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THE BORDEAUX–DUBLIN LETTERS 1757

Correspondence of an Irish Community Abroad

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and we should recall the lines by the author of the guide for the sources in the Archives Nationales on the history of foreigners. 'C'est cependant l'immigration irlandaise qui fournit les contingents d'étrangers les plus importants dans la France d'Ancien Régime, déversant dans le royaume soldats et mercenaires, prêtres et religieux, mais aussi errants et vagabonds'.[230] An Irish vagabond and artisan population in the French ports had however failed to survive beyond 1700. The clergy perforce continued to pass through the ports (Nantes and Bordeaux) which held two of four Irish ecclesiastical colleges. Recruits for the army rarely if ever passed through Bordeaux, and from the 1750s, in any case, few rank and file were recruited: officership of Irish regiments was a monopoly of an ever narrower vested interest. The survival of commercial groups in Bordeaux and Cadiz depended on the prosperity of the colonial trade of the ports. While the disappearance of the factories was essentially a commercial phenomenon, it was also accompanied by a general decline in the Irish presence in Europe.[231] [LMC]

IV. The Letters

Historians of the eighteenth-century Atlantic World have shown that the sea was less a barrier to communication than a medium of connection. The lands of the Atlantic littoral were linked by webs of trade which bound port communities and their hinterlands into networks that cut across political, linguistic, and religious divides. Through the channels of communication opened by trade flowed goods, people, and ideas. Such is the social world to which the Bordeaux–Dublin letters give access. In contradistinction to the Atlantic World writ large, however, this was a social sphere tied mostly to Old World trade. The correspondence on board the *Two Sisters* flowed for the most part between one European region and another, from south-western France, centred on Bordeaux, to Ireland, especially the thriving ports of Dublin and Cork.[232] Approximately three-quarters of the letters were sent by residents of Bordeaux or its immediate vicinity, while the broader region accounted for roughly another eighth of the total. After Bordeaux, Toulouse figures most prominently with six letters, followed by Bayonne, though all five of the letters sent from that city were written by prisoners of war. Single letters emanated from Agen, Auch, Caussade, and La Réole, all medium-sized towns in the French southwest.

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[230] Jean-François Dubost, *Les étrangers en France, XVI^{e} siècle–1789: guide des recherches aux Archives nationales* (Paris, 1993), 91. Trans. 'It is however the Irish immigration which furnished the most significant contingents of foreigners in old regime France, pouring into the kingdom soldiers and mercenaries, priests and religious, but also drifters and vagabonds'.

[231] L. M. Cullen, 'Choiseul's Irish circle and the Irish community: the final decades of the Ancien Régime', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 24 (2009), 62–83.

[232] A small number of the letters were written in Ireland. These include two letters written by Mary Dennis to her husband, Captain John Dennis, care of Christopher Gernon in Bordeaux (42, 43), and a letter written by John Dennis's mother, Margaret Dennis, to her son in December 1750 (44), and presumably carried by Dennis among his personal papers on board the *Two Sisters*. When Charles Griffin, Dennis's father-in-law, was permitted back on board the ship, he may have gathered whatever significant papers he could find

As for the intended destination of the letters, 65 per cent were addressed to correspondents in Dublin while 25 per cent were destined for Munster—nearly two thirds of the latter to Co. Cork (with eleven sent to residents of Cork city and another nine to county addresses, including the towns of Bandon, Bantry, Midleton, Rosscarbery or their environs). After Dublin and Cork, Limerick is the city that figures most prominently with seven letters, though two Bordeaux correspondents, David Donovan and Nicholas MacInerheny, account for all of these. Outside Leinster and Munster, only Galway figures among the addresses, with two letters. The pre-eminence of Dublin and Cork as destinations for the Bordeaux correspondence is understandable; these were the chief centres of Irish trade with Bordeaux. While Franco-Irish trade was closely tied to a broader Atlantic commerce—much of the Irish beef and butter imported to Bordeaux being re-exported to the Caribbean—the letters give us little access to these eddies of the Franco-Irish trade. Bar isolated references to Canada or the Antilles, America is absent from the letters, while references to Rotterdam, Cadiz, San Sebastián, and London crop up frequently.

The letter-writers and their correspondents were predominantly products of this commercial world. Of the forty-nine letter writers (out of a total of sixty) whose family background or profession can be established with some degree of confidence, more than three-quarters were linked to the realm of wholesale trade and shipping, including three ordinary seamen, members of the *Two Sisters'* crew, who were permitted to write home to loved ones to say they had been taken prize (49, 64, 73). The other prominent social group represented were priests, seminarians and other students in the Irish colleges of south-western France, constituting one-sixth of the identifiable writers. Only a handful of other professions or social backgrounds are identifiable, including three domestic servants, all women, and all employed in merchant households. Because there is less information in the letters concerning the social identity of the one hundred and seven addressees, a higher proportion of these are of unknown

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from among Dennis's possessions, which could explain how Margaret Dennis's letter was saved. A letter sent by William Finlay of Dublin to Barton & Delap in Bordeaux, dated 28 Nov. 1755, but returned undelivered, was also in the *Two Sisters'* letter bag.

profession or background. Of the two thirds who can be identified, over 90 per cent moved in mercantile circles, including wholesale trade, shipping, and allied businesses. We should not exaggerate the homogeneity and social cohesiveness of this group. Addressees ranged from successful manufacturers like Peter Besnard of Cork, at the upper end of the social scale, to Molly Johnson, wife of a simple seaman, in its lower reaches. Yet compared to the broader Irish and French populations from which most of the correspondents were drawn, they stand out for their urban and commercial character.

