

7. Elite English Girlhood in Early Modern Ireland

The Examples of Mary Boyle and Alice Wandesford

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Abstract

Taking as its starting point the little-discussed experiences of many early modern Englishwomen in Ireland, this essay examines the experience of elite English girlhood in Ireland through the lens of the retrospective accounts of Mary Boyle (later Rich, Countess of Warwick) and Alice Wandesford (Thornton). Although Boyle and Wandesford present idealized versions of much of their Irish experience, their texts also reveal the fragility of this existence, ultimately reinforcing the importance of the patriarch's physical presence in order for English girlhood to work on non-English soil.

Keywords: Mary Boyle (Rich); Alice Wandesford (Thornton); Ireland; education; colonial; England; girlhood

When writing retrospectively about her childhood and youth in Ireland in the 1620s and 1630s, Mary Boyle – later Lady Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick (1624–1678) – recounts a lengthy but happy fosterage with a friend of her father, Richard Boyle, Earl of Cork. '[B]y the tender care of my indulgent father', she writes,

that I might be carefully and piously educated, I was sent by him to a prudent and vertuous lady, my Lady Claytone, who never having had any child of her own, grew to make so much of me as if she had been an own

¹ I am grateful to Naomi McAreavey, Elizabeth Cohen, and Margaret Reeves for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

mother to me, and took great care to have me soberly educated. Under her government I remained at Mallow, a town in Munster, till I was, I think, about eleven years' old, and then my father called me from thence (much to my dissatisfaction), for I was very fond of that, to me, kind mother.²

This passage from Rich's autobiography, *Some Specialties In the life of MWarwicke*, emphasizes several aspects of Mary's early life, including her close relationship with Lady Anne Clayton, a seeming maternal surrogate in the absence of Mary's own mother; the beneficial education she received at the Clayton home; and her satisfaction with this arrangement, which entailed essentially growing to adulthood outside of her father's home.³ This was standard practice for the Boyle children. The typical Boyle newborn, as explained by Nicholas Canny in *The Upstart Earl*,

usually spent some weeks or months in the parental home before it was farmed out to a country nurse who reared the child to the age of three or four. Then the child spent some years in the care of a tutor at Lismore, or at the house of a carefully chosen foster-mother, but in either event was removed from direct parental supervision. [...] By the eleventh year the daughters would either have been sent for upbringing to the households of their future in-laws, or would have remained with their foster-parents until, at the age of fourteen or fifteen, each went to live with whatever husband had been chosen for her. Finally, after the daughters had borne children, and when the sons had completed their formal education, the young Boyles, by now adults, were permitted to enjoy the company of their father in a relaxed or familiar environment. (102)⁴

Accordingly, Mary continued with Lady Clayton until she left Mallow and – shortly thereafter – Ireland in 1638. She had lived roughly ten years with Lady Clayton and all of her thirteen-plus years in Ireland.

2 Rich, *Some Specialities in the Life of M. Warwicke*, edited by Croker, 2.

3 Clayton, the wife of an English planter, fostered at least three of the Boyle girls: Alice from 'as early as 1615'; Mary beginning in March 1628; and their younger sister, Margaret, from 1634 (Canny, *Upstart Earl*, 100–101). Lady Catherine Boyle (c. 1588–1630), the Earl's second wife and mother of all his children, died within a year of Mary's move to the Clayton home. Significantly, Rich refers to Clayton in her autobiographical manuscript as a 'kind Matrone' (2v), a term with distinctly less maternal warmth than the 'kind mother' used in T.C. Croker's nineteenth-century print edition quoted here.

4 Lismore Castle was the seat of the Boyles. Fosterage was common in both the English and Irish aristocracies, especially for young boys.

A similarly nostalgic, retrospective account of a youth spent in Ireland in the 1630s appears in *My First Booke of My Life* by Alice Wandesford, later Thornton (1626/7–1706/7).⁵ Unlike Mary Boyle, Wandesford was not born in Ireland but travelled there with her mother and younger brothers in 1634, when she was eight. Nor was she fostered, but instead lived with her parents, as the family had travelled to Ireland in order to join her father, Christopher Wandesford (1592–1640), who went to Ireland in 1633 as Master of the Rolls and eventually, albeit for a short time, became Lord Deputy.⁶ Yet her tone in *My First Booke* is quite similar to Mary's:

I inioyed great happienesse and Comfort dureing my honoured fathers life, haueing the fortunate opportunity in that time, [...] when I staid there, of the best education that Kingdome could afford, haue<ing> the aduantage of Societie in the sweete & <chaste> company of the Earle of Strafford's Daughters, The most Virtuous Lady Anne & The Lady Arbella Wentworth, Learning those qualities with them which my father ordered. Namlie,
The french Language, to write & speake the same; Singing, Danceing, Plaieng on the Lute & Theorboe; learning such other accomplishments of Working Silkes, gummeworke, &c., Sweetemeats & other sutable huswifery, As by my Mothers virtuous prouission, & caire, she brought me vp in what was fitt for her qualitie & my fathers Childe. (10)

