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## **Nation and Archipelago**

**Willy Maley**

**Abstract:** This chapter explores John Milton's *Observations upon the Articles of Peace with the Irish Rebels* (1649), a 25,000-word treatise that is a touchstone text for a turning point in British and Irish history, a telling account of the tensions between colonialism and republicanism, and a tipping point in Milton's thinking around Archipelagic interdependence – the tied fates of the nations that make up the emerging British state. This multi-authored work, exemplary in its many-sided depiction of a pivotal point in the history of the three Stuart kingdoms of England, Ireland and Scotland, depicts different national and religious communities responding to the execution of Charles I on 30 January 1649. Milton's commission was to address the “complication of interests” in Ireland in the wake of the killing of the king. His protean polemic captures the contradictions of a poet against empire countering a challenge to metropolitan government from a complex planter society.

**Keywords:** Britain; Ireland; Scotland; religion; republicanism; monarchy; cultural materialism; deconstruction; new historicism; postcolonialism

## Context

John Milton became a key spokesperson for the Cromwellian regime when on 13 March 1649 Cromwell's Council of State offered to make him "Secretary for the fforeign tongues", a post Milton accepted two days later (French 1950, 234, 236). On 28 March, the Council passed an order "That M<sup>r</sup>. Milton be appointed to make some observations vpon the Complicacon of interests w<sup>ch</sup> is now amongst the severall designers against the peace of the Commonwealth. And that it be made ready to be printed w<sup>th</sup> the papers out of Ireland w<sup>ch</sup> the House hath ordered to be printed" (French 1950, 240). On 16 May Milton's observations duly appeared appended to a sequence of items comprising: the articles of James Butler, Marquess of Ormond's peace with the Catholic Confederacy (17 January); an exchange of letters between Ormond and Colonel Michael Jones, Governor of Dublin (9 and 14 March respectively); Ormond's proclamation of Charles II as king (26 February); and an attack on the English parliament by the Scottish Presbytery at Belfast (15 February).

Milton's *Observations upon the Articles of Peace with the Irish Rebels* (1649) is a complicated document, made clear by the fact that his observations are only part of the story the text tells. Milton's *Observations*, in its depiction of the interdependence of the three nations of England, Ireland and Scotland revolving around the recently planted province of Ulster, is a vital resource for understanding archipelagic history, yet its brevity and derivative nature as an official response to diverse documents mean its importance – even at times its authorship – is doubted. "Published by Authoritie", as it says on the title page, anonymously, and never acknowledged by Milton, his voice is only one of several at odds in the bundle of papers printed under that title. Its latest editors speak of "the tract's corporate voice" with its use of the republican "we" (Keeble and McDowell 2013, 48). Although the

attribution is secure, it remains an overlooked corner of Milton's corpus (Keeble and McDowell 2013, 192). Milton's task entails quoting extensively from arguments he is charged with refuting, arguments that occupy two-thirds of the text before his own observations (Egan 2009). This makes for a disparate discourse, yet it is precisely its mosaic form that makes the *Observations* an exemplary text for critical study.

The *Observations* has been viewed chiefly as a discourse on Ireland and those involved there in defying English power in the Rising of 1641. (For an account of these and related events see Mac Cuarta 1993.) In fact its remit is much wider. It offers a target-rich environment for critics concerned with nationalism, colonialism, and the vexed politics of the Atlantic Archipelago. The archipelagic approach focuses on how the interaction of the three Stuart kingdoms complicates Anglocentric viewpoints. What began as a shift in the historiography of the "English Revolution" from an insular perspective to a broad islands outlook has become a way of looking at the early modern period as a whole. Having famously directed attention to "the plural history of a group of cultures situated along an Anglo-Celtic frontier and marked by an increasing English political and cultural domination", John Pocock came to see the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as "an age of the Three Kingdoms" (Pocock 1975, 605-6; 1996, 176). (The absence of Wales is explained by the fact that "the political union of England and Wales by the statutes of 1536 and 1542 was heralded as a return to a pre-existing national condition, Wales having ever 'been incorporated annexed united and subject to and under the Imperial Crown of this Realm, as a very Member and Joint of the same'" (Schwyzer 2012, 599).) Milton's *Observations* charts what is arguably the most highly charged moment of danger on the Anglo-Celtic frontier, when for England the loss of Ireland, both the English-planted South and the Scottish-settled North, seemed a serious prospect, with all the consequences that would have

for an English-dominated British state. In what follows I aim to introduce and describe the documents on which Milton has been asked to comment, summarise his responses, and map out some critical approaches that underline the cultural and political reach and significance of the *Observations*, which I offer here as a fracture-point and fulcrum for Archipelagic identity politics. The multivocal nature of the text and the interweaving voices employed by Milton to produce a position against which he can argue make it an exemplary document for addressing the tensions and contradictions in British state formation.

