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The Politics of Honor in Lady Ranelagh's Ireland

Ruth Connolly

Ireland does not come out well in the letters of Lady Katherine Ranelagh (1615–91). She strove to shape its economic and spiritual conditions for over half a century, but in her letters she refers to Ireland as “that country” or, in sympathetic mood, “that poore country.”¹ Unlike her brothers, the natural philosopher Robert Boyle or the politician Roger, First Earl of Orrery, she never writes of “our poore country” or “my Countrey.”² Yet her Irish origins were well known enough that, in the only mention of Ranelagh’s nationality in any surviving correspondence, she is described by Samuel Hartlib, a German Prussian emigré, to his correspondent John Winthrop as an “incomparable lady of Irish extraction,” meaning here of Irish “origin, lineage, descent.”³ So why is Ireland “that country”? My argument here is that Ireland is crucial to her identity but as a place against which she constructs herself as measured and reasoned, a persona Ranelagh called that of a “wise man.” These acts of rhetorical self-distancing from Ireland’s ill-governed spaces (which were not continuous with the whole of Ireland itself) enabled Ranelagh to create an ethnically inflected defense of her decision to separate from her estranged husband, the New English peer Arthur Jones, Viscount Ranelagh. As she strove to safeguard her personal and familial honor, endangered by her decision openly to separate from him, she cast her husband as unequivocally Irish and mapped his dishonorable conduct onto preexisting assumptions about treachery, disorder, and inadequacy among the “native” Irish. Her struggle to separate from Arthur were concurrent with her efforts to affirm Ireland’s political status as a colony in

permanent need of rule by “the English”. Her history vividly illustrates how gendered experience can inform a colonial enterprise and vice-versa.

In Ranelagh’s correspondence, her ideal vision of a potential Ireland—Anglicized and secured for the Protestant faith—emerges against and relies on a reading of Ireland as a porous space of “plots,” “fixtion,” and fantasies of power. The latter space becomes irremediably associated with Arthur, who has taken on his “native” country’s coloring. Indeed, “native” here means a set of behaviors as much as a place of birth. Ranelagh presents these behaviors as requiring condemnation and reform, not toleration or acceptance. Ranelagh thus exploits the slipperiness of identity with which Ireland was associated to designate Arthur as one of those settlers who have corrupted or have been corrupted by Ireland, who have failed in moral and material improvement, and who need to be brought to “reason.” She represents his failure as one of honor, touching on a particularly vulnerable point for the New English in Ireland.⁴ Ranelagh’s rhetorical insistence that she did not belong to “that country” is then based on the argument that Ireland and its inadequate governors violated the standards of behavior to which she held herself but to which it needed to be brought to conform. Arthur served as the paradigmatic example of a governor gone native. Ireland-as-Arthur and Arthur-as-Ireland becomes crucial to Ranelagh’s own justification for keeping her moral and geographic distance from both country and husband. The gendered experience of marriage in which a wife is governed rather than governor is thus challenged by invoking an ethnic hierarchy that legitimized her disruption of that relationship.

Settler Identity in Early Modern Ireland

John Kerrigan’s thoughtful comment about Ranelagh’s brother Orrery, that “history and place foster[s in him] an archipelagic sensibility that is more than Irish or English and not yet Anglo-Irish” is a useful place to begin to think about the political and confessional dynamics behind

Ranelagh's relationship with Ireland.⁵ Ranelagh's generation were the offspring of settlers who had arrived in Ireland as part of plantations of the late sixteenth century. She was the daughter of Richard, later First Earl of Cork, one of the most effective of that wave of English settlers, and his Irish-born wife Catherine, the daughter of Sir Geoffrey Fenton. With Edmund Spenser, Fenton had arrived in the train of the lord deputy Arthur, Lord Grey, in 1580 and rapidly rose to become one of the country's most influential policy makers, as his son-in-law became one of its wealthiest magnates. Ciarán Brady and Jane Ohlmeyer summarize the settlers' goal as making "a little England in Ireland," and maintaining their distinctive confessional and national identity was imperative to the task.⁶ The settlers were expected to introduce the material civility that, combined with the spiritual advantages of Protestantism, would eventually transform the whole island in landscape, manners, and confession.⁷ The simplicity of this vision of reform did not survive contact with the realities of attempting to achieve it, and Ranelagh's generation had, in addition, to begin to grapple with questions of whether their identity was, in the words of Toby Barnard, "colonial, provincial or a special Hibernian hybrid."⁸ Some members of the "English in Ireland" or of the "English and Protestant interest in Ireland" (the self-descriptions that occasionally occur in some of this generation's writings) could readily reconcile an identity as native of Ireland with being English and Protestant. Ranelagh's exact contemporary, Dublin-born Arthur Annesley, First Earl of Anglesey, wrote feelingly in his manuscript history of Ireland of his obligations to his "native country," which led him to be "cordially desirous that the place of my birth should be as much English and Protestant as the stock and country from whence I came."¹⁰ Annesley's separation of national identity from geographic space suggests the former is both portable and secure, resistant to the assimilation of any influence from Ireland's notoriously enfeebling material and moral environment.

Ranelagh's letters, which date from between 1642 and 1690, repeatedly return to the same goal as Annesley's: how to reform and govern Ireland in the English Protestant interest. This is a persistent topic in this half century of correspondence, sometimes glanced at in half lines, sometimes the focus of entire exchanges, and she grapples in those exchanges with the questions of who, and what, comprises the English Protestant interest. Over this half century the nature of the English Protestant interest was molded and riven by the political and religious dynamics of Three Kingdoms. Waves of "New Protestants" entered Ireland in the 1640s and 1650s either at the instigation of Parliament or with Oliver Cromwell's forces, and their claims to land and political power posed a threat not only to the estates of settled "Old Protestants" (the new name for the 1580s planters and their descendants) but to the royalist government restored in 1660. Attempts to maintain a de facto unity led occasionally to the use of the term "British Protestant subjects," as Orrery did in 1662, when he used the term strategically as a blanket term for the loyal settler class in Ireland.¹¹ This, as he later acknowledged, concealed the significant doctrinal divides between Scottish and English Protestantisms, whose political consequences, bitterly experienced across the Three Kingdoms in the 1640s, continued to trouble Irish Restoration politics.¹² The Duke of Ormonde, the restored king's governing representative, was the Protestant head of a largely Catholic Old English family, who had loyally gone in exile with Charles II. For Ormonde, the divide was royalist versus nonroyalist rather than Catholic versus Protestant, a political divide that no appeal to confessional unity might bridge. These fissures, and the problems of how negotiate them, come clearly into view across the history of Ranelagh's writing about Ireland. She was a committed Cromwellian of "Old Protestant" stock whose vision of Ireland as an improved, Anglicized space was materially exemplified by the Boyle family's vast holdings in Munster and whose tolerationist vision of Protestantism was informed by the

