

**The University of Akron**

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**From the Selected Works of Michael F. Graham**

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Jane E.A. Dawson, *The Politics of Religion in the Age of Mary, Queen of Scots: The Earl of Argyll and the Struggle for Britain and Ireland*

Michael Graham, *The University of Akron*



Available at: [https://works.bepress.com/michael\\_graham/S/](https://works.bepress.com/michael_graham/S/)

Mary Robbins' discussion of William Dunbar's problematic poem "Off Februar the fyiftene nycht" considers the problems of inversion. Occurring on the last night of Carnival before the beginning of Lent, the poem envisions courtiers dancing in hell and plebeian tradesmen, also in hell, participating in a tournament. Dunbar, she argues, stands at the edge of the medieval and Renaissance worlds. The grotesque pain of the medieval hell has been somewhat softened, but it has yet to be supplanted with the carnivalesque, Rabelaisian laughter that the Soviet critic Mikhail Bakhtin associated with modernity. Dunbar soothes the status quo without rejecting it. Robbins' essay would clearly have profited from the well-known work on this subject by Natalie Davis and Emmanuel LeRoy-Ladurie. Such historical studies rather than formal literary criticism might prove helpful here, for, among other things, readers may find themselves wondering why the devil eventually decided that he preferred a highland pageant to the aristocratic dance, and then after all banished the "Erschemen" to the lowest reaches of hell.

George Brunsten's diffuse tale of the earl-saint Magnus of Orkney, whose career proved vastly more significant after his death, seems to suggest that a saint's political uses correlated directly with his spiritual power. Elizabeth Ewan looks at defamation and gender, and discovers that social control was paramount, with gender playing out in subtle and complicated ways. It may have been more damaging to call a man a cuckold than a woman a whore. Margaret MacIntyre seeks to rehabilitate Margaret Tudor, James IV's wife and Henry VIII's sister, against the calumnies of historians great and small, running from John Mair in 1521 to Michael Lynch of today. The result is rather sad, for we never really enter into Margaret's thinking. Instead, we only hear her whining—and Dr. MacIntyre's special pleading. Andrea Budgey seeks to explicate and contextualize a passage from Gerard of Wales' *Typographica Hibernica* (c. 1188) about Irish and Scottish music. She discusses the passage and the considerable literature about it at some length, but to little discernable conclusion. At one point she expresses the concern that readers might deem her remarks "pedantic." Her concern is fully justified.

Only occasionally in this disparate collection of essays do we encounter significant insight. Such a beautifully produced book ought to have offered far more.

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ARTHUR WILLIAMSON

Jane E. A. Dawson. *The Politics of Religion in the Age of Mary, Queen of Scots: The Earl of Argyll and the Struggle for Britain and Ireland*. (Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History.) New York: Cambridge University Press. 2002. Pp. xvii, 255. \$60.00. ISBN 0-521-80996-7.

Historians in recent years have spent a lot of time and ink conceptualizing and re-conceptualizing the "New British History," creating such a thicket that few have had the boldness or fortitude to cut through and actually produce any original research within the framework. This long-awaited book is a happy exception. It delivers on its promise: a study of the career of an individual who was not a monarch and yet whose influence extended through Scotland, Ireland, and (to a lesser degree, as it would turn out) England at a critical moment in their collective histories.

Archibald Campbell, fifth earl of Argyll (1538–73) was probably the most powerful uncrowned individual in Britain during the time he held the earldom, commencing with his father's death in 1558, but cut short by the fifth earl's own premature death, possibly from a stroke or a severe attack of kidney stones, in 1573. He was one of the original five signers of the Band of the Congregation in December 1557, which provided the seed of the political movement that culminated in the Reformation Parliament (1560) that ended Scotland's formal ties with Rome. He was a close advisor and confidante of his sister-in-law Mary, Queen of Scots during most of her personal reign in Scotland (1561–67), despite their religious differences. Later he would provide leadership for the party of the exiled queen during the Marian civil wars, although he made his own peace with the supporters of James VI in 1571.

But his role in Scottish politics (he was also hereditary justice-general) was not what made him such a towering figure. Dawson points out that “before 1603, British politics could only be found in the interstices between the overlapping political worlds of the Atlantic archipelago” (p. 86). Argyll's position in the Gaelic world placed him in a position to dominate one of those interstices. As head of Clan Campbell, he was *MacCailein Mór*, the leading chief in the western Highlands and Islands, and his power did not stop at the North Channel, the narrow sea lane that separates the Mull of Kintyre from the coast of Antrim in the north of Ireland. Campbell allies and dependents such as the MacDonalds (not yet estranged from the Campbells as they would later become) had branches on both sides of the channel, and the Campbells were viewed as allies by the Donegal O'Donnells as well. Indeed, one of the future fifth earl's first military experiences came when he led an army of Campbell mercenaries to Ireland to help Calvagh O'Donnell overthrow his father Manus in 1555–56. The fifth earl was in effect a Gaelic king, with his own taxation system, clan council, and quasi-royal court hosting Gaelic *literati* and a bardic school. Dawson notes English alarm over his possession of heavy artillery, and the fact that, with the ability to raise 15,000 troops, he was the third leading military power in the British Isles. The Scottish Crown could theoretically raise 20,000, but 5,000 of those came from Argyll.