Other elements of social diversity, no doubt, lie among the unidentifiable addressees, especially those resident outside towns. The Barrys of Roxborough near Midleton, Co. Cork, to whom seminarian William Cunningham wrote, might have been farmers, comfortable farming backgrounds being relatively common for Irish priests in the eighteenth century. The same might be said for Maurice FitzGerald of Ballyhooly, near Kilworth, Co. Cork, uncle of seminarian J. MacGuire, or William Connell of Courtnecuddy, near Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford, father of yet another student in France. While burses were available to offset some of the expenses associated with a clerical education on the continent, most men who took this path needed at least a modest property at home to support their ecclesiastical ambitions. There is little, however, to indicate that many of the intended recipients of the Bordeaux–Dublin letters came from more exalted backgrounds. The only addressee who appears clearly to belong to the Ascendancy is Jeanne Marie Arabin, wife of Jean Arabin de Barcille, a colonel in the army of George II, and son of a Huguenot military officer who acquired an estate in Westmeath confiscated after the Williamite War.[233]

Family relationships as seen in the letters

One of the most striking characteristics of the correspondents is the prominence of family relationships among them. Well over half the letters constitute intra-familial communication—letters between spouses, among siblings, between parents and children, or among cousins. Indeed it is clear that a principal function of a great deal of this correspondence was simply to keep channels open between family members, and many of the letters invoke a duty to sustain such communication. Particularly noteworthy are the three letters written by ordinary sailors telling mothers and wives of their capture by the *Caesar* (49, 64, 73). These suggest a sensitivity and a family feeling we do not often associate with seafaring men of this era. A peculiarity of the family correspondence is that there are nearly three times as many letters from children to parents as the reverse.[234] Rather than representing a greater burden on the younger generation to stay in touch, this is likely a function of the lop sidedness of the correspondence carried by the *Two Sisters*. A large proportion of the letters are from men and women who left home to make their way in the world. Had the *Two Sisters* been carrying correspondence from Dublin to Bordeaux, we might have seen a disproportionate number of letters from an older, stay-at-home generation to younger people on the move. The centrality of family in the letters bears out studies which have shown that the family was the core institution in organizing and sustaining commerce in the early modern English speaking world. Most firms were organized as family partnerships; merchants preferred correspondents who were relatives; ties of blood or marriage created trust in a world where contracts might be hard to enforce and creditworthiness difficult to assess. Moreover in a realm where risk was a fact of life, and ruin an ever present possibility, family ties offered the only safety net.[235]

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[233] Raymond Hylton, *Ireland's Huguenots and their refuge, 1662–1745* (Brighton, 2005), 126, 130.

The ideal of family life is summoned up by John Black—'that alliance of friendship and mutual benevolence that ought always reign in families which have sentiments of honour, generosity, and Christianity' (119). But of course such was not always the reality of family life. The letters are full of familial recriminations, of efforts to rein in wayward family members. Fathers, in particular, felt it incumbent on them to chastise sons they regarded as disobedient, lazy, or spendthrift. One gets a sense in the prolific correspondence of the Réaud family of the kinds of conflicts that could test a family. The letters reveal a father aggravated by the behaviour of his sons and threatening to withdraw his affection, children sensing that a step mother is poisoning their relationship with their father, and a daughter sneaking behind her parents' backs to maintain communication with a much-loved brother.

Perhaps the most interesting reflection on relations between parents and children comes in prisoner of war Walter Codd's letter to his wife, Catty (26). Codd warned his wife not to become over invested emotionally in their son, Tom, who was with Codd in Marseilles. '[H]ow many Parents', he asks, 'have been undone by theyr fondness to Ungreatfull Children who frequently Measure Theyr affection in proportion to the substance Theyr Parents have To give them'? Yet Codd believed that if children did not turn out well, it was their parents' fault. He told his wife that he would blame her if his two daughters disappointed him, 'as there [is] no such thing as Children being naturally bad'. He hoped they might 'avoid the too Common Custom of Dublin Girls, Such as Gadding Abroad &c', and pay attention to their needlework because 'its as great a Scandall For Girls to be ignorant of theyr needle as it is for men not to understand The use of the pen'. A demanding parent, perhaps, but the letter is also full of Codd's affection for his wife and children and his desire to do right by them.

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[234] There are seventeen letters from children to parents and only six from parents to children.

[235] Richard Grassby, *Kinship and capitalism: marriage, family, and business in the English speaking world, 1580–1740* (Cambridge, 2001); Margaret R. Hunt, *The middling sort: commerce, gender, and the family in England, 1680–1780* (Berkeley, 1996).

Ten of the letter writers, a sixth of the total, were women. The modest proportion of female writers might be partly explained by the lower levels of female literacy prevailing in eighteenth-century Europe.[236] A more important factor in the case of the Bordeaux–Dublin letters is that so many of the letters represent the efforts of people on the move to stay in touch with family and friends at home. Women were less likely than men to go abroad in search of economic opportunity. Yet some did so. Three of the ten women letter writers were Irish women working in Bordeaux. The letters of Ann (or Nancy) Nulty, suggest that she was working in the Bordeaux household of relatives through marriage, the Gernons, taking care of and helping to educate three children. Christopher Gernon, it should be remembered was part-owner of the cargo aboard the *Two Sisters* on its March 1757 voyage to Dublin. Also in service was Mary Barry, a Cork woman. Her letter to Catherine Black in Dublin, a daughter of her employers, suggests a strong element of friendship between the two women. Mary asked Kitty to 'pay the postage of anny Leter for me from Cork and send it by ship hear [here]', and reminded her that 'Y^{u} promised me a Song: No Nimph that trespas the Vardent plain ag^{t} Sally can compair' (15). This was an air commonly performed at London's Vauxhall Gardens in the 1750s and composed by its musical director John Worgan.[237] A copy of the score was published in Dublin about 1755 and this presumably is what Barry wanted. A third woman employed as a servant was Mary Flynn, who worked in the home of the wine merchant James Babe. Mary's colourful letters to her sister Catherine Norris in Dublin comment upon the comings and goings at a busy Irish residence in Bordeaux (100).