### **Articles of Peace**

Ormond's short statement introducing the Articles of Peace ends with "GOD SAVE THE KING". God could not save Charles I from God's Englishman, nor would he save the Irish from Cromwell later that year. The Articles themselves are introduced thus:

Articles of Peace, made, concluded, accorded and agreed upon, by and between his Excellency *James* Lord Marquisse of *Ormond*, Lord Lieutenant General, and Generall of his Majesties Kingdome of *Ireland*, for and on the behalfe of His most Excellent Majesty, by vertue of the authority wherewith the said Lord Lieutenant is intrusted, on the one part; And the Generall Assembly of the Roman Catholickes of the said Kingdome, for and on the behalfe of His Majesties Roman Catholicke Subjects of the same, on the other part. (2)

The thirty-five Articles of Peace are part of a peace process torn up by Cromwell, with far-reaching consequences, and thus represent a lost opportunity. The Cromwellian Conquest of Ireland, and with it the notorious massacres at Drogheda and Wexford, was the direct result of the English commonwealth's refusal to accept a compromise solution in Ireland (Ó Siochrú 2008). For that reason, and because they are the most neglected part of a neglected text, surrounded by silence, I propose to summarise the Articles of Peace fully here. The thirty-five articles presuppose a knowledge of the previous hundred and fifty years of Anglo-Irish history, and encompass (1) religious freedom; (2) a "free Parliament" held in Ireland within six months, or a "General Assembly of the Lords and Commons" within two years, and a debate on the repeal or suspension of Poynings Law (1494), whereby Irish acts are provisional until ratified in London; (3) the lifting of acts and ordinances imposed on Catholics; (4) the repeal of anti-Catholic legislation dating from the Rising of 1641, including confiscations, with Catholics "restored to their respective possessions"; (5) outlawed Catholics free to be elected, to vote, and act as knights and burghers; (6) all financial penalties imposed after 1641 to be cancelled at the next parliament; (7) Irish landholders in the province of Connaught to be confirmed and made secure in their estates; (8) anti-Catholic "incapacities" to be lifted and Catholics allowed their own inns of Court, their own oath to the monarch, and "free schools for education of youths in this Kingdom"; (9) prominent positions in the army to be open on an equal basis to Catholics; (10) the Court of Wards to be abolished and instead 12,000 pounds a year paid to the Crown; (11) an end to proxies in the Irish parliament and all peers to have title and property in Ireland; (12) independence of the Irish parliament; (13) "Pattents of Plantation" and other grants of land to be open and transparent as "matters of State and weight"; (14) repeal of 1569-71 Elizabethan acts "concerning

staple or native commodities” such as “Wooll, Flockes, Tallow”; (15) justice for those who lost land “by attainders or forfeitures, or by pretence and coulor thereof”; (16) a list to be drawn up of those to petition his majesty at the next parliament for restoration of their lands; (17) inhabitants of the garrison towns of Cork, Youghal and Dungiven to be restored to their possessions “respectively where the same extends not to the endangering of the said Garrisons in the said City and Townes”; (18) an act of oblivion extending to all the king’s subjects in Ireland exonerating them “of all Treasons and offences, capitall, criminall and personall, and other offences of what nature, kind, or quality soever, in such manner as if such Treasons or offences had never been committed, perpetrated or don”; (19) no leading Irish officials “or Judges of the foure courts be farmers of his Majesties customes within this Kingdome”; (20) an Irish act against monopolies matching James I’s 1624 Statute to be implemented, especially with regard to “*Aquavitae, Wine, Oile, Yarne and Tobacco*”; (21) leading Irish figures to control the Court of Castle Chamber; (22) “that two acts lately passed in this Kingdom, one prohibiting the plowing with Horses by the tail, and the other prohibiting the burning of Oates in the straw bee repealed”; (23) redress of grievances; (24) settlement of “maritime causes” in the Irish Chancery rather than England; (25) all rent increases under the Earl of Strafford’s deputyship (1632-40) to be reversed; (26) all arrears to be “fully forgiven and be released”; (27) the longest article at five and a half pages assigns sovereignty to a non-sectarian Irish leadership who can impose penalties on disloyal breakers of the peace “with indifferencie and equalitie”, and “in the directions which shall issue to any such County, for the applotting, subdeviding, and levying of the said publike assesments, some of the said Protestant party shall be joyned with others of the Roman Catholike party to that purpose, and for effecting that service”; (28) Commissioners of the Peace to be