need for settlers to maintain a common denominational front against Catholicism in Ireland. Ranelagh's personal and political negotiations of the settler imperatives of civility, Anglicization, and reform were closely informed by her gendered experience of government in Ireland.

Political and Domestic Collapses in Ireland

From her childhood Ranelagh's experience of transition between England and Ireland was closely linked with reputation-damaging and emotionally taxing movements between changing marital statuses. She was born in Ireland and lived there until the age of nine, when she was sent by her father to live in England at the home of a proposed husband; the match eventually collapsed over demands for a larger dowry, and she was summoned home, aged fifteen, her father complaining she "had lost the foundation of religion and civility wherein she was first educated."¹³ Having been swiftly married to Arthur, she then lived between England and Ireland for a decade but departed with fellow refugees in 1642, after the outbreak of the Irish rebellion threatened the settlers' control of the island. She was in Ireland again in 1656, but after her final break with her husband she moved permanently to England in 1659; the surviving record indicates she returned only once more for her husband's funeral in 1670. The first failed match that entailed a return to Ireland is thus mirrored by a failed marriage that sees her move to England, returning again, once widowed. Her decisions to leave Ireland in 1642 and 1658 prompted her to write defenses of her conduct that segue into larger political reflections on the characteristics of governors in, and of, Ireland. The letters, addressed to her father and her brother, respectively, reveal how these moments of leave-taking become sites for Ranelagh's negotiations of the gendered experience of patriarchal and political power within an Irish context.

The first letter, addressed to her father, is dated December 26, 1642, and written just before she sailed from Dublin, following her negotiated release from the besieged garrison town of Athlone.¹⁴ Ranelagh portrays herself as leaving Ireland impoverished and angry, with the Irish ship of state about to run aground. Athlone had been under the command of her father-in-law, Roger Jones, Viscount Ranelagh, but the town itself had been partially occupied by the Catholic Irish commander Sir James Dillon and the townspeople and soldiers forced back into the castle. Ranelagh described her experience in Athlone briefly as a “most miserable captivity.” More detail is provided by the lengthy deposition of the curate Thomas Fleetwood, which reported brutal killings within Athlone itself; random attacks on women, children, and soldiers who went outside the garrison walls to gather food; the murder of a Protestant minister, Mr. Burton, and the expulsion of his wife and children from the town, “which Children (as this deponent was credibly informed) perished and dyed”; and the fate of one English woman, sent by Viscount Ranelagh to carry a letter from Athlone to Dublin, who was subsequently captured and then “stoned” to death by women in the town.¹⁵ ¹⁰⁰Nonetheless, Ranelagh’s departure with at least one of her children from Athlone on Dillon’s promise of safe conduct, “which indeed he kept with mee most punctually and civilly,” did not, she assured Cork, mean she had a “confidence in, or a kindness for the rebelles.”¹⁶ Rather, the “sperit and the interest both my bloud and religion [gives] me in this cause” would have led her to refuse had she not been compelled to accept because “those by whom I am governed thought that the best way I could come by.” For herself, she told Cork, the siege conditions, the difficult and disobliging company she found at Athlone, the sufferings of “the English” in the town, and the opportunity of advocating for them at Dublin all prompted her to accept the safe conduct. Ranelagh’s nervousness that she might be deemed a

¹⁰⁰ Okay to divide the paragraph here for easier readability? Yes.

collaborator by her father, who had just lost his son, Viscount Kinalmeaky, at the battle of Liscarroll, is revealing of how unstable loyalties had become.¹⁷ Her letter continues with a fierce reassertion of the importance of the Boyle family's role within Ireland.¹⁸ Her praise of the First Earl's commitment to "this bleeding and well neere ruined commonwealth, which is already soe destetute of any that seriously take its distractions to hart" is accompanied by a condemnation of the disputing factions at Dublin who are unable or unwilling to take heed of her pleas to relieve Athlone: "I find those who sitt at the helme here, soe ill advised as to let the generall good fall to the ground between their perticular dissentions, that I am not able to endure it any longer then I can prepare myself to goe for [the English port] Chester, where I intend to settle my selfe in a way of living suteable to that fortune that it has pleased god to reduce me to, and in which I humbly thanke him I find as much satisfaction, as ever I did in a more plentyfull one."

Her reversal of settler narratives of "improvement" point to failings that stretch from the private household to Dublin Castle and from which she, in principled frustration, will remove herself. The narrative and tropes that underlie Ranelagh's subsequent representations of Ireland emerge clearly in this letter. Her natal family are cast as self-sacrificial, principled, and honorable, while other settlers in Ireland, especially the administration at Dublin and perhaps those who "governed" Ranelagh—her husband and father-in-law—have proved unable to unite to defend it or succor the vulnerable "English" inhabitants of Athlone. Some have degenerated to the point where a Catholic rebel has a greater care for Protestant women and children. The vulnerabilities of women and children to physical, material, and reputational damage through errors of judgment by male governors is a powerful subtext. Her departure from Ireland means the loss of material wealth, but the accompanying gain in spiritual riches is expressed through another of Ranelagh's favored rhetorical strategies: a triumphant resignation to God's will that

introduces the aspects of choice and agency that are otherwise missing from her experience.