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[236] Precise literacy figures are impossible to come by for this period, but some generalizations can be made: people in urban areas were much more likely to be literate than rural dwellers; men were more likely to be able to read and write than women; Protestants had higher rates of literacy than Catholics in both France and Ireland, but class, region, and occupation were better predictors of literacy than religious affiliation. It must also be borne in mind that writing and reading were more likely to be seen in the eighteenth century as distinct skills, with reading viewed as the more basic and necessary art. This attitude could produce wide divergences between the proportion of a population able to read and those able to both read and write. See François Furet and Mona Ozouf, *Reading and writing: literacy in France from Calvin to Jules Ferry* (Cambridge, 1982); Niall Ó Ciosáin, *Print and popular culture in Ireland, 1750–1850* (Basingstoke, 1997).

[237] *Musical Times*, 63 (Sept. 1922), 620. Barry confused the opening line slightly: it should read 'No nymph that trips the verdant plains With Sally can compare'.

In an altogether different situation was Jeanne Bachan, an independent woman of means, perhaps a widow, with control over her own property. Bachan wrote to her cousin, Mrs. Arabin, to make arrangements to purchase a life annuity. She also requested information from her will in order to complete a codicil. Bachan, who appears to have been visiting Bordeaux, was likely a member of Dublin's Huguenot community. The cousin to whom she wrote was the wife of Colonel John (or Jean) Arabin, commander of the Fifty-Seventh West Middlesex regiment then serving in Gibraltar. Bachan reassured Arabin's wife that she had received a letter from the colonel, who had been dangerously ill, but now seemed improved. She could not be aware that he had already died on February 16.[238] Bachan was not only literate but able to express herself in both English and French. Moreover, she showed an unusual awareness of public affairs, observing that a Swede she had met in Bordeaux was 'one of those who escaped that revolt which occurred recently in that country', a reference to an abortive coup orchestrated by the Swedish court in 1756 against the Council of State, resulting in the public execution of several leaders of the court party.[239]

Huguenot letters

Huguenots made up in total perhaps 10 per cent of the identifiable letter writers and a similar proportion of the addressees. Ireland was an important refuge for Huguenots who left France after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685) or in response to earlier persecutions. More significant for the Huguenot presence in the Bordeaux–Dublin letters, however, was the lure of commercial opportunities which drew so many Protestants from south-western France into the Irish trade both before and after 1685.[240] Among the intended recipients of letters were the Cork Huguenot house of Ardouin & Sons, and the Huguenot manufacturer Peter Besnard. The latter, who came to Cork from Dublin in the 1740s, took over a sailcloth manufacture in Douglas with two partners and turned it into one of the largest manufacturing concerns in the region.[241] Besnard also made considerable profits from the manufacture of tents for the army during the Seven Years' War.[242] J. B. Nairac of Bordeaux and his cousin John Nairac of Dublin were members of an important Protestant family who made their money in shipping and as commission merchants, and then branched into sugar refining. Members of the clan owned two of the largest refineries in Bordeaux in the latter part of the century, and also refined sugar in Dublin.[243] Elizabeth Vashon, sweetheart of William Nassau Fleming, a prisoner in Bayonne, was likely a daughter of a prominent Huguenot family of Waterford. Simon Vashon was mayor of the city in 1726 while his son held the office in 1738.[244] The Vashons were correspondents of the Dublin banking house of Kane and La Touche, David La Touche being also a Huguenot.[245] Typical in some respects of the Huguenot merchant presence in Ireland, Michel Tramassé had come to the city in 1733 to learn English and to begin an apprenticeship in trade. He eventually established himself on St. Stephens Green, a focal point of Huguenot settlement in Dublin, though he retained extensive interests in France, as the letter he received from Dominique Armailhacq shows (122).

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[238] H. H. Woolright, *History of the Fifty-Seventh (West Middlesex) regiment of foot 1755–1881* (London, 1893), 364.

[239] Michael Roberts, *The age of liberty: Sweden 1719–1772* (Cambridge, 1986), 180–82. The Council of State was the chief executive body under the Swedish constitution of 1720.

[240] Cullen, 'Huguenots'.

[241] David Dickson, 'Huguenots in the urban economy of eighteenth-century Dublin and Cork', in *The Huguenots and Ireland*, 329.

[242] *DJ*, 4 Jan. 1757.

Catholic clergy, and the colleges of Toulouse and Bordeaux

Another important social element represented among the letter writers were Catholic priests, seminarians, and lay students in the Irish colleges of Bordeaux and Toulouse. Nearly one in six of the identifiable letter writers falls into this category (though none of the intended recipients can unambiguously be identified as Catholic clergy). Training for the priesthood was impossible in eighteenth-century Ireland until the founding of the Maynooth seminary in 1795, and Irish priests were typically educated on the continent, often in Irish colleges established specifically to serve this purpose. The Bordeaux Irish seminary on rue du Hâ had been founded in the early seventeenth century, and received a small subvention from the French monarchy. By the 1760s it constituted a community of about thirty, including staff, most with Munster backgrounds.[246] William Cunningham reported to his sister that he had just secured a place there (3). Patrick MacDermott asked his father to write to him at the seminary, though he may have been a lay student rather than an aspiring priest (85). Catholic boys bound for careers in law, medicine, and surgery could also board and study at Irish colleges in France.[247]

The Irish college in Toulouse, founded in 1659, educated a dozen young men at any given time either for priestly service in Ireland or for the lay professions.[248] Luke Egan was a seminarian there, and Dennis Kelly was also a student, though his future at the college was uncertain. According to family friend, William FitzSimons, Kelly had been criticized by the principal of the college—at this date Father Francis O'Hea—for his 'rudeness and malice'. Kelly even threatened to join the French army if his uncle did not send him money (23).[249] FitzSimons, dismissed this threat as that of 'all the good for nothing boys here' who used it to extort money from their relations. But he took the young man's disaffection seriously enough to suggest placing him in an apprenticeship with a bookseller (54). More settled was J. MacGuire, who was studying at the Jesuit College in Agen. He explains the promising situation a cousin might enjoy were he to take over the place MacGuire would soon relinquish in France: free room and board plus an allowance of ten livres a month as tutor to a gentleman's children (50). John O'Shea, who had gone to Auch to study medicine, told his father he had resolved to enter the priesthood but was having difficulty getting a position in the seminary due to the ill will of John O'Brien, bishop of Cloyne (1748–1769) (101). Though he was not O'Shea's bishop, O'Brien was himself a graduate of the Toulouse seminary and might be expected to have exercised some influence there.