Young Alice lived thus contentedly for several years until her father died in 1640; Dublin succumbed to violence the following year, and she and her family escaped soon after. But from 1634 to 1641 – from the age of eight to fourteen or fifteen – Alice's home was in Ireland.⁷

Rich's and Thornton's accounts of seemingly idyllic youths in Ireland thus offer a fascinating glimpse into a unique experience of girlhood at precisely the moment when early modern 'girls' transitioned into 'women'.⁸

5 For two important analyses of Thornton's Irish narratives, see Chedgzoy, *Women's Writing in the British Atlantic World*, especially 92–97, and Anselment's forthcoming essay, 'Alice Thornton'.

6 Wandesford was officially Lord Deputy from April to December 1640.

7 Alice left Ireland just once during this time period, when she accompanied her mother and brother to Bath in 1639.

8 On the evolving meanings of the term 'girl' in the early modern period, see Higginbotham, *Girlhood of Shakespeare's Sisters*: 'in the mid-seventeenth century [...] "girl" and the other terms in its semantic network began to be defined as separate categories of female youth. "Girl" subsequently came to be defined as the female age category that it largely is today' (8). On the other hand, the term 'youth' in the Early Modern period 'normally referred to young people in their teens or early twenties' (O'Dowd, 'Early Modern Ireland', 29).

I say 'unique' because Mary and Alice lived this significant phase of life *in* Ireland in the period just before the numerous wars and rebellions of the seventeenth century would create havoc for individuals of *all* religious, political, and national persuasions on the island and, indeed, throughout England, Scotland, and Wales. Mary's and Alice's experiences – albeit a limited sample recorded many years after the fact – suggest that, on the one hand, privileged English girlhood continued much as usual even in the atypical setting of a (to the English mind) foreign and savage land. The education they received and the carefully selected and controlled environments in which they received it further suggest that they were being prepared for the lives of aristocratic wives, particularly as they reached the critical age of puberty. This is very much in keeping with the other findings of this volume in regard to what Elizabeth Cohen and Margaret Reeves call in their introduction the 'shaping time' of youth 'between childhood and full adult status'. It is highly significant, for example, that Alice's and Mary's idyllic interludes end abruptly when they are both around fourteen years old – an age that seems appropriately within the 'youth' category and that also puts both girls on the verge of marriage, at least theoretically.

And yet, not only was the transition I focus on here *abrupt*, as noted, but also it did not lead directly to marriage, that most traditional marker of female adulthood. On the contrary, for both women, marriage did not happen immediately upon leaving Ireland: Mary wed Charles Rich a few years later, in 1641, and Alice married William Thornton in 1651, when she was 25 years old. Significantly, then, if the last few years of the tranquil period they spent in Ireland may justly be considered their 'youth', this period's ending did not coincide with their transition to adulthood as it was traditionally understood. Thus we are forced to consider the complexity of their situations, particularly the geographical setting in which they spent their formative years. Early modern childhood, Katherine R. Larson reminds us, was 'shaped as much by social class and geographical location as by gender and age' (68).

Mary's and Alice's circumstances match the traditional English model in three of these categories: class, gender, and age. Therefore, although two individuals' experiences alone do not allow any firm conclusions about how categories of girlhood and youth may have differed in Ireland as opposed to in England (if at all), they do demonstrate how factors external to the girls' individual development might force a more abrupt transition than one would expect otherwise. For Wandesford, this was her father's death and the 1641 Rebellion in Ireland, the latter following quickly upon the heels of the former. For Boyle, on the other hand, it was likely the change in

circumstances of her primary caregiver, Lady Clayton, in combination with her father's plans for her marriage.⁹ In both cases, however, the Irish setting of what we might call their 'tween' years was a significant external factor.

Most of what we know about these girls' lives in Ireland comes from auto/biographical sources, including their own retrospective narratives and their fathers' letters. They were in Ireland to begin with, of course, because of their fathers' involvement in England's ongoing, centuries-long effort to assert political control and to establish English settings and customs in Ireland. Yet how the female family members of male administrators and settlers actually experienced Ireland has been long overlooked, despite the fact that many girls and women, like the older Rich and Thornton, not only frequently referenced Ireland in their life writing but also, on occasion, made it a significant focus of their texts. Thus this subset of early modern women's life writing – which runs the gamut from nostalgic to bitter and includes the full range of life writing genres common at the time (prose narrative accounts like Rich's and Thornton's, letters, receipts, and so on) – usefully reminds us that many Englishwomen constructed their written lives against the complicated and fraught landscape of Ireland. In this essay, therefore, I interrogate first-person accounts like Rich's and Thornton's in an effort to understand not only what an elite English girlhood in early modern Ireland might have looked like but also how early modern Englishwomen more generally came to understand and represent the complex landscape of Ireland in their life writing.¹⁰

Like all life writing, of course, such accounts must be read as rhetorically motivated, carefully constructed texts in which the writers manipulate to the best of their ability formal and generic structures in order to constitute the self, or a narrative of the self, that fulfils the particular needs of a particular moment. In some cases, that particular moment is years distant from the events being recorded, as is the case with both Rich and Thornton, whose autobiographies are coloured by the nostalgia of their older years – Rich

9 As it turns out, Mary rejected her father's proposed husband, James Hamilton, Lord Clandeboy (d. 1659), creating significant tension with her father.