Sixteen years later, back in Ireland, as the Three Kingdoms rapidly approached another set of political convulsions following Oliver Cromwell's death, Ranelagh returns to the same themes of failed local and household governance as a metonym for failed public governance, with women and children again the principal victims, this time using her estranged husband as the illustrative example.

Sometime in the late 1650s Ranelagh permanently left her husband's household and returned with her daughters to the main seat of the Earls of Cork at Lismore to live with her brother Richard, the Second Earl. The ensuing tensions are evident in a letter sent by Richard to Arthur and surviving in a copy in Ranelagh's hand. It presents a dispute between two male heads of household that pivots on the question of female obedience to their fathers and husbands. The letter is not about Ranelagh's marriage, however, but about Arthur's failure to conclude ongoing marriage negotiations probably for the Ranelaghs' second daughter, Elizabeth, because Arthur, as Richard put it to him, "should be very loath to preffer daughters that would not be obedient as you feared." The direct and irate tone, a relative rarity in Ranelagh's autograph letters but often characteristic of Richard's suggests the letter is principally his composition, though the explicit expression of ill feeling toward Arthur probably reflects both siblings' attitudes. Richard argued forcefully on behalf of his niece, bringing the weight of his own standing as peer and family head to bear on his recalcitrant brother-in-law: "and what you intend by your loathnes to prefer daughters that wil not be obedient is another kindle to me since [she] has your Lordship's consent under your hand to my Lord Lieutenant for her stay with her mother."²⁰ Richard's attempt to compel Arthur to act as he wished positioned Arthur as a subservient member within the extended Boyle dynasty under the command of its head. This relied on a practice begun by

Ranelagh's father. Nicholas Canny, the biographer of the First Earl, noted that Cork sought to have his daughters Alice and Joan "focus their loyalty on himself as head of a kinship group rather than on their husbands as heads of their respective households."²¹ Arthur is positioned as a rebel within his wife's family rather than an independent head of household who might expect to find his demands for wifely or daughterly obedience reinforced. Ranelagh's separation was unquestionably eased by her brothers' emphatic support of her; their actions reinforced her position within her natal family and resisted the expectations of her role as Arthur's wife. Yet this proved insufficient to defend her reputation and actions, and as Arthur is edged toward the boundaries of the Boyle family, Ranelagh expressly codes his behavior as dishonorable, the action of an "Irish breed."²² This attack on her husband's honor is the crucial step that enables Ranelagh to map the newly drawn divisions between her and Arthur onto an ethnic distinction that reverses the hierarchy between them.

Land without Honor?

Ranelagh's strategy sought to position Arthur as resistant to reason and in need of correction by English courts and English governors. Exploiting doubts about how honor was practiced in Ireland provided Ranelagh with the means to contest her marriage and secure her reputation. She pursued this strategy through appeals to the most senior government officials in England: first, the lord protectors, Oliver and Richard Cromwell, and later the vice-chancellor, Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon. That this was interpreted as something more than a local dispute, and as having implications for the wider government of Ireland, is suggested by the exchanges of letters about the separation and settlement between the Duke of Ormonde, the lord lieutenant of Ireland, and Clarendon. The latter's unequivocal view of Arthur as deeply dishonorable was countered by Ormonde's refusal to countenance any proposition to order Arthur to travel to England, including

refusing a royal letter of summons. It is unsurprising that he proved so resistant to Ranelagh's claims of domestic dishonor; for him, as for Ranelagh, these claims mapped directly onto a partisan and highly politicized vision of how, and by whom, Ireland should be governed.

In Richard Cust's brilliant definition, honor "reflected the ways in which individuals were evaluated in the eyes of the societies to which they felt they belonged."²³ Competitions over honor were competitions to maintain or assert power and status. Nor were they solely individual: the "collective honor" of a household, family, or larger community hung on their adherence to mutually maintained standards. In an illuminating study of early modern honor politics in Ireland, Brendan Kane has characterized the culture of honor in Ireland as subject to a unique set of tensions stemming from the rapidly acquired wealth and perceived religious and ethnic superiority of comparatively lowborn groups of English settlers, and the native and Old English nobility, better-born but typically handicapped by Catholicism.²⁴ In his analysis of the variety of languages of honor practiced and experienced in Ireland, Kane argues that incoming Crown officials, anxious to assert their rule, used concerns about honor to target New English governors, who often, like Richard Boyle and Roger Jones, originated (at best) from the lower levels of the English gentry classes. Since honor was the principle that underpinned appropriate behavior in both domestic and public spaces, internal family relationships proved a useful if controversial theater of action when reinforcing "English" standards of civility among the New English.¹⁰¹

In 1636 a threat by the Irish lord chancellor, Adam Loftus, to disinherit his eldest son in the context of a dowry dispute provided an opportunity for the then newly arrived lord deputy, Viscount Wentworth, to assert his authority by publicly lecturing Loftus in the honorable

¹⁰¹ Okay to divide the paragraph here for easier readability? Yes. If not, notes 24 and 25 should be combined.

treatment of his offspring. Wentworth's actions encoded presumptions about honor as it was practiced in an Irish context that justified a political governor's challenge to an Irish peer's paternal authority over his dependents, something Kane suggests could "only seem possible in an Irish context; only there where the nobility were already suspect in honor, civility and loyalty."²⁵ Ormonde's refusal to intervene when Clarendon made a similar demand some thirty years later asserts his capacity, as the king's representative and the head of an Old English family of impeccable lineage and only-too-recently demonstrated loyalty, to determine honorable behavior. Ormonde's main aim may have been to deliver a firm rebuff to Ranelagh's principal advocate, Orrery, Ormonde's most significant political rival in Ireland, but his action also asserted an identity between standards of honor in England and Ireland and the capacity of Ireland's governors, in his person, to reinforce that standard. This domestic clash reveals two different visions of Ireland and how it should be governed, as kingdom (Ormonde) or as colony (Ranelagh), and sheds light on the ongoing tensions within the Protestant communities in Ireland..