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[243] Butel, *Négociants bordelais*, 154; Cullen, 'Huguenots', 143.

[244] Hylton, *Ireland's Huguenots*, 164.

[245] Dickson, 'Huguenots', 327.

[246] T. J. Walsh, *The Irish continental college movement: the colleges at Bordeaux, Toulouse, and Lille* (Dublin, 1973), 106–10.

[247] Emmet Larkin, *The pastoral role of the Roman Catholic Church in pre-famine Ireland 1750–1850* (Dublin, 2006), 33; Liam Swords, 'Collège des Lombards', in *The Irish-French connection, 1578–1978*, ed. Liam Swords (Paris, 1978).

Religious themes are, predictably, prominent in some of the letters written by Catholic seminarians. MacGuire's reflections on the death of a brother suggest the consolation the sacraments could offer devout Catholics in the face of death and loss. He told his uncle, Maurice FitzGerald, that he regarded the manner of his brother's death as 'the greatest proof of God's bounty for him' because 'he confessed and received [communion] the same day that he quitted this world' (50). Luke Egan wrote home to chastise his brother Daniel for joining the Freemasons, 'that diabolical & Hell invented Club . . . that you could have no desire to become a Member of Except that you were desirous to take a Short Cut to the Devil' (47). Freemasonry was popular in eighteenth-century Ireland, and attracted many Catholic members—perhaps one in five Munster freemasons was Catholic in 1760. Irish bishops tended to take a less trenchant stance on the organization than young Egan, not wishing to offend Ascendancy sensibilities with too forthright a condemnation.[250]

While casual references to religious notions are ubiquitous in the letters written by lay people, in only a few do religious themes figure really centrally.

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[248] Walsh, *Irish continental college movement*, 120–39; Jean Raynal, *Histoire de la ville de Toulouse* (Toulouse, 1759), 448.

[249] Francis O'Hea's account book shows that a Mr. Kelly had entered the seminary in 1754 (Walsh, *Irish continental college movement*, 135).

[250] Petri Mirala, 'Masonic sociability and its limitations: the case of Ireland', *Clubs and societies in eighteenth-century Ireland*, ed. James Kelly and Martyn J. Powell (Dublin, 2010).

The most striking in this regard is Margaret Dennis's letter to her son John which deals with his prospective marriage across confessional lines. Written in 1750, and presumably carried by Dennis with the rest of his papers over the following years, the letter demands assurance in writing that any children born of Dennis's marriage to a Mrs. Wright will be raised Catholics, even if Dennis were to predecease his new wife. Mrs. Dennis was ready to give her blessing to the marriage if her condition was met (44). It is unclear how this matter was resolved; all we know for sure is that John Dennis subsequently married Mary Griffin and was still married to her in 1757.[251]

Identity

Few of the letters offer such unambiguous markers of the author's identity as those in the preceding section yet some consideration of what the correspondence can tell us about the identity of this community nevertheless seems worthwhile. We are plainly dealing with an Irish community in the sense that most of the letter writers were Irish natives and nearly all their correspondence was destined for addressees in Ireland. However the letters lack much self-awareness about this identity, and this should hardly be surprising—it was a simple fact of life which required neither assertion nor defence. More notable, perhaps, is the relative paucity of references to missing one's country (as opposed to missing relatives and friends there). The closest any correspondent comes to such an admission is Pat MacDermott's 'by what I could learn, you are so kind as to wish I was in y^{e} County of Meath. be assured I am of that inclination . . . . as soon as Circumstances will permit it, be assured, I will not neglect making my endeavours to see my native Country' (55). This is the only use in the letters of the term 'country' in this specific sense and, in using it, MacDermott may have had in mind his locality or county rather than Ireland per se. Other evidence of regional attachment appears in John Black's poetic evocation of the view from Cave Hill near Belfast, which took in the 'rocky 15 to 20 Leagues shore of the Opposite Ancient kingdom Ailsa entry of clyde to the N.E. the Kingdom of Man & Newton Bay S.E. & South' (13).

A Protestant Irish identity appears to be on display in the same letter, undoubtedly the richest and most remarkable of the whole collection. John Black tells his son James of hearing stories from his grandmother of 'the dismall devastations murders & massacres of the heretick usurpers' during the 1641 Rebellion directed against the Plantation of Ulster, memories central to Protestant identity in eighteenth-century Ireland. Black goes on to evoke the Battle of the Boyne of 1690, another decisive Irish Protestant *lieu de mémoire*. An alternative reading of John Black's identity, and that of the Black family, is offered by historian James Livesey using a larger body of Black family correspondence held at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. Livesey suggests that the Blacks embraced central elements of a British identity including Protestantism and a commitment to political liberty, but that theirs was a cosmopolitan Britishness often critical of the British state, and flexibly open to occupying other identity positions—Frenchness, for example—and not for instrumental purposes only.[252] Indeed in his letter to his Huguenot son-in-law Isaac Simon, Black writes in French and signs himself Jean Black, which seems to suggest a degree of acculturation in France (119).

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[251] The marriage seems to have been a success as the affectionate quality of Mary's letters attest: 'My D^{r}', she tells Dennis, 'I have had a bad Custom of y^{r} sweet company wich makes it [his absence] worse to beare but I hope the allmyty will grant me the blesing onst more' (42).