appointed to “do equall right to the poore, and to the Rich”, but in keeping with the Articles their reach is “not to extend unto any crime or offence committed before the first of *May* last past”; (29) “that his Majesties Roman Catholicke Subjects, do continue the possession of such of his Majesties Cities, Garrisons, Townes, Forts and Castles which are within their now Quarters, untill settlement by Parliament”; (30) decisions concerning payment of customs to the crown to rest with the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, for “the defence and safety of the Kingdome”; (31) deferral of his majesty’s rents until a full settlement in parliament; (32) power to consider all crimes from 1 May 1648 to the first day of the next parliament; (33) establishment of a new system of courts and judges in Ireland to resolve disputes; (34) protection of the rights and properties of Catholic clergy; (35) and finally, an open-ended article holding out promise of “further concessions” for Catholics.

The articles end with a (perhaps prophetic) typo, dating them to 17 January “2648” (for “1648”, i.e. 1649 – the legal year began at this time on 25 March), and hail Charles I, thirteen days from his death, as “King of *Great Brittain, France and Ireland*” (Milton 1649, 34). There is no mention of England or Scotland. Cromwell’s title of Lord Protector, taken in 1653, gave him control of “the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland and of the dominions thereunto belonging” (Gardiner 1906, 406). After the Articles the rest of the documents are dated subsequent to the king’s execution.

### **The Ormond-Jones Letters**

Ormond’s letter to Colonel Jones of 9 March denounces “those that have late usurped power over the Subjects of *England*”. Ormond says he would have written earlier but waited till he was sure the army would be disaffected with events in England:

now that the mask of hypocrisie, by which the Independent Armie hath ensnared and enslaved all estates and degrees of men is laid aside, now that barefaced, they evidently appear to bee the subverters of true religion, and to be the protectors and inviters, not only of all false ones, but of irreligion and Atheisme, now that they have barbarously and inhumanely laid violent, sacrilegious hands upon, and murdered Gods annointed, and our King, not as heretofore some Patricides have done to make room for some usurper, but in a way plainly manifesting their intentions to change the Monarchy of *England* into Anarchy. (35)

Ormond's appeal to Jones to endorse the Articles of Peace and join him in opposing Cromwellian "anarchy" earns a stern rebuff from Jones, who informs Ormond:

[It] is not in the power of any without the Parliament of *England* to give and assure pardon to those bloodie Rebels [...] I am also well assured that the Parliament of *England* would never assent to such a Peace [...] wherein is little or no provision made either for the Protestants or the Protestant Religion. Nor can I understand how the Protestant Religion should bee settled and restored to its puritie by an Armie of Papists, or the Protestant interests maintained by those very enemies by whom they have been spoiled and there slaughtered: And very evident it is that both the Protestants and Protestant Religion are in that your Lordships Treaty, left as in the power of the Rebels to be by them born down, and rooted out at pleasure. (37)

Jones reminds Ormond that faction and opportunism have beset relations between England and Ireland in the past:

Most certain it is, and former ages have approved it, that the intermedling of Governors and parties in this Kingdom, with sidings and parties in *England*, have been the very betraying of this kingdom to the Irish, whiles the British forces here had bin thereupon called off, and the place therein laid open, and as it were given up to the common enemy. (38)

Jones adds a comment that is cruelly ironic given the Cromwellian conquest that followed within a few months of his writing when he says:

And how much the dangers are at present (more then in former ages) of hazarding the English interest in this Kingdom, by sending any parties hence into any other Kingdom upon any pretences whatsoever is very apparent, as in the generalitie of the Rebellion, now more then formerly. (38)

Jones concludes by reminding Ormond of his own former adherence to English sovereignty:

Therein I cannot but mind your Lordship of what hath been sometimes by your self delivered, as your sence in this particular; that the English interest in *Ireland* must be preserved by the English, and not by Irish, and upon that

ground [...] did your Lordship then capitulate with the Parliament of *England*, from which cleer principle I am sorrie to see your Lordship now receding. (39)

Jones uses the term “English” or “England” twelve times, “Irish” or “Ireland” eight, and “Brittish” twice, making his patriotic priorities clear. Ormond uses the word “England” or “English” four times in his letter, but while referring repeatedly to religion and monarchy makes no mention of Ireland. The letters of Ormond and Jones are followed by Ormond’s proclamation “that *Charles* the second, son and heir of our late Sovereign King *Charles* the first of happy memory, is, by the grace of God the undoubted King of *England, Scotland, France, and Ireland*, Defender of the Faith, &c” (40).

### **The Belfast Presbytery**

After the Ormond-Jones letters and proclamation there follows the Statement of the Belfast Presbytery. The “Necessary Representation” opens with a direct assault upon the English “Sectarian party” that executed the king:

In this discharge of the trust put upon us by God, we would not be looked upon as sowers of sedition, or broachers of Nationall and divisive motions, our record is in heaven, that nothing is more hatefull unto us, nor lesse intended by us, and therefore we shall not feare the malicious, and wicked aspersions, which we know Satan by his Instruments is ready to cast, not onely upon us, but on all who sincerely endeavour the advancement of Reformation. (Milton

1649, 41-2)

The Belfast Presbytery focuses on the national dissent and disunion fomented by the English sectarians who

without all rule, or example, being but private men [...] have proceeded to the tryall of the King, against both the Interest, and Protestation of the Kingdome of *Scotland*, and the former publique Declarations of both Kingdomes (besides the violent hast, reiecting the hearing of any defences) with cruell hands have put him to death; an act so horrible, as no history, divine or humane, hath laid a President [i.e. precedent] of the like. (Milton 1649, 43)

The Solemn League and Covenant of 1643 invoked by the Belfast Presbytery upheld “the Peace and Safety of the three Kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland” (Perceval-Maxwell 1978). Citing four duties demanded by the Covenant – to God, Church Government, monarchy and parliament combined, and Union – the Belfast Presbytery conclude their objections to the English parliament’s unilateral execution of the king by finding Cromwell’s party “guilty of the great evill of these times [...] the despising of Dominion, and speaking evill of Dignities” (44). By contrast, they insist:

That they doe cordially endeavour the preservation of the Union amongst the well-affected in the Kingdomes, not being swayed by any Nationall respect: remembring that part of the Covenant; *That wee shall not suffer our selves*

*directly, nor indirectly, by whatsoever Combination, perswasion, or terrour, to be divided, or withdrawne from this blessed Union, and Conjunction. (44)*

The language of the Belfast Presbytery – “preservation of the Union”, “not being swayed by any Nationall respect”, “*this blessed Union, and Conjunction*” – is archipelagic in its insistence on the co-dependency of the three kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland.

### **Milton’s Observations**

The thirty-five Articles of Peace occupy thirty-four of the sixty-four and a half pages of the *Observations*. Milton’s commentary, less than four pages, confines itself to seven articles, taken out of sequence (1, 2, 12, 22, 9, 4 and 18). Milton’s reference point is the 1641 Irish “rebellion” which he sees rewarded rather than punished in the agreement brokered by Ormond:

As for these Articles of Peace made with those inhumane Rebels and Papists of *Ireland* by the late King, as one of his last Master-pieces. We may be confidently perswaded, that no true borne *English-man*, can so much as barely reade them without indignation and disdain, that those bloody Rebels, and so proclaim’d and judg’d of by the King himself, after the mercilesse and barbarous Massacre of so many thousand *English* [...] should be now grac’d and rewarded with such freedoms and enlargements, as none of their Ancestors could ever merit by their best obedience, which at best was alwaies treacherous, to be infranchiz’d with full liberty equall to their Conquerours,

whom the just revenge of ancient Pyracies, cruell Captivities, and the causlesse infestation of our Coast, had warrantably call'd over, and the long prescription of many hundred yeares; besides what other titles are acknowledg'd by their own *Irish* Parlements, had fixt and seated in that soile with as good a right as the meerest Natives. (46)