That Ranelagh was relying heavily on the principle that English government officials might continue to intervene to correct recalcitrant Irish peers in their household affairs, is revealed in the letter she wrote to Orrery, then Lord Broghill, almost a fortnight after Cromwell's death in 1658. It is not clear when Ranelagh's initial link with Cromwell was established, but it was firmly consolidated by the time Broghill was serving in Cromwell's government. Broghill's biographer, Patrick Little, notes that Ranelagh acted as Broghill's personal intermediary with Cromwell while she lived in England and Roger in Ireland. Writing from Lismore, she tells Broghill, himself newly arrived in Ireland, of her intention to leave and "seeke a maintenance for me and my children" from Arthur through private petition to Richard Cromwell in England.²⁷

Such private settlements were in England “a tried and tested mechanism familiar since at least the time of Queen Elizabeth” and functioned as an often preferred alternative to formal separation *a mensa et thoro*, which could be granted only by the now defunct ecclesiastical courts.²⁸ Roger had brought a letter with him from London from Oliver Cromwell, seemingly intended for Arthur. Ranelagh noted that the “persuasions and advice” Cromwell supplied were aimed at “bringing him [Arthur] to reason either here or there.” But Cromwell was dead, and with him any hope of a resolution: “his now highness [Richard Cromwell] seemes not to me soe proper a person to summon my lord [Arthur], or deal with him in such an affayre, as his father did, from whose authorety and severety against such practices as my lord’s are, I thought the uttmost would be done.”³⁰ Some sixteen years after her letter to her father, Ranelagh once again teeters on the brink of an undeserved reputational disaster, one that could be avoided only by accepting personal poverty and the loss of her daughter’s marriage as its price.

The letter articulates very precisely what Ranelagh understood as the action necessary to safeguard her own reputation. Within the letter she reveals she had petitioned Oliver Cromwell about acquiring some leases of land that would have established a propertied relationship to Ireland in her own right. This in fact forms the major motivation for leaving. She had, she wrote, no reason to remain, as Cromwell’s death and the consequent uselessness of his letter “takes away what engagement lay upon me to stay in this country [Ireland], in expectation of what effects its delivery would produce.” Losing the leases ensures her dependence on her brothers and thus leaves her in a morally dubious and reputation-damaging environment while she remains in Ireland. Living off the large Boyle rent rolls could not make clear to the world that she left Arthur “upon necessity.” Trusting to a “much experienced providence” in England restores the moral authority of which she is deprived in Ireland.³³ Ranelagh’s resolution of this

dilemma articulates the relationship between women's honor and its relationship to real and symbolic property. Legal disability means Ranelagh cannot hold real property in her own right, yet her actions reinforce Garthine Walker's assessment that "non-sexual morality was a crucial component of women's honour."³⁴ That morality centered on the household, and the good head of household maintained honor by protecting her family's material worth and its moral credit. In her letter Ranelagh stresses that she must provide for her household without sacrificing that moral credit. By leaving Ireland Ranelagh is able to perform a strategic recuperation of this aspect of her honor and safeguard her household. These are the actions, she tells Orrery, of a "wise man" ruled by what "al good laws make my duty, use honest endeavors in order to provideing for myselfe and famelly,". Yet despite this appropriation of a masculine identity, and her renewal of her own agency, Ireland's capacity to disturb and cast doubt on her actions remains intact.³⁵ On the defensive about her reputation and involved in a complicated negotiation between men represented as models of political and personal integrity (herself, her siblings, Oliver Cromwell) and men positioned as their mirror images (her manifestly inadequate husband and the politically and morally feeble new lord protector), Ranelagh sees Ireland as a space that mercilessly exposes any weaknesses of its and England's governors and visits the consequences on those unlucky enough to be governed by them. Yet by conflating questions of domestic and political governance she was also able to use the opposition between Irish and English, governed and governor, to reverse roles with her husband and make herself the head of household.

English Honor and Irish Land

By making her dispute with Arthur principally a question of honor as it was practiced in Ireland, Ranelagh had hit on a seam with rich yields in England but that met considerable resistance in Restoration Ireland. Once in England Ranelagh turned to her brother-in-law, the English peer,

Charles Rich, Earl of Warwick, to harass her husband through law courts.³⁶ She grimly told Richard of Arthur: “he is of an Irish breed which commonly proues fatal to such English as come amongst them.”³⁷ Resonating behind this phrase is the New English contempt for the Old English, who were deemed to have degenerated from their original English stock and become “mere” or pure Irish.³⁸ Ormonde became a crucial figure in resolving the dispute, and Ranelagh sought to utilize some of the moral credit she had accumulated with the Duchess of Ormonde. Ranelagh had considerable influence with Henry Cromwell’s governing council in the 1650s, and she used it to assist the duchess in holding onto the Butler estates when the duke was in exile with Charles II. Clarendon, a fellow royalist exile, told Ormonde that Lord Broghill’s “obligations and civilities to your family haue been very extraordinary, as likewise hath my Lady Ranelagh’s, to whose interests with the present gouernors *the*¹⁰² preservation of *the* fortune is much to be imputed and *the* protection that is now enjoyed.”³⁹ However, as a Boyle with Cromwellian sympathies, Ranelagh was automatically suspect in the eyes of the Ormonde administration and Ranelagh sought to intensify the pressure on Ormonde by bringing the influence of Clarendon, her friend of long standing, to bear on him.⁴⁰ Writing to Ormonde, Clarendon denounced Arthur’s behavior and declared that he “must be the worst man in the world and shee the most unworthily oppressed by him.” In an echo of Wentworth’s intervention, he explicitly accused Arthur of significant breaches of honor, including public lies, failing to provide for his daughters, and “makeing bold with his wifes cabinet,” that is, that Arthur had searched his wife’s papers and correspondence without her permission, which Clarendon found indefensible.⁴² Arthur should, Clarendon advised, “be exposed in his true colours what kind of man he is” and “be sent hither, where no doubt he will be brought to reason” by the English

¹⁰² Italics indicate editorial expansion of abbreviations in the original text.

courts.⁴³ In making these demands, Clarendon mapped H=honor and the proper provision for, protection of, and behavior toward wives and children a onto a hierarchical division between the Irish and English peerage and their systems of honor and justice.