A few other letter writers, having spent time in France, seem to have become at least partially acculturated. Jemmy Woulfe, who was employed in the Paris banking house of Woulfe & Waters, thought of relocating either to Bordeaux or Nantes; he certainly had no intention of going home. As he told the widow Collin, 'God preserve me from thinking of it. twixt you & me I am too much the french man' (28). One wonders what Woulfe meant by this: literally that he was becoming assimilated? Or that after a sojourn in Paris he regarded himself as too sophisticated for life in Ireland? We should probably draw no conclusions about identity or assimilation from the threat made by Dennis Kelly to join Louis XV's army: 'I have had a great mind to engage me self With the French Other wise to make me self a Soldier but as I was going for to take the money that the sergent offerd me one of my School fellows told me that it was a foulish thing and that i would often repent it' (23). Kelly's statement was dismissed by William FitzSimons, as already noted, but the fact remains that some young men from the Irish colleges did go on to serve as chaplains in the Irish brigades of the French army (54). William Connell, another Irish seminarian in Toulouse, told his father that poor food, cold weather, and gambling debts had kindled in several of his fellow students 'the noble desire of serving his majesty' (29).

A small number of the twenty-five letters composed in French were written by members of Bordeaux's Irish community, but the majority were not. What can we say about the identity of these French correspondents and the purposes for which they wrote? Much of the French correspondence was generated by the presence of young French men working in Dublin merchant houses, learning the language or serving out apprenticeships there. Seven letters from members of the Réaud family were occasioned by Alexis Réaud's residence in Dublin in the household of Dublin wine merchant, John Connor, one of the owners of the *Two Sisters* (31, 32, 107–111). Alexis's brother had apparently lived with the Connors in the past and wrote a friendly and familiar letter in English to Pat Connor (32). Alexis Réaud's situation was similar to that of Jacques Bourbon, who was learning English in Dublin and staying with sea captain, John Pearl (16). Pearl's son William, in turn, lived with the Bourbon family in Bordeaux. A French employee of the Barton firm in Dublin, one St. Martin, was the recipient of a letter from Marie Despasse, who seems to have been a love interest (115). It was sympathy that prompted Janneton Darquier and her brother to write to their sibling, Guillaume (or William) Darquier, a Huguenot merchant established in Dublin, whose only son had recently died (40, 41).[253] Finally, the war gave rise to four of the French letters, three of which were addressed to prisoners of war held in the British Isles (92, 93, 116), and a fourth to a friend who offered to assist a son of the writer held as a prisoner in England (62).

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[252] James Livesey, *Civil society and empire: Ireland and Scotland in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world* (New Haven, 2009), 128–53.

Another prisoner of war, this one Irish, offered some of the most self-conscious reflections touching on identity to be found anywhere in the letters, but the identity in question was neither national nor religious. Ship master Walter Codd's letter to John Crump is a kind of vindication of a life lived in trade (36). Codd might be a character in a Defoe novel celebrating the middle station in life. He describes a professional trajectory of challenges—heavy debts to be repaid, cargoes lost, and other bad luck—which he claims to have surmounted almost single-handed. Instead of being bowed by his most recent adversity, being held captive in France, he tells Crump that 'by the Knowledge I have increased I do not think I am a looser'. There seem echoes here of what has been called 'commercial humanism', the claim that there were virtues inherent in the mercantile life and that the merchant was consequently deserving of approbation and honour.[254] Codd is proud of what he refers to as 'his calling', which gives him insight into 'the manners Customs Trade & Manufactures' of the whole world. Claiming to have 'Sought Fortune wth honesty & Industry', he tells Crump 'If I cant be a great man, I shall Endeavour To be a good Man' (36).

Commercial correspondence

Considering the mercantile identity of so many of the identifiable correspondents, one of the peculiarities of the Bordeaux–Dublin letters is the relative paucity of letters transmitting orders, arranging the shipment of goods, or settling accounts between merchants. Possible explanations for this absence have been explored above. Nonetheless, there is some commercial correspondence—roughly one letter in five—discussing shipments made before the declaration of war, settling accounts on past business, dealing with problems of trade in wartime conditions, and communicating information on prices and general news of a mercantile nature. Abraham Lawton's letters to correspondents in Dublin and Cork bemoan the general slowness of trade, especially the travails of the wine business which was Lawton's specialty. The most recent vintage of Bordeaux wine was exceptionally poor, he noted, and would be saleable only if the Spanish wines with which it was typically mixed were truly excellent (21). This judgment of the latest vintage was shared by other correspondents. Lawton was also able to inform Hugh Lawton, Jr., that the credit of the latter's Bordeaux correspondents remained sound—a valuable piece of information in a business climate even more uncertain and risky than usual (83).

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[253] Hylton, *Ireland's Huguenots*, 126.

[254] J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, commerce, and history: essays on political thought &history, chiefly in the eighteenth century* (Cambridge, 1985), 50.

Much of James Babe's business correspondence deals with problems of settling accounts with correspondents in Galway. Babe thanks William Clancey for covering a bill of exchange for £200 which he had drawn on William White of Galway, but which the latter had been unable to pay. Babe was grateful to Clancey for 'taking up my Said bill for my honnour', that is, covering the unpaid bill and thereby preserving Babe's credit. Babe's debt to Clancey was cleared via a payment from the banking house of Kane & La Touche of Dublin, covered in turn by a bill on Babe in France (24). Babe had other troubles with a bill drawn on John Mills of Galway, which the latter was unable to honour. Mills owed him over twenty-one thousand livres tournois (a little under £1000). Babe sent a power of attorney to Anthony French, another Galway merchant, in hopes of getting a temporary settlement from Mills in the form of interest-bearing paper (56, 96).