10 Early Modern 'Irish' and 'English' women's life writing in the Irish context is finally getting the attention it deserves, thanks largely to Coolahan, *Women, Writing, and Language*; Chedgzoy, *Women's Writing in the British Atlantic World*; and McAreavey, 'Epistolary Account' and 'This is that I may remember'. Julie A. Eckerle and McAreavey's forthcoming *Women's Life Writing and Early Modern Ireland* builds on these foundational texts. The two game-changing volumes on Irish women's writing published in 2002 as *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (vols. IV and V) also include excerpts by Englishwomen, such as the early pages of Rich's autobiography.

writing in the 1670s and Thornton around 1669.¹¹ Furthermore, while rhetorical context is key to understanding any single life-writing document, genre-based elements and narrative patterns frequently inform whole bodies of material. Therefore, although my focus in this essay is quite narrow (two accounts of English girlhood in Ireland in the 1630s written roughly 40 years later), it is important to note that my primary examples accord with what I have found to be quite standard categories of representation within the larger corpus of early modern Englishwomen's representations of Ireland in their life writing. These include an idealized version of Ireland as a mini-England, the inverse depiction of Ireland as a kind of nightmare landscape, and slightly less morally laden versions of Ireland as a site of rich potential for individual transformation or as a land of mystery and somewhat exoticized otherness.

In the first of these categories, the one most evident in my opening passages, Ireland is idealized as a mini-England, a home-away-from-home during the periods when women accompanied husbands and fathers to Irish settings. Of course, the English colonization of Ireland did literally attempt to transform Ireland into an English space, and certainly within the homes of colonial administrators, it was likely to succeed. As Canny writes of Boyle, for instance, 'Cork populated his estates in the vicinity of Lismore and Youghal with Englishmen, and moulded the local environment to an English model' (35). But the idyllic settings so constructed on English-run estates and within the walls of English homes are both temporary and tenuous (as Alice's case will effectively illustrate) and thus frequently give way to another narrative strain, identified above as a kind of 'Irish nightmare'. In this 'sub-genre', so to speak, Ireland is the setting, cause, and antagonist in narratives of disaster, ruined careers, and death. Here we learn of how financial and material disasters ruined many families, and we find the war-torn landscapes through which women like Lady Ann Fanshawe (1625–1680) – wife of English diplomat Richard Fanshawe – escaped with her family when the English garrison in Cork fell to Oliver Cromwell in October 1649. In the third type I have identified, women's accounts of early

11 Comments in Rich's diaries suggest that she wrote most of the narrative in 1671, but she also incorporated events that occurred as late as 1674 (Croker, 'Preface', vii). The complicated Thornton corpus comprises four different volumes that often re-narrate, or revise, the same material. For the clearest account of these manuscripts, see Anselment's introduction to *My First Booke of My Life*. Two of the manuscripts contain references to Ireland, as Thornton 'recalled briefly in "A Booke of Remembrances" and at greater length in [...] "My First Booke of My Life", the sense of place she enjoyed with her family during a happy Dublin life' (Anselment, 'Alice Thornton').

modern Ireland depict the great potential for and realization of individual transformation to be found there, whether via spiritual conversion or the non-traditional behaviour often necessitated by war-time settings. And in still another narrative mode, Ireland is not necessarily dangerous but certainly mysterious, given to superstitions like the banshee and characterized by a general 'otherness' that many Englishwomen life writers struggle to understand.

Of course, in reality, these various narrative themes often blend together. This is especially the case with the idealized and demonized versions of Ireland, which – as I have defined them – are also oversimplified, in part because of English prejudice toward the Irish during the colonial period and in part as a result of my own attempt to delineate narrative types within more complex accounts.¹² These narrative strains consistently encroach on one another, perhaps most vividly when the landscape Fanshawe describes in her memoirs as fertile, peaceful, and 'seemingly quiet' in 1649 literally gives way one memorable night several months later to gunshots and screams of terror – the 'lamentable scricks [shrieks]', she explains, 'of men & women & children [...] [who] were all Irish stript and wounded turned out of y^e Town' (50, 51).¹³ Thornton's account of her own escape from Ireland nearly ten years earlier similarly blends seemingly contradictory versions of Ireland, as will be discussed below. Nonetheless, distinguishing between the various threads in women's auto/biographical writing about Ireland allows us to see more clearly the contradictions and conflicts that informed English attitudes during these tumultuous decades – decades, in fact, when the Irish peerage was being thoroughly reconstituted in an effort, Jane Ohlmeyer writes in a recent book, to 'make Ireland English' (9).

