civility, w[i]th a feelinge of the difference betwene their former manner of life under the tirranie of their sup[er]io^r Irishe lordes and the easie and clement gov[ern]m[en]t of her matie’.⁴

The term rhetoric of difference is of course an anachronism employed by modern scholarship to describe differences between English and Irish society in a rhetorical fashion. Nevertheless, this rhetorical figure mirrored real life circumstances and had political, social and cultural repercussions for the inhabitants of Tudor Ireland. Although the terminology of the rhetoric of difference displayed a remarkable consistency during these four centuries since king Henry II’s forces entered Ireland, it was employed to different ideological ends at distinct points in time. Until the fourteenth century, Englishmen upheld a policy of conquest in Ireland which was accompanied by the continuous acquisition of Gaelic Irish lands in the name of the English crown. This coincided with Richard de Burgh’s conquest of Connacht, an attempted conquest of Donegal by the FitzGerald Lord of Sligo, and the Fitzgeralds of Desmond’s endeavour to seize parts of MacCarthaig-country.⁵ The following two and a half centuries were marked by a more defensive English policy in Ireland culminating in the consolidation of the ‘four obedient shires’ and the creation of the English Pale in the late fifteenth century.⁶ This can also be detected in the use of the rhetoric of difference. By 1297 the first Irish parliament⁷ met in Dublin which aimed

3 Gerald de Barri: Giraldus Cambrensis, *Expugnatio Hibernica. The Conquest of Ireland*, edited with translation and historical notes by A.B. Scott and F.X. Martin, Dublin, 1978, pp. 22/23 and 65.

4 TNA, SP 63/212/46, fol. 106r.

5 cf. Katharine Simms, Gaelic Revival, in: Sean Duffy (ed.), *Medieval Ireland: An Encyclopedia* (New York/Abingdon Oxon, 2005), p. 189.

6 Brendan Bradshaw, *The Irish Constitutional Revolution of the Sixteenth Century*, Cambridge et al., 1979, pp. 10 and 82. For the origin of the term English Pale cf. Steven G. Ellis, *Defending English Ground. War & Peace in Meath & Northumberland, 1460–1542*, Oxford, 2015, p. 28.

7 The 1297 parliament is considered the first ‘real’ parliament, despite evidence of previous parliament-like meetings, cf. Margaret Murphy, Parliament, in: Sean Duffy (ed.), *Medieval Ireland: An Encyclopedia*, New York/Abingdon Oxon, 2005, p. 365.

to introduce a peace-keeping policy in Ireland. It was at this parliament that the first evidence for the concept of degeneracy can be found regarding those English who were born in Ireland.⁸

Degeneracy was understood as a countermovement to civility. It is a process of acculturation through which Englishmen had adopted Gaelic Irish lifestyle choices which did not correspond with English notions of an ordered and civilised life. Since such close interactions with the Gaelic Irish threatened the stability of English society in Ireland, degeneracy can be seen as a rhetorical attempt at self-defence by which Gaelic Irish influences were depicted as damaging the functionality of the English community. This went hand in hand with the fourteenth-century decline in the English sphere of influence in Ireland, which was due to the still fragile state of the settlement and the effects of the so-called Gaelic Revival.⁹

In this context a change towards a defensive ideology behind the English rhetoric of difference emerged. The Gaelic Irish were no longer depicted as just any barbarous nation that needed to be tamed for the sake of implanting an English hegemony in the country, but were constructed as a proper threat to English power in Ireland. Hence, in 1342 the Red Book of the Exchequer in Ireland includes a complaint to King Edward III about ‘the Irish, your enemies, who border on and join divers counties’ which caused Englishmen of one county who tried to ‘hold peace or truce’ to suffer ‘the said Irish enemies, whilst they war on and destroy your lieges of the other neighbouring counties.’¹⁰ Leading up to the famous 1366 Statutes of Kilkenny, a rhetorical frontier was constituted alongside the geographical one between civilised Englishmen living in the land of peace where the King’s obedient English subjects lived and a land of war inhabited by the adversaries to English power, the ‘Irish enemies and English rebels’¹¹ (the majority of the latter occupied the marcher border regions in between). The difference between rebel and enemy is to be understood in their respective loyalties. While a rebel is someone who shows non-conformist

8 cf. *ibid.*

9 cf. Simms, *Gaelic Revival*, pp. 189–190; Nicholas Canny, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: A Pattern Established, 1565–76*, Hassocks, 1976, p. 118.