The correspondence of another writer in the wine trade, Jacques Horish, has the character of a commercial circular. All of his letters contain similar information and serve both to keep channels of communications open with his Irish correspondents and to tout for business. Horish notes that he has a substantial quantity of red and white wine, 'fin'd, rack'd, & in very good order for Sale or Shipping' (30). He suggests that old wine such as his will sell well in the coming winter and spring owing to the dreadful quality of the most recent vintage, a view also shared by Thomas Barton's clerk, John Thomson (7). Adding to the 'circular' quality of his letters, he includes information which might be of interest to his correspondents concerning prices of a number of commodities important in the Franco-Irish trade: beef, tallow, butter and brandy. Horish had hoped to ship samples of his wine to Dublin on board the *Two Sisters* but had been unable to get

Captain Dennis to accept a single barrel, preference being given to the friends of the ship's owners—a complaint echoed in other merchant correspondence (38, 65).

Consumer goods

While the letters offer only a limited access to the trade that persisted between Ireland and Bordeaux in the early phase of the war, they open other perspectives on the flow of desirable consumer goods—especially items sent by friends and relatives for the personal use of their correspondents. Requests of this sort crop up frequently in the letters. Many of the commodities correspondents requested from Ireland were prosaic items for everyday use. Mary Barry asked for needles (15); Francis Silvester Bird for 'a few white waistcoats for summer' (12); John Bradshaw for 'two pair of shoes' (91). Denis Kelly pleaded for 'a litle linen for to make some shirts', claiming that linen was both expensive and coarse in Toulouse (23, 52). Linen manufacture became a leading sector of the Irish economy in the eighteenth century with exports growing from less than half a million yards in 1698 to forty million yards by the 1790s, yet it is unclear why linen should be so expensive in Toulouse as to warrant its import from Ireland and, as for coarseness, several correspondents specifically requested bandle cloth, a coarse linen fabric that was a traditional product of Munster linen manufacture.[255] J. MacGuire insisted that if his cousin were sent to France to study for the priesthood that he bring 'sixteen shirts of the whitest bandlcloath' (50); John O'Shea also requested bandle cloth shirts (101). Perhaps we are dealing here with a consumer preference for a known and trusted commodity. Several Bordeaux correspondents also requested butter from Ireland, which might imply a hankering for the taste of home or simply the inferior quality of what was available locally (24, 51, 114).

But many of the goods correspondents requested from Ireland were of a different order, less items of necessity than comforts, conveniences and minor luxuries. Recent work on popular consumption suggests the eighteenth century was a period when the spending habits of ordinary urban men and women shifted significantly, when conveniences and comforts came to absorb a larger portion of popular budgets, and when 'populuxe' items such as watches, umbrellas, cosmetics, tea services, and prints—cheap versions of goods previously the province of the well-to-do—came to be more widely distributed.[256] J. Geraghty Duffey wanted jacket buttons from his friend Ned Clinton in Dublin (25). Ann Nulty, on behalf of her employer Mrs. Gernon, asked for Nottingham ware—dark brown, salt-glaze ceramics made in the British midlands. Her request included baking dishes, teapots, mugs, and vessels for sauce. For herself, Nulty asked for toys to give to the children she took care of: 'an alle baster baby . . . naked of a bout 2 shillings price for my pretty molly' (58), and 'a few whipping tops . . . for my 2 littel boys that I have here' (123).

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[255] Dickson, *Old World colony*, 208. On the linen industry generally, see Cullen, *Economic history*; and W. H. Crawford, 'The rise of the linen industry', in L. M. Cullen (ed.), *The formation of the Irish economy* (Cork, 1969), 23–35.

[256] John Brewer and Roy Porter, (eds.), *Consumption and the world of goods* (London, 1993); Roche, *History of everyday things*. Recent work on consumption in eighteenth-century

The presence of 'populuxe' items was even more marked in the goods passing from France to Ireland. Such minor luxuries sought from France, or sent to Dublin on the *Two Sisters*, included stockings, candlesticks, artificial flowers, and coffee pots, buckles, lace, gloves, and hair bags—small silk bags, tied with a drawstring, used to restrain the ends of a wig at the nape of the neck (51). J. B. Nairac promised his cousin John that Captain Dennis would bring him a sword and an ornamental crest (worn in a lady's hair and usually made of ostrich feathers). Two pendants would follow later, Nairac having sent to Paris for them (99). The *Two Sisters* also carried perfume and cosmetics, as the inventory ordered by the admiralty court shows. Nicholas MacInerheny sent his sister-in-law, the widow Collin, six pairs of gloves at a cost of four livres, and a capuchin—a hooded cape named for its likeness to the robes worn by capuchin friars. He details the materials purchased to make the garment: three and a quarter ells of drugget (a heavy woollen fabric sometimes with an admixture of silk or linen), three ells of lining material, and some black lace. The price of the materials, at over fifty livres, far outweighed the cost of the labour, a mere four livres, ten sols. This was an expensive garment, but hardly a true luxury (27).

Edible French delicacies also figure in the letters. Jean-Baptiste Réaud sent traditional products of the French south and southwest—olives, provençal plums, and nuts—as a gift for the wife of John Connor, with whom his son Alexis was boarding in Dublin (109). Similar wares were requested by John Dennis's wife, Mary, who may have run a shop. She advised her husband that raisins, prunes, nuts and olives, along with fine and coarse paper would find a ready market (42, 43). More ambitiously, Meade & Bonfield of Bordeaux shipped 'two Perigueuse Turkeys stuft with trufles', for the account of Frederick Gore, though they worried that the birds would have putrefied before arriving in Dublin, being dead nearly two weeks. Another ship would deliver half a dozen bottles of truffles preserved in oil (60). Robert Hutchinson promised to try to find the two squirrels John Gore had requested, but regretted that the five partridge he

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Ireland has tended to focus on the well-to-do, the middling or poorer classes being more difficult to study systematically because of a dearth of sources. See, notably, Toby Barnard, *Making the grand figure: lives and possessions in Ireland, 1641–1770* (New Haven, 2004).

had for him had 'Gave up y^{e} Gost' (61).