Indeed, for the English in Ireland, the 1620s and much of the 1630s had been primarily occupied with expanding plantations, consolidating estates, and generally solidifying control over the native Irish. As the 1630s drew to a close, however, the march toward civil war in England had its own repercussions in Ireland, where crown and parliamentary loyalties were complicated by tensions among the various layers – and thus factions – of English settlers.¹⁴ The period 1632–1640 also witnessed the disastrous

12 To treat 'the Irish' in monolithic terms is of course highly problematic, though this is exactly what England did in the early modern period.

13 Fanshawe also wrote her retrospective account, often referred to as her *Memoirs*, in widowhood, specifically 1676 (BL Add. MS 41161).

14 The primary categories of identity in Early Modern Ireland as they are generally understood were the native Irish (Irish-speaking, primarily Catholic descendants of the pre-Anglo-Norman inhabitants); the Old English (primarily Catholic descendants of the Anglo-Norman invaders of

deputyship of Thomas Wentworth (1593–1641), 1st Earl of Strafford – father of the ‘sweete’ girls with whom Thornton describes spending her days, and the man whose execution as a traitor in January 1641 was a critical turning point in Charles I’s already troubled relationship with Parliament.¹⁵ Later that year, tensions in Ireland exploded when Irish Catholics rebelled against the English (Protestant) administration. As Martyn Bennett explains, ‘The Rebellion spread across the country during the rest of the year, embracing the Old English [...] as well as the Irish themselves. By the summer of 1642 the Rebellion had become something of a war for political equality with England, Wales, and Scotland and for religious freedom, if not for true independence’ (119). Although the Rebellion, or Rising, of 1641 was eventually put down, the anger it unleashed continued to create conflict and turmoil throughout the decade until the Cromwellian conquest in 1649 silenced the Rebellion as well as the lives of many individuals who had participated in it.

Yet, intriguingly, the political machinations and shifting loyalties that dominated men’s activities throughout the 1630s – and that are documented in their own life writing of the period – is virtually non-existent in the girlhood accounts with which this essay began. In other words, even though the received historical tradition of colonial Ireland tells of military conquests, political conflicts, and endless plots and betrayals, another history was simultaneously being experienced and written – especially by the girls and young, unmarried women of the English elite. For these individuals, Ireland was not only a site of warfare and danger but also, perhaps more than anything else, a *home*.

This was particularly the case for Mary Boyle, one of many Boyle daughters who either were born in Ireland or spent significant years of their childhood there. They included Alice (1608–1668) and Margaret (1629–1637), who were also fostered by Lady Clayton; Lettice (1610–1642) and Joan (1611–1656/7), who were the only Boyle daughters to ‘spen[d] a considerable number of years in the parental home’; Dorothy (1617–1668), who lived with her future in-laws at Rathfarnham, Dublin as soon as her marriage to Sir Arthur Loftus was arranged in 1626 (they married in 1632); and Katherine (best known as Katherine Jones, Lady Ranelagh, 1613/15–1691), who was born in Ireland, spent much of her young life there, and eventually married into the Irish

twelfth-century Ireland); and the New English (primarily Protestant sixteenth- and seventeenth-century settlers who spoke English and were generally loyal to the English crown). These would be joined by a fourth category, the Cromwellian settlers, later in the seventeenth century. Yet all categorization is inadequate to Ireland’s complex history, which included waves of settlement and colonization over many centuries.

15 Wentworth’s political life, and particularly his death, continue to be subjects of debate.

peerage and lived with her husband, Arthur Jones, in Athlone until the 1641 Rebellion.¹⁶ Neighbours of the Boyle girls when they were at their father's estate included other girls in similar circumstances, such as the daughters of Sir John King, another Irish administrator. Dorothy (later Lady Dorothy Moore, 1612/13–1664), Margaret, and Mary King moved in similar social circles and learned some of the same skills as those described by Thornton, including dancing. It is worth noting, however, that the adult Dorothy did not think as highly of these experiences as the adult Alice did, as she explained in a letter to Lady Ranelagh that:

[D]ancing and curious workes [...] serve onely, to fill the fancy with unnecessary, unprofitable and proud imaginations. My experience as well as my reason tells me this; for my owne education was to learne both, and all I got by them was a great trouble to forget both.¹⁷

Alice, as we know, shared her lessons with the Wentworth daughters. Ladies Anne (1627–1695/6) and Arabella (1629–1689) lived at Dublin Castle from 1632/3 until 1639, when they were sent to live in England with their maternal grandmother, the widowed Lady Clare.¹⁸ Their father believed that, at ages twelve and ten, respectively, they were ready for a new 'educational' environment: although 'they had pretty manners, danced well, and could speak French', Wentworth claimed 'that Dublin was not the best school for elegant graces'.¹⁹ For all of these girls, whatever the variances in their Irish experience, the general impression of Ireland that they came away with when they eventually moved or returned to England informed both the adults they would become and, in the case of Mary and Alice, the accounts they would write. Significantly, these narratives share at least a few common elements.