10 *Statutes and Ordinance, and Acts of the Parliament of Ireland. King John to Henry V*, ed. Henry F. Berry, Dublin, 1907, pp. 351–353.

11 *Id.*, pp. 484 and 562; *Statute Rolls of the Parliament of Ireland*, 2 vols, ed. Henry F. Berry, Dublin, 1910, Hen VI, pp. 102, 118, 154, 204, 208, 234, 236/238, 240, 248, 286, 402, 450, 492, 514, 546, 580 and 770.

behaviour and deliberately rises up against the established order, he is still to be considered part of this order.¹² An enemy, on the other hand, is a person who shows hostility towards someone from an outside perspective. Hence the ‘wilde Irish men’ were fittingly considered ‘the King’s mortall enemies’.¹³ This distinction was still relevant in the late sixteenth century as reflected in Lord Chancellor Gerrard’s 1577–78 definition of these two groups:

The Irishe [...] accompteth him self cheife in his own country and (whatsoever he saye or professe) lykethe of noe superior. He mortally hatethe the Englishe. By will he governe the those under him, supplyinge his and their wantes by prayinge and spoyling of other countryes adioyninge. Theise lyve as the Irishe lyved in all respectes before the conqueste. [...] The English rebels ar people of our owne nacion, [...]. Theise Englishe rebels may be devided into twoe kindes: the one, soche as enter into the field in open hostilitie and actual rebellion against the Prince, comparable to the rebellinge in England. [...] Thother sorte of Englishe rebels are suche as refuzinge Englishe nature growe Irishe in soche sorte as (otherwise then in name) not to be discerned from the Irishe.¹⁴

In Gerrard’s words the ‘Irish enemies’ are opposed to any English presence in Ireland. The English rebels are however presented as ‘mislead’ and can be compared to dissenters in England herself. In Henry VIII’s post-1541 terminology both groups are transformed to ‘disobeysaunt subjectes’¹⁵ and the description of Irish adversaries had changed from enemies to rebels.¹⁶

With Henry VIII’s initiation of a religious reorientation from Catholicism to Protestantism from the 1530s onwards and his promotion to King of Ireland in 1541 the tone of the rhetoric of difference shifted back to reflecting a ‘conquest ideology’¹⁷ which has to be seen in the context of Henry’s military actions of the later 1540s in France and Scotland.¹⁸ This is exemplified by Gerrard’s

12 *Stat. at large, Ire*, i, 12 Eliz I, ch. 5, p. 370 defines rebellion as a deliberate act against English authorities: ‘[they] had respite for fifteen daies to make their apperaunce before the lord deputie and counsell, or outhewise to be taken, from thenceforthe as enemyes and rebelles, whiche apperaunce they neglected to make, chosing rather to be rebells’.

13 *Stat. at large*, i, 28 Hen VIII ch. 1, p. 68. However, Bradshaw, *Constitutional Revolution*, p. 11 noted that the Gaelic Irish were not considered ‘outside the law’ but ‘beyond the law’ which constituted clear politico-conceptual boundaries between the two groups rather than a complete negation of Gaelic Irish society.

14 William Gerrard, Lord Chancellor Gerrard’s Notes of His Report on Ireland, in: *Analecta Hibernica*, 2, 1931, pp. 95–96.

15 SP Hen VIII, ii, p. 60.

16 cf. Steven G. Ellis, *Ireland in the Age of the Tudors 1447–1603. English Expansion and the End of Gaelic Rule*, Harlow/New York, 1998, p. 123.

17 cf. Canny, *Elizabethan Conquest*, p. 118. For an analysis of the mid-century ideological shift cf. Bradshaw, *Constitutional Revolution*, pp. 259–263.

18 cf. id., pp. 231–32.

suggestion that it must be the English objective ‘totallye to conquer’ the Irish ‘for so were the other of the Irishe subued before the Englishe were settled’.¹⁹ Although the terminology of conquest was rarely employed openly in official contexts – after all the conquest had taken place in the twelfth and thirteenth century and was considered complete²⁰ – the so-called Tudor Conquest of Ireland took place under the cover of reform policies. This was a way to shield the ideological concept of English civility from Irish influences and to cure those English affected by these foreign customs.