Notable among the consumer purchases of eighteenth-century men and women of the 'middling sort' were cultural products: books, newspapers, musical instruments, and prints.[257] One sees elements of this form of consumption in the letters too. Denis Kelly in Toulouse asked John Carny for a few English books, complaining that his English had deteriorated (23). Jacques Bourbon's father refused to send his son any French reading matter, telling him to concentrate on developing his English language skills instead (16). Captain Dennis carried some Catholic missals and breviaries to Dublin on behalf of a Father Butler, presumably the 'large red Morocco Gilt Book entitled Missale Romanum' and '4 smaller books Entitled Brevarium Romanum' identified in the admiralty court inventory (125).[258] Mary Barry asked Kitty Black for some sheet music (15). Perhaps the most unusual cultural product mentioned in the letters is the peep box [*optique*] Cadiche Réaud describes in a letter to his brother Alexis, 'a machine in which there are two small glasses at the end, and a tilted mirror on the inside'. A peep box was a device used to view specially made colour prints called perspective views, often depicting cityscapes or historical panoramas. The peep box both magnified the image and gave the viewer the impression of three-dimensionality. Viewers could enjoy the illusion for a fee at fairs or street entertainments, though the comfortable could also purchase these devices and the accompanying prints. Réaud mentions a price of 30 livres for the *optique*, a comparatively modest sum equivalent to the yearly cost of a newspaper subscription (108).

Absence of comment on course of war

Such fripperies seem far from the brutal reality of the war being waged in Europe, in America, and on the seas in the spring of 1757. Yet a distinctive characteristic of the letters is the modest place the war holds in them. Few of the letters give any indication of personal attitudes towards the fighting. William Barry's reference to 'these miserable wars' in a letter to his sister in Co. Cork stands out for its implied indictment of the fighting (3). In a letter to her brother William in Dublin, Janneton Darquier wishes an end to the war, which she characterizes euphemistically as 'sete grande gene [cette grande gêne]' (40). Jacob Sandilands's 'we all long Much for a peace' (117) may have expressed the aspiration of many of the correspondents, but few actually said as much. There are no references in the letters to battles, troop movements, victories, or defeats. References to the naval war are confined to privateering, and even these are few—just five mentions (three from a single writer), all made briefly and in passing. ‘Since your departure there has been a Considarable Prize taken & brought into this River of five hundred tuns burthen & ten Cannons by the petit furett of four cannons’, William McCline tells Sandy Brown in a letter devoted to other matters (19). Jacques Horish mentions in his letter to John Connor ‘Some privateers $gett^{g}$. ready to cruise, & a few Stout ones on the Stocks’ (30), and makes similar observations in letters to Peter and Richard Curtis (37, 38). But his focus is on the wine business and general conditions of trade.

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[257] Colin Campbell, *The romantic ethic and the spirit of modern consumerism* (Oxford, 1987).

[258] Appendix VII, p. 293.

There are several possible explanations for this reticence. The letters were written mostly in February and early March 1757, months after the end of the 1756 campaigning season and before the season of 1757 had begun. Thus there was little immediately to report. Bordeaux did not have a naval arsenal, so discussion of naval affairs was likely to focus on privateering. One might be tempted to conclude that such ordinary men and women simply were not interested in grand questions of war and peace, though such a conclusion is belied by a good deal of research on eighteenth-century popular politics over the last few decades.[259] A more likely explanation is that such concerns were simply foreign to the purposes for which the letters were written: to sustain contact among the distant branches of families and among friends; to relay requests for goods or favours; and to communicate commercial news or business matters.

Another factor limiting the discussion of the war, and of high politics more generally, was likely self-censorship. Correspondents could not be sure that their letters would stay out of the hands of the authorities, and the position of the Irish factory in Bordeaux was sensitive to say the least. ‘It’s not proper or prudent to hint news’, Horish remarks, though he could not help remarking on the ‘many privateers fitting out’ (37). Other correspondents echoed this caution. ‘[T]ake special care that your letters might contain nothing that would not bear reading in London or Paris’, warned J. MacGuire (50). William Cunningham concurred: ‘I dare not say any More as I believe this letter will be opened before it reaches you’, he added after a brief reference to the greatest public event of the day, Robert-François Damiens’s failed attempt to assassinate Louis

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[259] David Bell, ‘Jumonville’s death: war propaganda and national identity in eighteenth-century France’, *The age of cultural revolution: Britain and France, 1750–1820*, ed. Colin Jones and Dror Wahrman (Berkeley, 2002); Bob Harris, ‘“American idols”: empire, war and the middling ranks in mid-eighteenth-century Britain’, *Past and Present*, no. 150 (Feb. 1996); John Shovlin, ‘Selling American empire on the eve of the Seven Years War: the French propaganda campaign of 1755–1756’, *Past and Present* (Feb 2010); Kathleen Wilson, *The sense of the people: politics, culture, and imperialism in England, 1715–1785* (Cambridge, 1995).

XV in January 1757 (3). John Black was less reticent, relaying to his son James the rumour that the assassination attempt had been directed by the Jesuits. Black described Damiens as the tool of Ignatius of Loyola and compared him to François Ravaillac, the Catholic zealot who assassinated Louis XV's ancestor, Henri IV, in 1610. Black incautiously set the Damiens affair within the context of political struggles over the enforcement of the papal bull *Unigenitus*, directed against Jansenism, which ranged the Jesuits against Jansenists sitting in the thirteen French parlements (13). But such forthright remarks about politics are highly uncharacteristic of the letters in general.