But Clarendon's echo of Ranelagh's own terminology of reason fell on deaf ears. Ormonde declined to dispatch Arthur to England, even after a royal letter of summons was received, claiming Irish parliamentary privilege protected Arthur and citing the latter's ill health and the bad weather as further excuses. These prevarications appalled Clarendon, already angered at Arthur's cavalier rejection of Crown authority, which seemed only to confirm the claims about him.⁴⁴ Ormonde's subsequent appointment of Arthur as a member of the Irish Privy Council in 1667 suggests his own opinion.⁴⁵ Ormonde or his wife appears to have eventually brokered a settlement, and Ormonde wrote dryly to Clarendon that "his Lady may be sure of all just and reasonable satisfaction, and in truth I think shee had receaued it sooner but for the animosity between my Lord of Orrery and her husband."⁴⁶ Ormonde's comment implies Ranelagh's loyalty to her brother rather than her husband is the source of the disorder, the same reasoning Ranelagh feared in 1658, but, crucially, it also firmly grounds the dispute as a local one fostered by internal family politics. Ormonde's refusal to allow issues of Irish honor to be determined elsewhere was making a political point about the efficacy of Ireland's political administration and delivering a rebuff to Orrery. Ranelagh's household dispute was evidently understood by him as inextricably bound up with larger political tensions across the archipelago and within Ireland. Ranelagh's subsequent interventions in Irish politics from London demonstrate her success in securely re-establishing her moral authority and credit on the foundation of Ireland's instability.

Lady Ranelagh's Ireland

Power struggles in Irish politics were increasingly played out in London, where Ranelagh was now the Boyles' preeminent political agent, and her political activity in the 1660s deliberately sought to undermine the decisions of Ormonde's administration at Dublin. Ranelagh observed to Richard in July 1659, having left Ireland five months earlier: "One of *the* misfortunes of *that* place is *that* it seldome lights upon proper Instrum*ents* for *the* worke they have to get donn."⁴⁷ The letter was addressed to Lismore, so her use of the phrase "that place" measures not only her geographic but their mutual moral distance from Ireland's ill-governed spaces. It is moral rather than geographic boundaries that distinguish communities. The implicit point was that Ireland needed to be governed and reformed as Richard governed, reformed, and cultivated his impeccably Anglicized Irish estates.⁴⁸ What this meant was Irish land in reliable and reforming Protestant hands. So while Ranelagh was calling on Ormonde to assist her to a personal settlement with Arthur, she was working in London against his government to support the threatened land titles of two waves of Protestant settlers that had entered Ireland after 1641.

Many post-1641 settlers had come in response to Parliament's attempt to privatize the suppression of the rebellion through an act granting lands expropriated from the rebel Irish to English Protestant "Adventurers" willing to fund the military forces needed to do so. The next wave came in 1649 with Cromwell's army, whose soldiers likewise received pay arrears in expropriated Irish lands. With the restoration of Charles II, all these actions were technically illegal, and all Irish land confiscated since 1641 was vested once more in the monarch. It "could only be divested by decree of the court of claims" staffed by English commissioners and set up by an act of settlement.⁴⁹ These confiscations included lands possessed by the Second Earl of Cork and many others in the larger Boyle affinity. Irish landowners, particularly those who had

remained loyal to the Stuarts, immediately seized the opportunity to demand restitution of their lands from the forces of the Cromwellian “usurpers” and parliamentary “rebels” against the English Crown. This led to fierce protests from the existing proprietors. Ormonde wrote gloomily to Clarendon in early 1663 that “reports of the King’s favouring Papists and the worst of the Irish rebels spreads when any Irishman is restored to his estates.”⁵⁰ In his detailed discussion of the act’s effects on landholding in County Dublin, L. J.¹⁰³ Arnold argues that there was “a deeply held conviction which existed among Protestants that the commissioners of the court . . . were intent on dismantling the entire settlement and that this process must be reversed and the Act of Settlement amended.”⁵¹

Ranelagh emerged as a central figure in coordinating these protests.⁵² She worked to support aggrieved adventurers in petitioning the English government and used her personal influence with Clarendon and his son Henry, Lord Cornbury, to communicate the anger of Ormonde’s opponents. The Irish member of Parliament Dr. Robert Gorges, formerly the clerk of Henry Cromwell’s council and Cromwell’s secretary, wrote from Dublin partly in cipher to Cornbury to tell him that Gorges had through an “enclosure” sent to Ranelagh sought “to present [the] Lord Chancellor [Clarendon] with his thoughts of Ireland” on behalf of a resentful portion of the Irish House of Commons.⁵³ Gorges added that the actions of the commissioners in openly inviting claims to lands had set the House “in a flame.” Gorges was deeply influenced by Ranelagh and continued her work of transmitting the Irish House’s complaints to London through her; Ranelagh’s son Richard wrote to Ormonde’s heir, Lord Ossory, in 1670 to tell him he was “often conversant with Dr Gorges with whom I have frequent meetings as my mother [is his] Chief agent and Councillor, and on whom I know he depends for all his calculations.”⁵⁴ A

¹⁰³ First name available? Lawrence J. Arnold. But he always signs himself L.J.

former commissioner of the court of claims, Sir Allen Brodrick, witheringly assessed Cornbury's grasp of the situation to Ormonde: "My Lords deference to my Lady Ranelagh who hath long assumed to Her self the Direction of these affayres, his singular opinion of the *Doctors* honesty, and his small understanding of Irish pretentions, made his whole discourse unintelligible." Brodrick's subsequent comment that he expected no more from Gorges in this "then I should haue found when he was secretary to Harry Cromwell" confirms the impression that Brodrick considered the petitioning adventurers and Ranelagh as former Cromwellians intent on undermining Ormonde and the king's authority.⁵⁶ ¹⁰⁴