In the second half of the sixteenth century the English crown was virtually challenged to conquer a people that they claimed as their own subjects and to lead it into the socio-political and cultural realms of English order. Various attempts at installing English normativity in Irish society were manifested in the numerous reform treatises that were published throughout the entire Tudor period and were most prominently expressed through the famous phrase ‘reducing Ireland to civility’.²¹

On top of the ideological divide between English civility and Gaelic Irish barbarism, Tudor administrators had grown increasingly dissatisfied with those English officials who were born in Ireland as descendants of the twelfth-century settlers. The latter’s lack of political achievements regarding the implementation of these reform policies paired with their refusal to convert to Protestantism gave reason for concern. In this context, the rhetoric of degeneracy that surrounded them caught new momentum and the English of England found an ideological rationale to exclude the English community of Ireland from political influence. Thus, a further ideological divide was created which was eloquently summarised by Sir Edmund Spenser as the following question: ‘is yt possible that an Englishe man brought vpp naturallie in such sweete civilitie as England affordes, coulede fynd such lykinge in that barborous rudenes, that he should forgett his owne nature and forgoe his owne nacion?’²²

Accordingly, it can be stated that an integral part of the sixteenth-century English discourse about the exclusion of the inhabitants of Ireland from the realms of ‘Englishness’ was to establish an English notion of superiority over an-

19 Gerrard, ‘Notes’, p. 95.

20 Gerald de Barri, *Expugnatio Hibernica*, p. 25.

21 cf. David Heffernan (ed.), *‘Reform’ treatises on Tudor Ireland, 1537–1599*, Dublin, 2016.

22 Edmund Spenser, *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, edited by W.L. Renwick, Oxford, 1970, pp. 62–63.

yone who did not comply with lowland English standards. Thus, the discourse about civility and barbarity in regard to Tudor Ireland triggered a necessary re-definition of English national identity based on religious affiliation and political loyalty. This phenomenon was often described, by contemporaries and modern scholarship alike as English civility. Although English civility has commonly been accepted as an expression of an English sense of cultural, social and political superiority,²³ the mechanisms behind this concept remained in a large part untouched by historical and literary research on Tudor Ireland. While efforts have been undertaken by historians and a number of literary scholars to define the elements of the discourse about English civility (in the way it has been applied in regard to Ireland since the twelfth century), the intrinsic functions and applications of the concept has remained vague.

This study aims to provide the ideological rationale for the exertion of English power in Ireland and to supply the case-specific historicity for the concepts of English civility and Gaelic Irish barbarism respectively. The formulation of a case-specific understanding of the concept of English civility in the context of Tudor Ireland and the explanation of its function within the English discourse about legitimising, establishing and maintaining political rule in Tudor Ireland are at the centre of it. This shall be achieved by approaching the topic of English civility by way of conceptual historical methodology that has up until now not been explored in greater detail by Irish historical researchers but offers new insights between factual historical events and the way those were communicated, justified and exploited through a rhetorical looking glass. This study is part of the broader field of cultural history. Its intellectual heritage lies within New Cultural History and the Burckhardian tradition of 'history of the everyday'. New Cultural History's concern with 'capturing otherness' (as predominantly practised by medievalists and early modernists)²⁴ sets the stage for research on the effect of a concept like English civility in Tudor Ireland. To the best of the author's knowledge, there have not yet been any extensive studies conducted on

23 For example, cf. Ellis, *Defending English Ground*, p. 54.

24 cf. Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?*, Cambridge/Malden, 2004, pp. 32–33, 37 and 106. For an informative overview of recent developments in terms of Otherness-studies cf. Raingard Eßer, *Cultures in Contact: the Representation of 'the Other' in Early Modern German Travel Narratives*, in: Guðmundur Hálfðanarson (ed.), *Racial Discrimination and Ethnicity in European History*, Pisa, 2003, pp. 33–37 (with a special focus on German historiography).