Prisoners of war in France

The clearest perspective on the war comes in letters sent by Irish prisoners in France. Predictably, getting home was their chief concern. Richard Exham, imprisoned in Bayonne Castle, complained to his correspondents, Ardouin & Son of Cork, about an anticipated prisoner exchange that had fallen through (2). Exham had expected to be exchanged for one Salles, a French prisoner in Bandon whom Exham's Irish friends had treated well, hoping to swap him for their countryman. Later Exham discovered that Salles had escaped from Bandon and returned to Bayonne without coming to see him in prison. Exham's hopes were now set on a cartel, or formal diplomatic convention, for the exchange of prisoners between the French and British governments, an expectation which would be disappointed as no such agreement was reached during the Seven Years' War. It was never in the British government's interest to sign a cartel as there was such a huge disproportion between the number of British subjects imprisoned in France and French naval prisoners held in the British Isles.[260]

More fortunate was the position of John Besnard, taken prisoner when the *Peggy* of Cork was captured by the Bayonne privateer *Ross* on 17 December 1756 on a voyage home from Portugal. Besnard was bailed by a friend, Jacques Sauvage of Bordeaux, and came to stay in the latter's home until an exchange could be arranged (63). His prospects seemed good. Among the several French prisoners at Kinsale, he told his father, 'I dont doubt but you may make Interest enough to gett one Exchanged for me' (9). Advised no doubt by Sauvage, who had an official role in arranging exchanges, Besnard was highly specific about the technicalities of the business: any French prisoner to be exchanged for him must make a written declaration as to the vessel he was taken on, and by whom, which port he was taken into, and that his release was conditional on the release of Besnard. This kind of exchange, whereby one specific prisoner was exchanged for another named individual was the predominant form of prisoner exchange practised for individuals taken in the naval war.

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[260] On prisoner exchange and the politics linked to it, see Olive Anderson, 'The establishment of British supremacy at sea and the exchange of naval prisoners of war, 1689–1783', *English Historical Review,* 75, no. 294 (1960), 77–89; and Alain Cabantous, 'Gens de mer, guerre et prison: la captivité des gens de mer au XVIII^{e} siècle', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine,* 28, no. 2 (1981), 246–67.

The situation of another prisoner in Bayonne Castle, William Nassau Fleming, was also more promising than Exham's; he too had been bailed. 'I have now the joyful news to send you', he told William Hutchinson, 'of the offer maid me last post from the Merch^{ts} in Bordoux, my Owners friends to Remove me to there Country House 6 Miles from Bordoux'. From that much happier situation, Fleming hoped 'to get Exchang'd for some prisoner in Ireland'. Even if he failed, he remarked, 'my Bondage will be light by Injoying the pleasures of one of the Most Delightfull Countries in the World' (71).

The letters also contain valuable information on conditions of imprisonment in Bayonne, though here they must be interpreted with caution. Exham estimated there were five hundred men imprisoned with him in 'this filthy Castle', while Fleming put the number at six hundred. Communication with Ireland was relatively easy. Exham claimed that over one hundred Irish letters had reached prisoners between the end of the first week of January and the middle of February; a common sailor he knew had personally received eleven, via Rotterdam, from friends in Kinsale (48). Fleming assured his sweetheart Elizabeth Vashon that conditions in the castle were not so bad for men like himself with a little money to spend: 'we have Beds & Rooms that we hiar (a part from the common prisoners) has fiars Candle light & commandors in a Roome lives merry'. Fleming also claimed the prisoners were healthy and had the use of two large courts for exercise and 'a Billiard table to play at' (124). This account contrasts markedly with the dismal reputation of Bayonne Castle generally, and it may be that Fleming was self-censoring in order to ensure the prison authorities did not stop his letter. Such was the situation of an American prisoner, Samuel Bard, who told his father in 1761 that the castle was 'at present very healthy', and the victuals 'good in their kind'. Subsequent correspondence, which left his hands without passing through those of the prison commandant, offered a bleaker account.[261] All the prisoners complained of being exploited by their gaolers. Exham claimed his captors used their position to extort money from the prisoners, 'fleeceing us in every Shape and Makeing us pay mostly on every article we have Three hundred per Ct' (2). Fleming confirmed this account, remarking that nothing could be brought into the prison without paying a hefty surcharge (94). A similar experience of being exploited while imprisoned in Bayonne was related by the Quaker diarist John Griffith, who was captured by a French privateer toward the end of the previous conflict.[262]

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[261] See John M'Vickar, *A domestic narrative of the life of Samuel Bard* (New York, 1822), 16.

The heavy personal and familial costs imposed by the war come across most poignantly in a letter from Robert Moore, a prisoner at La Réole, about thirty miles upriver from Bordeaux, to his wife Mary in Cork. In a previous letter, Moore's wife had told him of being evicted from her lodgings, to which Moore could only reply that 'had I my Liberty you Should not want a Roome to Goe to'. His hopes, like those of Exham, were set on a cartel; he believed he had no other prospects of getting home. His situation was the more pitiful as he had apparently been imprisoned during the previous war, though he affirmed that 'This Time I have ben heur is more Troble to me then all y^{e} Eight Year I was Confined Close y^{e} Last warr & all is on acc^{t} of y^{e} Toble itt Gives me upon y^{r} acc^{t} & my Child' (97). Here, as in the three letters written from the *Caesar*, we see the something of the humanity and the sentimental life of an ordinary seafaring man.

Conclusion

The Irish prisoners in France were part of the same merchant world as so many of the other correspondents—this is the principal reason their letters ended up in the mail bag of the *Two Sisters*. They were actors in a social sphere the contours of which are discernible in the letters as a whole. This was a realm created and sustained by trade around the eastern fringes of the Atlantic—trade in French wines and brandies, in Irish beef and butter. It was a predominantly Catholic world—one through which Irish seminarians passed on their way to an education in France—though one in which Protestants also played a large and crucial role. It was an Irish world, though one where French men and women had an important place, and in which identities could be flexible and expansive. Women had their province here too, as wives and mothers, retailers and consumers, servants and lovers. Most of all we see a social fabric held together and organized by bonds of family—bonds sustained by letters such as those carried by Captain Dennis. These letters never reached their destination, no doubt to the frustration and chagrin of those they were intended to connect. Their loss however is our great gain, as they open to us a perspective on eighteenth-century Irish life drawn to a very human scale. [JS]

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[262] *A journal of the life, travels, and labours in the work of the ministry, of John Griffith* (London, 1779), 82.