Argyll's interest in protestant reform and resentment of French influence in the regency of Mary of Guise led him and his friend James Stewart (future earl of Moray and half-brother to Mary, Queen of Scots) to seek English assistance in 1559–60, as the Lords of the Congregation directly challenged the regent's government. Most critically for Dawson's argument, Argyll shared with William Cecil the belief that the security of a protestant Britain would require an effective pacification of the north of Ireland, where Shane O'Neill was resisting English rule. As a result, the Anglo-Scottish agreement of early 1560, which secured English troops for the army of the Congregation in Scotland, included a pledge by the fifth earl of Argyll to use his own Campbell troops as well as those of his allies in the north of Ireland against the O'Neills. Cecil and Thomas Randolph, English ambassador to the Scots, were both very impressed with Argyll, despite their suspicions of his Gaelic background, when they finally met in person. He and James Stewart, the young turks of the Scots protestant nobility, were the linchpins in the diplomatic revolution of 1560, which severed the Auld Alliance between Scotland and France.

But those high hopes of 1560 would be dashed, much to Argyll's disillusionment. The English administration in Dublin did not want to become beholden to the Scots in Ireland. Despite Cecil's plans, English officials refused Argyll's counsel and declined his military

aid. The return to Scotland of the queen in 1561 also changed the picture, as Argyll was almost always loyal to the Crown. By 1565, he had given up on the English, and would not trust them in the future. In 1567 he broke with Moray, his ally of ten years, due to the latter's role in the deposition of the queen. Eventually, Argyll would sow the seeds of Ulster's Nine Years' War through his sponsorship of a set of marriage alliances uniting Campbells, O'Neills, and MacDonalds.

Dawson deftly guides readers through the complexities of Gaelic politics. Her style is that of the analytical narrative, which can become tedious at times, particularly when it leads to ungrammatical sentences such as "Having been sunk in a lethargic gloom at the end of 1570, these developments frightened Argyll into a frenzied round of triangular negotiations" (p. 185). As in her other work, she is remarkably confident about the popularity of religious reform in Scotland; this reviewer suspects the presence of an occupying army, rather than the wishes of the locals, was the main factor behind the iconoclasm (and the rave reaction to John Knox's sermon) in St. Andrews in June 1559. She also assumes that Argyll sponsored an effective reform of the Highlands and Islands, despite the paucity of evidence there. It seems remarkable that religion did not prevent him from making common cause with either Mary, Queen of Scots or any number of Ulster Gaels.

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Rowan Strong, *Episcopalianism in Nineteenth-Century Scotland: Religious Responses to a Modernizing Society*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2002. Pp. Xvii, 347. \$74.00. ISBN 0-19-924922-9.

The challenges to religion by the forces of modernity, especially industrialization and urbanization, have been the theme of numerous histories. How did religion, rooted in tradition and based on God's word, respond to these new forces that appeared during the nineteenth century? Industrialization did create new problems such as class conflicts, unemployment, and urban squalor. Secularism or nationalism became popular creeds, and the Marxists condemned religion as the opiate of the masses. Yet churches did not vanish and religion did not disappear. Much has been written about the English response to the perceived threats from the new modern society, but historians have neglected how Scottish Episcopalianism confronted the new industrial world. Rowan Strong's interesting and insightful book, however, addresses this question.

Strong describes how Scottish Episcopalianism reacted to the new industrial society of the nineteenth century, a force over which it had little control. He begins by asking two questions: "How did Episcopalians respond to the changes and challenges of an emerging modern society? Was their religion merely another force for the Anglicization of Scotland in the nineteenth century, or did it make some contribution to a sense of Scottish national identity" (p. vii)? Strong not only studies the structure and organization of this church, but he looks at both individuals and groups within Scottish Episcopalianism and the manner in which each responded to industrialization and urbanization.

The author sets the stage for his analysis by tracing the history of Scottish Episcopalianism from 1560 to 1900. Strong skillfully describes the intricate history of religion in Scotland. The conflict between Episcopalianism and Presbyterianism and the victory that the latter