the topic of the meaning and evolution of English notions of civility in Ireland. As for the terminology employed to describe the various groups under investigation in this study, the indigenous populations of Ireland and Sápmi²⁵ shall be referred to as Gaelic Irish and Sami in an effort to reflect their self-identifications. The term *Gaelic Irish* is used to differentiate between the native inhabitants of Ireland and the population groups influenced and shaped by the English immigration. It is by no means a contemporary term used in Tudor sources on Ireland. Moreover, the descendants of the twelfth-century English settlers shall be designated English for the medieval period by way of meeting John Gillingham's demands regarding scholarship's general omission of this issue.²⁶ In distinction to the English of England they shall be referred to as English of Ireland for the Tudor period.²⁷

In regard to English perceptions of Ireland and her inhabitants historians of Tudor Ireland tend to accept the general notion of an inherent English disdain for their Irish neighbours and prefer to view their subsequent treatment of the Irish population in terms of a traditional coloniser-colonised mentality. Over the last century, the comparative methodological approach to this topic has been chosen by high ranking scholars of the field like David Beers Quinn, Nicholas Canny and Steven Ellis, with Quinn and Canny referring to the English North American Colonies supported by a choice of source material drawn up by authors involved in dealings regarding both territories and Ellis linking the Irish scenario to English border regions in Wales and the North of England.

For his source material, Quinn drew from the published works of Gerald de Barri, Richard Stanihurst, Edmund Spenser, Barnaby Rich, John Harington and Fynes Moryson, which based the conclusions of his study on a very limited number of authors with very distinct political agendas. This superficiality clearly misrepresented the English perceptions of the Irish in the sense that Quinn made generalisations based on the opinions of a few. Furthermore, Quinn tended to neglect the position and meaning of the so-called English of Ireland, the discussion of which is restricted to their political or religious roles. Overall,

25 The term describes the cultural region traditionally inhabited by the Sámi people in the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia.

26 cf. Gillingham, *English Invasion of Ireland*, pp. 150–53 and 155–57.

27 cf. Steven G. Ellis, *Nationalist Historiography and the English and Gaelic worlds in the late middle ages*, *Irish Historical Studies*, 25, 97, 1986, p. 3.

Quinn operated with the almost Manichean categories of English and Irish and leaves little room for the idea of cultural exchange as found in the process of mutual acculturation, which was crucial to English self-perceptions.

Canny built his argument against a background of a large assortment of administrative and literary source material, which made his studies overall more convincing than that of Quinn a decade earlier. For the comparison between the English settlements in Ireland and North America, Canny, like Quinn, introduced a coterie of adventurers who were involved in both scenarios in order to support his argument for the existence of a colonial setting in Ireland. Canny argued that English perceptions of the Irish lacked originality and were heavily influenced by Spanish rhetoric regarding the indigenous peoples of the Americas. However, it has to be taken into account that the English were already acquainted with the use of abusive vocabulary – a rhetoric of difference – that was regularly applied to the Irish community since the times of Gerald de Barri.²⁸ The comparison between the proceedings in Ireland and the English North American colonies as conducted by Quinn and Canny may be chided at several points. Canny's 'North Atlantic connection' has been criticised by Steven Ellis for overlooking the strong historical connections between Ireland and the British Isles, of which it was a geographical part, in order to invoke the idea of an 'Irish exceptionalism' in Europe. In response to this, Ellis pointed out that early modern Ireland's situation was no different from that of other European countries that had been incorporated by their expansionist more ambitious neighbours. Also, the need to 'assimilate' the inhabitants of the annexed territories into one's own society was a common custom wherein the early modern Irish experience does not stand out.²⁹ English applications of the concepts of civility and barbarism in Tudor Ireland shall be checked against English perceptions of the Native North American people as means to prove the universality of the rhetoric of difference. In this particular case, the thesis draws heavily from Karen Ordahl Kupperman's *Settling with the Indians* (1980), which presents

28 cf. Robert Rees Davies, *The First English Empire. Power and Identities in the British Isles 1093–1343*, Oxford/New York, 2000, pp. 117–118.

29 cf. Steven G. Ellis, Writing Irish history: revisionism, colonialism, and the British Isles, in: *The Irish Review*, 19, 1996, pp. 7 and 12–13; for critique on Irish exceptionalism see: David Lloyd, After History. Historicism and Irish Postcolonial Studies, in: Clare Carroll/Patricia King (eds.), *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory*, Cork, 2003, pp. 50–51 and Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire. Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture*, Oxford/New York, 2005, p. 84.