As a “true borne *English-man*”, fifty years before Defoe satirized the species, Milton is outraged that the Irish, “justly made our vassals, are by the first Article of this peace advanc'd to a Condition of freedome superior to what any *English* Protestants durst have demanded” (46). To Article 2 and 12, Milton declares the Irish “deserv'd to hold no Parliament at all, but to be govern'd by Edicts and Garrisons” (47). In the most quoted passage of the *Observations*, Milton calls article 22, on ploughing by the tail, “more ridiculous then dangerous”, showing the Irish to be “averse from all Civility and amendment [...] who rejecting the ingenuity of all other Nations to improve and waxe more civill by a civilizing Conquest, though all these many yeares better shown and taught, preferre their own absurd and savage Customes before the most convincing evidence of reason and demonstration: a testimony of their true Barbarisme and obdurate wilfulnesse to be expected no lesse in other matters of greatest moment” (47).

Recalling the “barbarous Massacre” of English planters Milton mocks the king's peace as royal folly fuelling the insolence of upstart colonial subjects, saying of Article 9, which proposes that Catholics be eligible as army leaders: “Now let all men judge what this wants of utter alienating and acquitting the whole Province of *Ireland* from all true fealty and obedience to the Common-wealth of *England*” (Milton 1649, 48). Milton's repeated references to English superiority are punctured briefly

when he slips into a British perspective, claiming Charles I's pro-Irish peace sacrifices "Brittish Loyalty" to "*Irish* Rebels", privileging them over "all his Subjects of *Brittaine*" (47).

To the charge of breaching the Covenant and dividing the kingdoms in Article 4 Milton counters: "And what greater dividing then by a pernicious and hostile Peace, to disalliege a whole Feudary Kingdome from the ancient Dominion of *England*?" (49). Milton concludes with Article 18, in which the late king offers amnesty to those involved in the events of 1641, "wherein without the least regard of Justice to avenge the dead, while he thirsts to be aveng'd upon the living, to all the Murders, Massacres, Treasons, Pyracies, from the very fatall day wherein that Rebellion first broke out, he grants an act of Oblivion" (49).

Milton then briefly discusses Ormond's letter to Jones, "attempting his fidelity, which the discretion and true worth of that Gentleman hath so well answerd and repulst" (49). Mocking Ormond's title – since councils like Cromwell's had been around long before "such a thing as a Titular Marquess had either name or being in the World" (53) – Milton's riposte focuses on Ormond's remarks regarding religion and regicide. To the charge of being too tolerant in matters of faith leveled at the Independents, Milton counters that they have defended true religion, confining Catholics "to the bare enjoyment of that which is not in our reach, their Consciences" (50). To the charge of having "murderd the King", and Ormond's claim that the only liberty left under Cromwell's rule is "to tread underfoot Magistracie, to murder Magistrates, and oppresse and undoe all that are not like minded with them" (35), Milton asks "who are those that have trod under foot Magistracy, murder'd Magistrates, oppress'd & undone all that syded not with them, but the *Irish* Rebels, in

that horrible Conspiracy, for which Ormond himselfe hath either been or seem'd to be their enemy; though now their Ringleader" (54).

Turning to the Belfast Presbytery, Milton declares:

We have now to deale, though in the same Country, with another sort of Adversaries, in show farr different, in substance much what the same. These write themselves the Presbytery of *Belfast*, a place [...] whose obscurity till now never came to our hearing. And surely wee should think this their Representment farr beneath considerable [...] were it not to observe in some particulars the Sympathy, good Intelligence, and joynt pace which they goe in the North of *Ireland*, with their Copartning Rebels in the South, driving on the same Interest to loose us that Kingdome, that they may gaine it themselves, or at least share in the spoile: though the other be op'n enemies, these pretended Brethren [...] is the Presbytery of *Belfast*, a small Town in *Ulster*, of so large extent that their voyces cannot serve to teach duties in the Congregation which they oversee, without spreading and divulging to all parts farr beyond the Diocesse of *Patrick*, or *Columba*, their writt'n Representation, under the suttile pretence of Feeding their owne Flock? [...] And surely when we put down Bishops, and put up Presbyters, which the most of them have made use of to enrich and exalt themselves, and turn the first heele against their Benefactors, we did not think that one Classick Fraternity so obscure and so remote, should involve us and all State affairs within the Censure and Jurisdiction of *Belfast*, upon pretence of overseeing their own charge. (Milton 1649, 54-5)

Having established the Belfast Presbytery's obscurity and impertinence, Milton insists on the separation of church and state:

Wee very well know that Church Censures are limited to Church matters, and these within the compasse of their own Province [...] that affaires of State are not for their Medling. (Milton 1649, 55)

In answering the Belfast Presbytery's charge that the English republic allows all and no religion Milton observes:

Nor doth the *Covnant* any way engage us to extirpate, or to prosecute the men, but the heresies and errors in them, which we tell these Divines and the rest that understand not, belongs chiefly to their own Function, in the diligent preaching and insisting upon sound Doctrin, in the confuting not the railing down errors, encountring both in public and private Conference, and by the power of truth, not of persecution, subduing those authors of hereticall opinions, & lastly in the spirituall execution of Church discipline within thir own congregations. In all these ways wee shall assist them, favour them, and as far as appertains to us joyn with them, and moreover not tolerate the free exercise of any Religion, which shall be found absolutely contrary to sound Doctrin or the power of godliness; for the conscience we must have patience till it be within our verge. (Milton 1649, 59)

To the suggestion that the English republic has set up servants as rulers, Milton retorts:

they talke at random of *servants rainging, servants riding, and wonder how the Earth can beare them*. Either those men imagin themselves to be marvellously high set and exalted in the chaire of *Belfast*, to voutsafe the Parliament of *England* no better stile then *servants*, or els thir high notion, which wee rather beleeve, falls as low as Court parasitism; supposing all men to be servants, but the King. (Milton 1649, 64)

Not content with equating Scottish Presbyterians with Irish Catholics, Milton likens them to the Spanish Inquisition:

Thir next impeachment is, *that we oppose the Presbyteriall government, the hedg and bulwark of Religion*. Which all the Land knows to be a most impudent falshood, having established it with all freedom, wherever it hath been desir'd. Nevertheless as we perceave it aspiring to be a compulsive power upon all without exception in Parochiall, Classicall, and Provinciall Hierarchies, or to require the fleshly arm of Magistracy in the execution of a spirituall Discipline, to punish and amerce by any corporall infliction those whose consciences cannot be edifi'd by what authority they are compell'd, we hold it no more to be *the hedg and bulwark of Religion*, than the Popish and Prelaticall Courts, or the *Spanish Inquisition*. (Milton 1649, 60)

The accusation of “the despising of Dominion” Milton throws back in his opponents’ faces, since they are a mere dominion and must accept the dominance of England and her parliament.

Milton's most telling point against the Belfast Presbyterians is their apparent ignorance of their own history:

Thir grand accusation is our Justice don on the King, which that they may prove to be *without rule or example*, they venture all the credit they have in divine and human history; and by the same desperate boldness detect themselves to be egregious liars and impostors, seeking to abuse the multitude with a show of that gravity and learning which never was their portion. Had thir knowledge bin equall to the knowledge of any stupid Monk, or Abbot, they would have known at least, though ignorant of all things else, the life and acts of him, who first instituted thir order: but these blockish Presbyters of *Clandeboy* know not that *John Knox*, who was the first founder of Presbytery in *Scotland*, taught professedly the doctrine of deposing, and of killing Kings. And thus while they deny that any such rule can be found, the rule is found in their own Country, givn them by thir own first presbyterian institutor; and they themselves like irregular Friers walking contrary to the rule of thir own foundation, deserv for so grosse an ignorance and transgression to be disciplin'd upon thir own stools. (Milton 1649, 61-2)

The Belfast Presbytery has forgotten its republican principles, leading to “a co-interest and partaking with the *Irish Rebels*”, confirming its colonial subordinate status (65). The fact that Milton devotes nine pages of commentary to the forty pages comprising the Articles of Peace, the Ormond-Jones letters and proclamation of Charles II, and eleven pages to the four and a half pages of the *Necessary Representation* has been seen to reflect his priorities in the *Observations* ((Raymond

2004, 338, 340; Kerrigan 2008, 231-32). He recognizes Ulster as a crucial setting in the drama being played out between the nations of the Archipelago.