A later 1667 petition¹⁰⁵ against alleged abuses of the act, which took place shortly after Clarendon lost office as chancellor of England, was also the opening salvo in an attempt, allegedly led by Orrery, to impeach Ormonde.¹ While Anglesey assured Ormonde that "my Lady Ranelagh purges her selfe of hauinge any hand in *the* Adventurers petition," Brodrick reported to Ormonde the events surrounding the reading of the petition in the English House of Commons, the intention being "to unravel as much of the settlement [created by the act] as possible. My Lady Ranelagh is still said to have many designs and indeed all the sectaries grow to a high degree in confidence and promise themselves an interest in government very speedily."⁵⁷ The political implications of these actions from England are made explicit in comments by another Ormonde agent, Col. Edward Vernon. Writing on December 28, 1667, he reported an argument with Lord Edward Conway, an Irish peer and an Ormonde ally on the Irish Privy Council. Conway had had his views altered because Ranelagh, who was¹⁰⁶

a woman (¹⁰⁷as he *said* of an Excelent judgment, said the petition was altered, and was then a very

¹⁰⁴ Divide the paragraph here for easier readability? Yes.

¹⁰⁵ Add a citation for this petition? See Earl of Ossory, ALS, to Ormonde, 7 Dec. 1667, MS 220, Carte Papers, BDL, fol. 310.

¹⁰⁶ Please connect this sentence with the quote to create a complete thought.

¹⁰⁷ Is the closing parenthesis missing from the original text, as it is here? Yes.

wise and well penned petition; I replied [to Conway] I was not of the opinion for I considered [no] petition could be soe that drew any thing of the Settlement or conserne of Ireland into debate before the House of Commons of England being, it would bring all lawes, and soe greate an uncertainty, that noe wise person would either purchase or plant in Ireland if an Irish Act of Parliament should not be thought final.⁵⁸

From an Ormonde point of view, Ranelagh was not functioning as an agent of a Protestant or a collective “English interest in Ireland,” as Orrery framed it in his (anonymous) protest against the act, *The Irish Colours Displayed* (1662), but as the figurehead of a faction associated with the Cromwellian usurper and radical models of Protestantism.⁵⁹ Her activities were politically extremely problematic because it rendered the acts of Irish House of Commons subject to overrule by their English counterparts. Ranelagh’s position in relation to Ireland is thus transformed from a woman shuttled between two nations at the behest of fathers and governors to an agent making skilled and influential interventions in Irish politics that sought to ensure the country occupied a subordinate position as a colonial possession. That systems of honor formed the basis for her judgement of what was appropriate rule in Ireland is apparent from her most detailed surviving account of how Ireland’s settler and native communities should interact.

This was written at another moment of acute crisis for Irish Protestants, the accession of the Catholic monarch James II in 1685. Possibly because of this context, her assessment, contained in her notes on the manuscript treatise of Sir William Petty’s “*Speculum hiberniae*,” are remarkably consistent with the more radical visions of Elizabethan settlers.⁶⁰ Petty, who had arrived in Ireland as a physician with Cromwell’s army, was both a “principal architect” and a “prime beneficiary” of the land redistribution from Catholic to Protestant that took place in Ireland in the 1650s.⁶¹ Ranelagh had known Petty since at least 1652 from their shared membership in the Hartlib Circle. She and he were the only Hartlibian experimenters to last into the changed political climate of the 1680s, and she and he were practiced participants in that group’s moral and experimental incursions into Ireland.⁶² Petty found her a willing supporter of

his attempts to defend the post-Restoration land settlement against further potential encroachment through the treatise's reassessment of the Cromwellian conquest. Petty's argument sought to recast the Cromwellian army, in which he has served, as a coalition of displaced English Protestant settlers, cavalier soldiers of fortune, and "moderate Irish papists" horrified by the "cawseles Crueltyes of their CountryMen" who produced an "absolute conquest." Their loyalty to the English Crown had been visibly demonstrated by their voluntary surrender of all Irish lands possessed by them to the returning Charles II, giving him "cleere and absolute title" to Ireland.⁶⁴

Petty's coalition was of the willing incorporated soldiers of differing religious, national, and political affiliations joined by unshakable loyalty to the Crown. Ranelagh's notes were quick to build on this. She writes on a firm presumption that native insurrection and foreign invasion were always imminent. Her recommended additions to Petty's treatise included a request that "*the* armes" and "corporate towns" were kept in "*the* hands of *the* English," a right looked on as "an ancient and uninterrupted trust reposed in *them* by *the* crowne of England euer sin[c]e *the* acquisition of *that* country." This will reinvigorate English application to "*the* aduancement of their trade and *the* improuement of their riches" and defend against foreign invasion "since without mentioning into whose protection *the* natiues may endeavour to throw *themselves*, it is doubtles not capable of an Argument *that the* English can ever seeke any other *than that* of *the* Crowne of England."⁶⁶ The "native" population is reliably treacherous, and an identity with England is the guarantee of the settlers' honor. But for the fact that the hinted-at invasion is French rather than Spanish, Ranelagh's lines might readily have been written in the 1590s or the 1640s, even though she carefully and necessarily avoids invoking any confessional divides. By casting the loyalty of the English settlers into the lap of James, Ranelagh followed her well-worn

route of appeal to the English ruler to reassert “a contract which bound the king to respect the rights of those who took risks to defend the security of his realm by settling in Ireland,” a contract that relies on the king’s own role as the fount and exemplar of honor.⁶⁷ Her note on the treatise envisages a secure and united English community in Ireland. Its continuity is rooted in the possession of property legitimately theirs on the basis of both conquest and their sustained trust in the monarchy. Through invoking these old certainties, she circumvents any need to reflect on the complex politics of the 1640s, which exposed divisions between and within the “English of Ireland” or the ironies of former Cromwellians extolling loyalty to a Catholic monarch.