The most striking is that English girlhood in Ireland seemed to require the presence of the girl's father. It is critical that, in Thornton's recollection of her blissful youth in Ireland, she includes the qualifying phrase 'during my father's life'. The Irish idyll that she and the Wentworth girls experienced was

16 Canny, *Upstart Earl*, 102–03. Canny speculates that Lettice and Joan were home more because they 'suffered rejection in the many marriages which their father sought to negotiate on their behalf' (103). As for Katherine, it is important to note that she also spent formative premarital years (1624–1628) in England at the home of Sir Thomas Beaumont, to whom she was contracted for a time, and most of her adulthood post-1641 in England as well.

17 Quoted in Pal, *Republic of Women*, 128–29.

18 Anne married Edward Watson, Lord Rockingham; Arabella married Justin MacCarthy, son of the Earl of Clancarty, and may well have lived in Ireland again during her marriage.

19 Wedgwood, *Thomas Wentworth*, 266.

a fragile one, both constructed and maintained by powerful fathers working in the interest of the English crown. Indeed, in her idealizing character sketch of her father, Thornton depicts him in traditional terms as just the kind of pious and resourceful steward a good father should be: '[H]e had A wise & prudenceall loue towards all his Children [...] For their Pieous & religious Education, with faire & noble prouissions for them in his Last Will & testament' (22). Thornton's language echoes Rich's (especially the latter's claims that she was 'piously educated' and fostered with a 'prudent and virtuous lady') in its characterization of Wandesford as a good father. But he is not only an exemplary 'husbandman' for his own family, Thornton insists. He was also a successful steward of 'Gods [*sic*] Vineyard' in Ireland, and so loved there that he was keened by the Irish at his funeral (22, 26). And even though she also notes her mother's oversight of many of her activities – as, again, Rich notes the wise 'government' of Lady Clayton – Thornton makes clear that the overall regimen is as her father 'ordered' it. Indeed, according to Wandesford's eighteenth-century biographer and descendant Thomas Comber, even the father's use of epistolary communication with his daughter when she was in England in 1639 was intended to serve an *educational* purpose:

Always attentive to his Children's real Improvements in all Things truly praise-worthy, he now became a Correspondent of his younger Daughter, *Alice*; though only 12 Years old he well knew of what Consequence it must be to young Ladies, to initiate them in the Elements of family Correspondence with a prudent Father; and therefore wrote to this Daughter a monthly Letter. (111–12)

The Earl of Cork's oversight of his daughters' lives was equally thorough, even if – in contrast to Wandesford – he chose to send his girls to live in others' homes. Canny notes that the Boyle children's 'upbringing and education were a matter of the greatest concern to their father' and that Boyle 'was extremely selective about the households to which he would commit his children for their upbringing' (8, 32). And the Wentworth sisters departed Ireland – and their own education there – on a patriarchal order.

Secondly, rather obviously, English girlhood *was* deemed possible on Irish soil. Crown officials had the advantage of government-sponsored housing like Dublin Castle, where Anne and Arabella Wentworth lived during their entire time in Ireland. But nearly all Englishmen in Ireland invested in ample estates there. Wandesford went so far as to build a *town* at Castlecomer: 'an elegant Town, exactly on the Model of a famous one in *Italy*, viz. Alsimore. The Houses were all of *free Stone*, very convenient, and

with a noble Market-Place in the Centre'.²⁰ Thus Alice was exposed to a variety of lodgings, from a Dublin house on Dame Street to the Castlecomer castle – 'a pretty convenient Castle of sufficient Strength to be a Security [...] from the Rapine of the wild *Irish*' – and Dublin Castle.²¹ Even when not housing their daughters in their own homes, men like the Earl of Cork were quite capable of creating or finding satisfactory English households like the Claytons'. Therefore, despite the fact that he claimed in a 1630 letter to the Earl of Kildare that 'Ireland holds no comparison with England for the education of a young lady, here being neither means to breed her well nor marry her well', most of his daughters *did* grow up on Irish soil.²²