The difference between an imperial monarchy and a colonial republic is one of degree; and for the colonized such distinctions are largely irrelevant. If Milton was, as David Armitage suggests, a “poet against empire”, he was not a poet against plantation, and if he was a poet against sovereigns, he was not against the sovereignty of England or “the sovran Planter” (*PL* IV.691) – God in *Paradise Lost* – who gave England dominion over Ireland. Much depends on whether we see the colonization of Ireland as a “domestic” matter or as a staging post for the pursuit of plantations in the so-called New World. Armitage may be right to see Milton as opposed to the aggrandizement of imperial monarchies, but Milton’s support for the Cromwellian occupation of Ireland and his language in the *Observations*, where Ireland is characterized as a “Feudary Kingdome”, suggests otherwise (49). This is a complicated debate, since although in *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660) Milton asked, “Where is this goodly tower of a Commonwealth, which the English boasted they would build, to overshadow kings, and be another *Rome* in the west?” (Milton 1660, 21-2), by the time of *Paradise Lost* it is Satan who is upholding “Imperial Titles” and the prospect of a British imperial monarchy supplanting Rome is less appealing (*PL*.V.801). The key question is whether it is a monarchy or a commonwealth/republic that is leading the scramble for colonies.

The *Observations* implicates Milton within the discourse of English colonialism. Seeing Milton as a poet against empire is an Anglocentric perspective that overlooks the internal colonialism of the emerging British state. The running header of the earliest editions of Milton’s *History of Britain* (1670) reads “The

History of England”, a revealing glimpse into the Anglocentric mindset. In *Of Reformation* (1641) Milton praises God who “having first welnigh freed us from *Antichristian* thraldome, didst build up this *Britannick Empire* to a glorious and enviable heighth with all her Daughter Ilands about her” (Milton 1641, 87-8). In the *Observations* Milton backs Britain’s imperial project and places England at the cutting-edge of the Anglo-Celtic frontier identified by Pocock. Milton’s strategy in the *Observations*, his response to the “complication of interests”, is to stage a four-way struggle as a straight fight between on the one hand Irish royalists – Catholic, Protestant, and Ulster Scots – and on the other English republicans. Confederate Catholics in the South and Presbyterians in the North were equally opposed to the actions of the English parliament in executing the king. Milton’s response was to identify an underlying complicity between these apparent enemies. The crucible of conflict in which this unique intervention occurs, in the context of a prismatic debate over sovereignty and statehood, makes the *Observations* a proving ground for the politics of the period.

### **Critical Perspectives**

I hope I have done enough here to suggest the importance of the *Observations* as a case study in the complexities of archipelagic interactions. In what follows I want to suggest some critical approaches to the text, a series of observation posts from which to view this multi-authored text, which can be viewed as secondary effects of archipelagic studies insofar as each approach draws on or builds on the non-Anglocentric perspective mapped out in the preceding pages:

1. The first is Cultural Materialism. The cultural materialist commitment to context, to Marxism, and to the continuing relevance of Renaissance texts makes the *Observations* a perfect platform for this critical theory. Marx claimed the English republic was shipwrecked on Ireland (Marx and Friedrich Engels 1971, reprinted 1986: 378-79). Radical English historians agree that colonialism undid the commonwealth (Durstun; Hill). Marx's reading of the English revolution as meeting its doom in Ireland is borne out by the displacement of the social and political energies released in England in the 1640s in the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland, and by the real revolution in land ownership that occurred there (Bottigheimer 1972). According to his most recent editors, Milton's 1649 writings are "deeply concerned with how the three former Stuart kingdoms can be unified under a new republican regime" (Keeble and McDowell 2013, 33). If the answer lies in subjection to English authority then from a native standpoint it matters little whether such unity is achieved under an imperial monarchy or colonial republic.

2. New Historicism. Rather than tracking Renaissance afterlives, new historicists happily inhabit the period. They like to place a short non-fiction text, usually a minor or neglected work, alongside a major canonical one in order to argue their shared concerns. Pairing the *Observations* with *Paradise Lost* – and *Paradise Regained* – reveals the complexities of the poet's attitude to empire, race and slavery. There is now an established strand of criticism that considers the *Observations* a scenario for Milton's epic poetry, including work by Catherine Canino (1998), Jim Daems (1999), Maura Grace Harrington (2007), John Kerrigan (2008, 230), and David Loewenstein (1992, 310).