Conclusion

In this context Ranelagh’s characterization of Arthur as an “Irish breed” forms part of a larger understanding of Ireland as a colony whose reformers need to exercise constant vigilance over their communities and themselves. The situation where Ranelagh could successfully stigmatize her husband as of an “Irish breed” in an attempt to reverse the power relationships between them may be unique to this context, reliant as it is on a model of Irish degeneracy, which assumed its capacity to infect even English settlers.⁶⁸ The dangers of slippage, inevitable when an identity is defined as a set of behaviors, take on a greater danger in the context of mid- and late seventeenth-century Ireland. The threat was not only to women and children, though it was felt immediately by them, but it also was a threat to the entire goal of the settlement. Honor provided Ranelagh with a means of connecting the domestic and public weakness she perceived. Her actions exposed, exacerbated, but also relied on divisions within the Protestant community about Ireland’s precise status in relation to England. Those actions were shaped by her gendered experience of Ireland. It was the location where she experienced the greatest powerlessness,

losing control over her marriage, movements, and reputation, which she was able to win back only through leaving. Ireland both established and periodically endangered Ranelagh's laborious self-construction as an honorable woman. To say therefore that she did not identify with Ireland cannot negate its central role in how she saw herself and how others saw her.

Notes

1. Lady Katherine Jones, Viscountess Ranelagh, autograph letter signed (ALS) to Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, June 4, 1663, MS 79, Clarendon Papers, Bodleian Library (BDL), Oxford, fols. 70–71,¹⁰⁸; Ranelagh, ALS, to Richard Boyle, Second Earl of Cork, July 24, 1659, vol. 31 (50), Boyle Papers, Chatsworth House (Chatsworth), Derbyshire.
2. Robert Boyle, copy letter to Andrew Sall, January 21, 1682, no. 11, Dopping Collection, Armagh Public Library, Armagh; [Roger Boyle], *The Irish Colours Displayed* (London, 1662), 3.
3. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (1989¹⁰⁹), s.v. "Extraction"; Samuel Hartlib, copy letter to John Winthrop the Younger, March 16, 1660, MS 7/7/1A–8B, Hartlib Papers, Sheffield University Library, Sheffield.
4. See Brendan Kane, *The Politics and Culture of Honour in Britain and Ireland, 1541–1641* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For a superb discussion of Ranelagh's uses of honor in her correspondence, see Elizabeth Anne Taylor [Betsey Taylor-Fitzsimon], "Writing Women, Honour and Ireland, 1640–1715" (PhD diss., University College Dublin, 1999).
5. John Kerrigan, *Archipelagic English: Literature, History and Politics, 1603–1707* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 267.
6. Ciarán Brady and Jane Ohlmeyer, "Making Good: New Perspectives on the English in Early Modern Ireland," in *British Intervention in Early Modern Ireland*, ed. Ciarán Brady and Jane Ohlmeyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 4.
7. On the complications and disruptions that ensued, see Brady and Ohlmeyer, "Making Good," in Brady and Ohlmeyer, *British Intervention*; and Toby Barnard, *Improving Ireland: Projectors, Prophets and Profiteers 1641–1786* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2008).
8. Toby Barnard, "The Political, Material and Mental Culture of the Cork Settlers, c. 1650–1700," in *Cork History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish City*, ed. Patrick O'Flanagan and Cornelius G. Buttimer (Dublin: Geography, 1993), 311.¹¹⁰
10. See S. J.¹¹¹ Connolly, *Contested Island: Ireland, 1460–1630* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 398; and

¹⁰⁸ The bibliography lists Clarendon vol. 79, fols. 270–71, for this letter. Please reconcile. 270–71 is correct.

¹⁰⁹ Please add the year of the second edition. Added – 1989.

¹¹⁰ The bibliography gives the page range as 309–65. Please reconcile. This should be 311; corrected above.

¹¹¹ First name available? Sean J.

- Arthur Annesley, First Earl of Anglesey, “Heads and Memorandums for an Intended General History of Ireland by Arthur, Earl of Anglesea,” April 6, 1682, add. **MS** 4,816, British Library (**BL**), London, fols. 30r, 48r–v.
11. [Boyle], *Irish Colours Displayed*, 2.
 12. Kerrigan, *Archipelagic English*, 259.
 13. Richard Boyle, qtd. in Nicholas Canny, *The Upstart Earl* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 60.
 14. Ranelagh, **ALS**, to First Earl of Cork, December 26, 1642, **MS** 43,266/20, Lismore Castle Estate Papers, National Library of Ireland (**NLI**), Dublin.
 15. Thomas Fleetwood, deposition, March 22, 1643, **MS** 817, 1641 Depositions, Trinity College Dublin Library, Dublin, fols. 37r–40v, 37r, 38v.
 16. Ranelagh to First Earl of Cork, December 26, 1642, **NLI**.
 17. See Kerrigan, *Archipelagic English*, 246–47.
 18. Ranelagh to First Earl of Cork, December 26, 1642, **NLI**.
 20. Richard Boyle, Second Earl of Cork, copy letter to Arthur Jones, Viscount Ranelagh, December 28, 1658, vol. 30 (56), Boyle Papers, Chatsworth.
 21. Canny, *Upstart Earl*, 120. The second earl reproached another brother-in-law, the Earl of Kildare, for similar reasons. See Patrick Little, *Lord Broghill and the Cromwellian Union with Ireland and Scotland* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004), 199.
 22. Lady Ranelagh, **ALS**, to Second Earl of Cork, September 2, n.y.,¹¹² add. **MS** 75354, Althorp Papers, **BL**, fol. 50.
 23. Richard Cust, “Honour and Politics in Early Stuart England: The Case of Beaumont vs. Hastings,” *Past and Present* 149, no. 1 (1995): 59.
 24. Kane, *Politics and Culture*, 1–15.
 25. Kane, *Politics and Culture*, 266.
 27. Katherine Ranelagh to Lord Broghill, September 17, 1658, in *A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe*, ed. Thomas Birch (London, 1742), 7:395–97.
 28. See Tim Stretton, “Marriage, Separation and the Common Law in England, 1540–1660,” in *The Family in Early Modern England*, ed. Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 18–39.
 30. Ranelagh to Broghill, September 17, 1658, in Birch, *State Papers*, 396.
 33. Ranelagh to Broghill, September 17, 1658, in Birch, *State Papers*, 396.
 34. Garthine Walker, “Expanding the Boundaries of Female Honour in Early Modern England,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 (1996): 243.
 35. Ranelagh to Broghill, September 17, 1658, in Birch, *State Papers*, 396.
 36. Felicity Heal notes in her case study of Elizabeth Russell that “as a woman the only effective defences of her honour were her family or the law courts.” See “Reputation and Honour in Court and Country: Lady Elizabeth

¹¹² Does “n.y.” stand for “n.d.” (no date)? Or perhaps “no year”? No year.