Perhaps the significance of the patriarch's presence in and authority over his daughters' Irish girlhood is so obvious as to not merit mention since, as already noted, English children would not have been in Ireland in the first place if not for their fathers having households there. Yet the daughters' emphasis on their fathers – as is so clear in the writing of Rich and Thornton – demands acknowledgement. This is even more so since, by this same logic, the father's fall or absence translates into the family's fall and the consequent 'loss of paradise', if you will. As Raymond A. Anselment says of Thornton's portrayal of her happiness in Ireland, 'He [Wandesford], and not Ireland, is the source of this contentment' ('Alice'). Indeed, Lord Deputy Wandesford's death in late 1640 would lead to life-long financial struggles for his family, struggles that contributed to Alice's reluctant decision to marry and that mark her entire autobiographical corpus with their associated pain and loss.²³ But even the immediate aftermath of Wandesford's death is traumatic, and his loss demarcates a radical shift in Alice's life as she represents it, as well as in Ireland *as she represents it*. No longer a world capably managed by her father, Thornton's Irish existence is prolonged – perhaps unwisely, she suggests – by her mother, who

tarried in Ireland, discharging those Seruants & paieng many debts which should haue bin don by the Excequtors, longer then she could well doe, in regard that her Ioynture beeing in England she wanted supplies.

20 Comber, *Memoirs*, 99.

21 Comber, *Memoirs*, 103.

22 Quoted in Canny, *Upstart Earl*, 109.

23 As Thornton writes quite bluntly in a later manuscript, a marriage was arranged for her against her will and without her knowledge 'for y^e gaining this aduantag for y^e clearing the Estate of the sequestration' (BL Add. MS 88897/2, 39–40). Tragically, Wandesford's only living son and heir drowned within a short time of Alice's marriage and his consequent 'Recovery of his Estates from Sequestration' (Comber, *Memoirs*, 43).

[T]hus she continueed till about the October affter, when [...] that horrid Rebellion & Massacre of the poore English Protestants began to breake out in the countrey. (35)

Ireland, in the absence of Thornton's father, is no longer peaceful and enriching but tumultuous and menacing, no longer a home but a dangerous place to be escaped. As she continues the tale:

[W]e were forced vpon Alarume to leaue our house & fly into the Castle [...] with all my mothers Familie & what goods she could. [F]rom thence we were forced into the Citie, continueing for 14 daies & nights in great feares, frights, & hideous distractions & disturbances from the Alarums & out cries giuen in Dublin each night by the Rebels; & with these frights, fastings & paines about packing the goods, & wanting sleepe, times of eating, or refreshment wrought so much vpon my young bodie that I fell into a desperate flux called the Irish dissesas, beeing nigh vnto death, while I staid in Dublin. (37)

In point of fact, nearly ten months had passed between her father's death and the Rebellion's official beginning in October. But Thornton is quite emphatic about linking the two, identifying his death as 'the begining of troubles in our Familie, affter which follo<w>ed the breaking out <of> the Rebellion of Ireland' (26).

Thus we see that loss of a literal father, as represented in Thornton's narrative, represents a greater loss of English colonial control (which we can think of as the symbolic father) since,

In the vacancy of a wise & prudent Gouvernour after my Fathers death & my Lord of Straffords imprisonment by the Parliament in England, That Nation was vnder the authority of Iustices, [...] 2 old gentlemen [who] haueing liued in Ireland many Peaceable yeares could not be made sencable that the Irish had an ill designe against the English. (35)²⁴

The political and the personal here become intertwined, though of course – for Thornton – it is the personal that matters most. In her wise father's absence, life as she knows it falls apart, and that disintegration is best illustrated by rebellion and chaos, disease and subterfuge, and '2 old gentlemen' who are not up to the task of shepherding their English family through a

24 The gentlemen to whom Thornton refers were Lords Justices Sir William Parsons and Sir John Borlase.

moment of crisis. Without a clear and vital patriarchal head, in other words, English society in Ireland – as well as the fragile and peaceful girlhood it enabled and nourished – was no longer possible. Indeed, one might argue that the departure of another patriarch from Ireland set this disintegration into motion, since it was the King's recall of Wentworth earlier in 1640 that led to Wandesford stepping into the Lord Deputy position and that, more personally, may have contributed to the sudden turn in his health. This is certainly one reason cited by Thornton, who acknowledges the stress that the trial of her father's dear friend created for him.²⁵ Whatever the actual cause of the end of their Irish idyll, though, by 1641 and the beginning of rebellion in Ireland, all three of the girls described in Thornton's picturesque scene were without fathers, and – according to Thornton's account, at least – English Ireland was as well.²⁶

But when the fathers lived, and when the girls' worlds were ordered by those fathers' desires, English society thrived. Daily life under such circumstances included exercise, spiritual training, the presence of instructive maternal figures, *English* companionship, and education – the details of which are relatively unclear despite Thornton's claim, cited above, that it was 'the best education that Kingdome could afford'. As was typical at this time, the spiritual facet of a young child's education was most important, and a key responsibility of the mother or a maternal surrogate. Thus, when Mary's mother was alive, 'the principal role assigned to Lady Cork was to cultivate a spiritual atmosphere within the household'.²⁷ Lady Clayton, as we have seen, also helped make sure that the Boyle girls within her care, including Mary, were 'carefully and piously educated'. Alice's mother apparently took this aspect of her identity quite seriously, for Wandesford writes in *A Book of Instructions* for his son that 'In this Time of your Minority [...] your Devotions to God will be directed by your Mother and others about you' (12). Comber further reports that:

Mrs. *Wandesforde* followed the Example of her Husband's excellent Mother, calling her Children together every Morning before they breakfasted, and making them repeat their private Prayers to her, read or repeat by Memory Psalms and Chapters, [...] and then blest them on their Knees. (32)

25 Wandesford and Wentworth had been friends since boyhood.

26 It is no coincidence that Comber uses distinctly paternal language to describe Christopher Wandesford: '[H]e was truly a Father not only to his Children, but to all his Dependants' and 'The *Irish* at our Ld. Deputy's Interment raised their *peculiar* Lamentations, a signal Honour, paid to him as the *common Parent* of the Kingdom' (*Memoirs* 137, 141).

27 Canny, *Upstart Earl*, 118.

Wentworth's daughters lived in Dublin under the direct guidance of their stepmother, Elizabeth, whom their father had married somewhat hastily – within a year of their mother's death – likely, at least in part, to assure a consistent spiritual caregiver in his children's lives as he prepared to move his household to Ireland.²⁸ She, his three children (at the time), and his brother actually set up house in Dublin several months before he himself arrived. Later, of course, the girls' grandmother took over their upbringing but only – it bears repeating – as their father ordained.

As for non-familial companionship, the girls seem to have had plenty, if primarily aristocratic and 'English'; examples include elite families like those with whom Alice dined and the play- and study-mates with whom she spent her days. For instance, in one of the more light-hearted scenes of her narrative, Thornton describes 'play time' spent 'swing[ing] by the Armes for recreation & being good to exercize the body of Children in growing'. Indeed, this activity, encouraged by Lady Strafford, united the older girls, or 'ladies', with the younger ones, since Thornton writes of how '[T]he ladies [...] would make me, beeing a young girle, doe the same with them, & I did soe & could hold very well by the Armes as they did & [...] found it did me good' (13). Thus, although Alice and Mary must have interacted with Irish people to at least some degree (we know, for example, that an Irish boy named Frank Kelly joined Alice's family for a time and that Lord Deputy Wentworth's household at Dublin Castle numbered close to 300 people), they generally do not figure in the older women's recollections of their youth unless as the reason for and backdrop of their fathers' work.²⁹ And that work, as Thornton states directly, was none other than 'the due ordering of that Barbarous People & theire Ciuilizeng them to our good Lawes & gouernment' (18).

In the background of their fathers' labour, then, the girls lived a quite luxurious life. Wentworth's Dublin Castle was enhanced by 'polished marble columns and orders for Venetian brocades', while the Earl of Cork apparently 'allowed his younger daughters a hundred pounds a year pin-money'.³⁰ Life for these elite English girls seems, in fact, to have been so pleasant that it

28 Wentworth married first Lady Margaret Clifford; second Lady Arabella Holles, mother of Anne and Arabella; and third Elizabeth Rodes.

29 By the nature of his position, Wentworth would have taken into his household 'the sons of many of his friends as pages or gentlemen-in-waiting' as well as supervised 'young Irish noblemen' (Wedgwood, *Thomas Wentworth*, 204, 205). Such details provide only the barest hint of the number and types of people with whom his daughters would have come into contact while living in Dublin Castle.

30 Wedgwood, *Thomas Wentworth*, 226, 180.

is easy to forget that they faced any hardships at all before their respective departures from Ireland. Yet Mary's sister Margaret *died* while they were both fostering with Lady Clayton. Alice reports nearly 'drowning In Ireland by a fall out of the Coach' in 1636, hurting herself in a fall while swinging, barely avoiding injury from a fire at their house in Dublin, and nearly succumbing to shipwreck on her return voyage to Ireland from Bath in 1639 (11, 12, 13, 15). And the Wentworth girls had to be rescued in the middle of the night from a fire at Dublin Castle that ultimately destroyed the wing in which they were sleeping. Such facts remind us that the narrative lenses through which these recollections are conveyed are informed by nostalgia, hindsight, basic life experiences as adults, and – to varying degrees – 'Anglo-Irish colonial subjectivity'.³¹

Mary Rich's narrative is particularly instructive in regard to the role of hindsight. In her account, she claims first 'dissatisfaction' at having to leave Lady Clayton, but later gratitude to both her father and her God for taking her away from Ireland and 'into England'. This striking shift from displeasure to filial gratitude within mere paragraphs is a consequence of time: time for Rich to marry a man of her own choosing (rather than her father's choice of James Hamilton), time to experience a less than satisfactory marriage with that husband, time to embark on repentant and defensive autobiographical projects, and time to witness history. For Mary Boyle, in other words, Ireland was simply home – the site of girlhood, relative content, and attentive caregivers. But for Mary Rich, Ireland *after* she left it became the site of rebellion as well as of a narrowly avoided personal disaster. Writing of her refusal to marry Hamilton, she notes how hindsight reveals:

[A] good providence of God in not letting me close with it, for within a year after my absolute refusing him, he was, by the rebellion of Ireland, impoverished so that he lost for a great while his whole estate, the rebels being in possession of it; which I should have liked very ill, for if I had married him it must have been for his estate's sake, not his own, his person being highly disagreeable to me. (3)

Much has been written about Rich's various motives and rhetorical goals in her multiple, often quite different, autobiographical accounts. In the case of her autobiography, from which I have been quoting, Rich seems deeply concerned to defend her filial disobedience, which she does through the reliance on providence (seen here) as well as her use of a romance plot that

31 Chedgzoy, *Women's Writing in the British Atlantic World*, 93.

practically demands her disobedience in the name of love.³² Yet, just as the reality was quite different from the autobiographical account – something we know because of the frequent complaints and worries she expressed about her husband and her marriage in her voluminous diaries – so were the real circumstances around her departure from Ireland likely different than how she represents them here. In Rich's autobiography, she reports being called away from Ireland in one sentence and then moving with her family to England and being courted by Hamilton in the next; the grammatical joining of the two incidents implies a causal relationship as well. Perhaps this was the case, but other possibilities also exist, with at least one Earl of Cork biographer, Dorothea Townshend, claiming that Mary left Lady Clayton because the latter was changing her living situation in the wake of her husband's death in 1637 (292).

In the end, however, it is not the reason for Mary's departure from Ireland that matters most here but, instead, the fact that she constructed the Ireland of her youth in a very intentional way that was inevitably informed by her adulthood in England. The latter included relief at not having married into a family that would be devastated by conflict in Ireland, as well as a need to justify and make sense of a life lived entirely – and sometimes controversially – in England. Both of these motives, furthermore, are bound up with her father, a dominant patriarchal figure who loomed large in her own life as well as that of seventeenth-century Ireland.

When Richard Boyle, then, 'removed, with his family, into England' (3), Mary's Irish home shifted into her past.³³ In accordance with the pattern I have delineated, the safe Irish space in which she, an aristocratic English girl, could develop in traditional fashion disappeared with the departure of the father, the colonial authority, and in fact became increasingly dangerous. This moralistic story is both personal and political. After all, even though Rich and Thornton embarked on their autobiographical projects with primarily personal motives, to idealize a father or a father's role in Ireland inevitably meant idealizing the English colonial project that took the father to Ireland in the first place.³⁴ Ironically, to read Thornton's and Rich's texts in this way is also to recognize how quickly 'Ireland' and 'England' lose any sense of

32 See Eckerle, *Romancing the Self*, esp. 148–58.

33 As it turned out, Boyle's move to England was only temporary; Mary's was permanent.

34 Although self-defence looms large in both cases, it dominates Thornton's revised manuscript. Anselment documents that, '[C]ompelled to defend her reputation and that of her family, when Alice expanded the recollections of the Irish years significantly, the revision reflects the defensive tenor. Praise of her honorable father and devotion to a merciful God are an essential part of this vindication' ('Alice Thornton').

clearly demarcated borders in their narratives. When, for example, Thornton fondly recalls ‘the best education that Kingdome could afford’, one must ponder exactly which kingdom she means. Since she writes as a widow in England, ‘this kingdom’ most logically refers to England itself. Yet drawing attention to ‘that Kingdome’ in a narrative moment about life in Ireland would seem to point to Ireland, or possibly to Ireland as it was managed by England, thus raising intriguing questions about just how a young girl might have understood the place in which she found herself. Ireland, for the young Alice, *was* England. Only in adulthood can she see the fragility of this construct and of the idyll it enabled in her youth.

Therefore, through the eyes of Mary’s and Alice’s older selves, we witness elite English girlhood at its finest, regardless of the soil on which it occurs. Because the walls that surrounded this girlhood eventually disintegrated, we are able to see with greater clarity not only just what went on there but also – as most colonial powers eventually learn – that the borders are *not* distinct, nor are the walls impenetrable. For the purposes of this essay, furthermore, we learn something about the fragility of early modern girls’ youth as well. Indeed, only by bringing together the tale of Ireland as a source of pain and unhappiness with the happier story of the Ireland that offers a peaceful, traditional aristocratic girlhood – presided over by the family patriarch, complemented by English companions or family members, and isolated from the Irish beyond the household’s walls – can we begin to understand the complex emotional and geographical landscapes within which such girlhoods were experienced and the kind of self-sustaining fictions that undergirded it. If the differentiation between ‘girlhood’ and ‘youth’ is not as clear here as we might like, it may well be because the ideal circumstances in which such a transition *should* have occurred broke down or unravelled, providing glimpses of the horror outside the familial walls that would haunt Alice and Mary long after their youths had faded.

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