3. Deconstruction. There are several ways of thinking about the *Observations* as a text ripe for a deconstructive reading. The first lies in the status of the

*Observations* as a marginal text within Milton's voluminous prose. Its liminal status – and composite nature – immediately renders it of interest, for as Derrida observed marginal or fringe cases “always constitute the most certain and most decisive indices wherever essential conditions are to be grasped” (Derrida 1977, 209). The second is Milton's own interpretative strategy in relation to the multifaceted material he was commissioned to critique. Milton sets out to reveal an underlying complicity between two apparent opposites, and carries out the classic two-stage process of reversal and displacement characteristic of deconstruction. When in his sonnet “On the New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament” (1646; 1673) Milton declares “*New Presbyter* is but *Old Priest* writ Large” he is deconstructing a false opposition, as when he compares the Belfast Presbytery to the Spanish Inquisition (Campbell 1980, 81; Milton 1649, 60). A third deconstructive dimension is the characteristic of becoming like the thing to which you are ostensibly opposed by closely inhabiting the discourse of your adversary. Milton turns royalist and imperialist in accusing Ormond of attempting “to disalliege a whole Feudary Kingdome from the ancient Dominion of *England*.” Milton's commentators fall into this trap too. Thomas Corns, John Kerrigan and Joad Raymond have all viewed the *Observations* as primarily preoccupied with Scotland or England, as though Ireland, specifically Ulster, could not be the true topic of discussion, yet on 23 March 1649 Cromwell declared the “Irish interest [...] the most dangerous” (cited in Keeble and McDowell 2013, 49).

4. Postcolonialism. David Beers Quinn saw Elizabethan Ireland as a unique instance of a country colonised twice over, its twelfth-century settlers displaced by sixteenth-century planters (Quinn 1958, 20). In fact, Ireland's uniqueness lies in its being triple colonised. The 1609 Ulster plantation, a predominantly Scottish affair made possible by the accession of James I as king of Britain in 1603, laid the

foundations for partition three centuries later. The English Pale around Dublin became a British Pale around Belfast. Modern Ireland's provisional independence saw the country partitioned between the parts planted by England and those settled by the Scots. The colonial complexities of Ireland are laid bare in the *Observations*, and for those interested in postcolonial criticism it is a paradigmatic text where the roots of partition and the complexities of the modern British problem can be traced.

5. Animal Studies. In the most-quoted lines of his commentary, Milton singles out the proposed repeal of the act against ploughing by the tail as a piece of barbarism. Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford had introduced in 1635 an "Act Against Plowing by the Tayle, and Pulling the Wooll Off Living Sheep", considered the earliest animal welfare legislation in the English-speaking world (Beirne 2009). "One of the first anti-cruelty laws" (Kalof 2007, 125) was passed by a man Milton detested (Merritt 1996, 5-6), an English colonial governor later tried as a tyrant and a traitor whose execution was a dress rehearsal for the king's. The background to the legislation against ploughing by the tail suggests that it was as much about colonial authority and taxation as it was about advocating humane practice (Pinkerton 1858, 212-13). Within Irish ethnology, ploughing by the tail has a complicated history as an embarrassment to nationalist or anti-colonial narratives (Evans 1976, 34). The relationship between colonialism and animal welfare is complex, since brutalisation of natives accompanies both cruelty to and concern for animals (Coughlan 1990). An earlier Archipelagic moment saw an Irish lord in 1317 address a "Remonstrance" to Pope John XXII, encouraging the presence of the Scots in Ireland in the shape of the brothers Bruce, Edward and Robert, by complaining of the Anglo-Normans, or English: "For not only their laymen and secular clergy but some also of their regular

clergy dogmatically assert the heresy that it is no more sin to kill an Irishman than a dog or any other brute” (Lydon 1972, 289).

## **Conclusion**

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a “handbook” as “a book small enough to be easily portable and intended to be kept close to hand, typically one containing a collection of passages important for reference or a compendium of information on a particular subject, *esp.* a book of religious instruction”. The *Observations* is such a book, a rare pamphlet that is a real Renaissance handbook, offering insights into the formation of a multi-nation state that is only now beginning to unravel. It raises questions of enduring concern about colonialism, monarchy, nationalism, religion, republicanism, sovereignty, and civil society, and should be of interest to all students of the early modern period and beyond. Two recent developments may bring the *Observations* back into view. The first is the publication in 2013 of the new Oxford edition of Milton’s 1649 prose, providing excellent notes by Nick McDowell not just on Milton’s contribution, as previous editions have done, but on the whole text of the *Observations*. The second development is the debate around Scottish independence, and related issues around federalism, English Votes for English Laws, and the fallout from Brexit. The complication of interests along the Anglo-Celtic frontier persists.

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