- Russell and Sir Thomas Hoby,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 (1996): 169.
37. Lady Ranelagh to Second Earl of Cork, September 2, n.y., **BL**.
 38. See Edmund Spenser, *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, ed. Andrew Hadfield and Willy Maley (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997). There is no evidence that Ranelagh read the *View*, but Orrery cites it in [Boyle], *Irish Colours Displayed*.
 39. Sir Edward Hyde, **ALS**, to James Butler, Marquis of Ormonde, October 15 and 25, 1659, vol. 65, Clarendon State Papers, **BDL**, fols. 237–39, 238v.
 40. Lady Ranelagh, **ALS**, to Elizabeth Butler, Duchess of Ormonde, March 2, [1666], **MS** 217, Carte Papers, **BDL**, fols. 452–453r. For her relationship to Hyde, see Ranelagh, **ALS**, to Sir Edward Hyde, March 3, 1644, vol. 23, Clarendon State Papers, **BDL**, fols. 113–15.
 42. Clarendon, **ALS**, to Ormonde, January 30, n.y., **MS** 47, Carte Papers, **BDL**, fols. 104r–106r.
 43. Clarendon, **ALS**, to Ormonde, August 31, [1665], **MS** 47, Carte Papers, **BDL**, fol. 98.
 44. Charles II, copy letter to Ormonde, August 18, 1665, **MS** 43, Carte Papers, **BDL**, fols. 450r–451v; Clarendon to Ormonde, August 31, [1665], **BDL**; James Butler, Duke/Marquis of Ormonde, **ALS**, to Clarendon, September 18, 1665, **MS** 217, Carte Papers, **BDL**, fol. 448r; Richard Jones, Viscount Ranelagh, copy petition to Clarendon, December 21, 1665, **MS** 48, Carte Papers, **BDL**, fols. 372–73.
 45. Charles II, copy letter to Ormonde, January 11, 1668, **MS** 43, Carte Papers, **BDL**, fol. 639r.
 46. Butler, copy letter to Clarendon, January 10, 1666, **MS** 49, Carte Papers, fol. 319r, **BDL**.
 47. Lady Ranelagh to Second Earl of Cork, July 24, 1659, Chatsworth.
 48. For these estate practices, see Toby Barnard, “Land and the Limits of Loyalty: The Second Earl of Cork and the First Earl of Burlington (1612–98),” in *Lord Burlington: Architecture, Art and Life*, ed. Toby Barnard and Jane Clark (London: Hambledon, 1995), 167–200.
 49. L. J.¹¹³ Arnold, *The Restoration Land Settlement in County Dublin, 1660–1688* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1993), 54.
 50. Ormonde, **ALS**, to Clarendon, February 21, 1663, vol. 79, Clarendon State Papers, **BDL**, fols. 80–81.
 51. Arnold, *Restoration Land Settlement*, 87.
 52. One vulnerable settler was the member of Parliament Sir John Clotworthy, her sister-in-law’s husband, who had almost eleven thousand acres in Antrim. Ranelagh lived with him in London after arriving in England in 1642. See Aidan Clarke, *Prelude to Restoration in Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 170.
 53. Dr. Robert Gorges to Henry Hyde, Lord Cornbury, February 18, 1663, vol. 79, Clarendon State Papers, **BDL**, fol. 75r.
 54. Viscount Ranelagh, **ALS**, to Thomas Butler, Lord Ossory, October 14, 1670, **MS** 37, Carte Papers, **BDL**, fol. 546v.

¹¹³ First name available? Lawrence J.

56. Sir Allen Brodrick, *ALS*, to Ormonde, December 31, 1667, *MS* 36, Carte Papers, *BDL*, fols. 63r–63v.
57. Anglesey, *ALS*, First Earl of Anglesey, to Ormonde, January 4, 1667, *MS* 217, Carte Papers, *BDL*, fol. 433r;
Brodrick, *ALS*, to Ormonde, December 14, 1667, *MS* 36, Carte Papers, *BDL*, fol. 31r; qtd. in Arnold,
Restoration Land Settlement, 121.
58. Col. Edward Vernon, *ALS*, to Ormonde, December 28, 1667, *MS* 36, Carte Papers, *BDL*, fol. 53r. Lord Conway
was Edward Conway, the Third Viscount Conway and Killultagh.¹¹⁴
59. [Boyle], *Irish Colours Displayed*, 14. For an overview of the Orrery-Ormonde rivalry, see Raymond Gillespie,
Seventeenth Century Ireland (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2006), 222–25.
60. Sir William Petty, “Speculum hiberniae,” [1686], add. *MS* 72,884, vol. 35, Petty Papers, *BL*, fols. 1–54.
61. Barnard, *Improving Ireland*, 51.
62. Patricia Coughlan, “Natural History and Historical Nature: The Project for a Natural History of Ireland,” in
Samuel Hartlib and Universal Reformation, ed. Mark Greengrass, Michael Leslie, and Timothy Raylor
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 298–317.¹¹⁵
64. Petty, “Speculum hiberniae,” *BL*, fol. 12v, fol. 13r.
66. Lady Ranelagh, autograph notes, add. *MS* 72,884, vol. 35, Petty Papers, *BL*, fol. 7r.
67. Gillespie, *Seventeenth Century Ireland*, 261. See also Canny, *Upstart Earl*, 132.
68. Lady Ranelagh to Second Earl of Cork, September 2, n.y., *BL*.

¹¹⁴ Is “Third Viscount Conway and Killultagh” accurate? Yes.

¹¹⁵ The bibliography gives the page range as 298–319. Please reconcile.