

Marianne Elliott — *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989. Pp. x, 492.

There are few places where history is more deeply embedded in public discourse than in Ireland. Not only does the general populace have a great interest in, and a fair (if partisan) knowledge of their country's past; but several contending groups are currently in arms trying to redress "historical" grievances, or to protect "historic" relationships. As a result, many people, including the leadership of both constitutional and revolutionary parties, are intensely interested in how historians rewrite the past. This is especially true when the historian turns her or his attention toward one of those individuals who occupies a central place in a construct of history which has served as the foundation of contemporary ideology. This is precisely what Marianne Elliott has done in her detailed and compelling biography of Ireland's major revolutionary figure of the 18th and 20th centuries, Theobald Wolfe Tone.

Elliott traces the evolution of Tone's career through its many stages with meticulous care. Tone, the careerist barrister, the whig reformer, the Protestant champion of Catholic rights, the founding member of Irish republicanism, the American exile, and finally — almost "accidentally" — Tone the revolutionary; all are subjected to the cold light of critical historical analysis. The care Elliott has taken in detailing the development of Tone's political thought, and the haphazard and occasionally reckless nature of his political odyssey, will surely upset many of those who have seen Tone only through the lens of 20th-century ideology; but ultimately, most should recognize that the figure which emerges from these pages is far more complicated and humane than the icon which myth has long projected. He appears more vulnerable, less powerful and, for all this, more heroic.

Among the many positive elements of this biography, perhaps the most praiseworthy is Elliott's careful use of Tone's manuscript journals as a foil to the familiar published versions, enabling her to correct for the posthumous editing of Tone's manuscript by his family, and to carefully evaluate the impression of clarity and control which the journals provide. Noting that the very process of retrospective writing clarified political ideas which "were anything but clear at the time" (2), she carefully reconstructs the actual course of ideas and events which ultimately led to Tone's advocacy of and participation in violent, republican, separatist revolution. The character and personality which emerges in this work is less perfect than that of the popular iconography. Tone was capable of snobbery, chauvinism and fits of monumental impatience; but none of this seemed to have detracted from his personal value as a friend, partner or compatriot. Elliott describes him as

a man of considerable warmth, generosity and talent ... But he was impatient of humbug, cavil and unearned privilege, and his intellectual contempt for the country's rulers laid the ground for his active republicanism. He was quite fearless, sometimes to the point of folly, in pursuit of a principle. This, attached to a penchant for a life of adventure, made him an ideal revolutionary ... (2)

The interpretation most likely to be controversial is Elliott's characterization of Tone's republicanism as "accidental". Elliott interprets several critical turning points in Tone's political odyssey as the result of circumstances or events which were not only outside of his control, but had little to do with his political ideology. For example, Elliott notes that his "tendency for personal attachment ... frequently played a more important role in dictating his career than did pure principle" (36), and that his critical step from radical reformist to revolutionary was "a case of necessity as much as

choice". Elsewhere, she claims, "his republicanism was an accident of character as much as of timing" (37). And perhaps most provocative of all, she calls Irish republicanism itself an "accident" (36). Elliott's choice of this theme is not dictated by any hostility to Tone or his cause, but by an empirical methodology which keeps her close to the reality of Tone's experience. Some may charge that she remains *too* close to the particular, and thus fails to see that there was little that was 'accidental' about the aristocratic mafia which monopolized the benefits of the legal system and caused the "accidental" financial embarrassments which both propelled Tone into a political career and insured that privilege and hierarchy would forever be his enemies. Such 'accidental' combinations of grievance and necessity were the major force behind most 18th-century class conflict. Elsewhere, Elliott recognizes this, noting that Tone was "part of that process of fracturing elites which was producing revolution all over Europe" (61). Yet, with her particular formulation, Elliott demands the acceptance of Tone's fallibility, of the existence of self-interest in his actions. Most of all, she demands a recognition of the complex historical relationships of Irish society which circumscribed the possibilities of political transformation, and which controlled the actions of individual participants in these transformations.

There are other interpretations which may be queried by historians with different perspectives. For example: Elliott dismisses any relation between Tone's support of Catholic Emancipation and the fact that his mother had been raised as a Catholic by noting that he was "thoroughly Protestant". But it is hardly necessary to suggest that Tone was a crypto-Catholic to suppose that his intimate knowledge of his mother's experiences had an influence on his attitudes towards Catholics. It is worth noting, in this light, that Tone shared this 'mixed' parentage with Edmund Burke, and these two ideological poles of 18th-century Ireland seemed to have agreed on only this one thing: the desirability of Catholic Emancipation. This interpretation is of some importance, as Elliott makes it very clear that the issue of Catholic Emancipation, rather than Irish independence, was at the centre of Tone's political evolution. Another area of possible contention concerns the pride of the place which Elliott awards to Belfast; she provides convincing evidence of the essential role of Belfast radicalism in the development of Tone's political career. Yet she also provides abundant evidence of a parallel influence centered on the Anglo-Irish world of Dublin. For example, Tone drew his early inspiration from the intellectual center of the ascendancy, Trinity College, where he first came into contact with the uniquely Anglo-Irish language which joined the classical associations of public virtue, liberty, and opposition to tyranny with the Enlightenment values of tolerance, secularism, and political purity. Molyneux, Swift, and Laurence Parsons all strongly influenced Tone's thinking. All this would seem to give Tone's Anglo-Irish environment an equal claim to his tutelage.

There are other points open to differing interpretations, but a great strength of this work is the author's judicious separation of fact and judgment. That, coupled with the abundance of material which she provides her readers, will enable the construction of alternative perspectives. In the charged atmosphere of Irish republican historiography, this is a significant achievement, and it should be applauded. There is much else here to praise: Professor Elliott writes with clarity, ease, and candor, producing a text which is engaging and enjoyable to read; she provides important new material on Tone's time in America and France, and she also illuminates many figures who influenced and/or cooperated with Tone, and who are often hidden by the broad shadows cast by Tone's popular image. She rescues some from near obscurity, such

as Joseph Pollock, the "Irish Rousseau", and offers others their first serious consideration by a modern historian. Her treatment of Thomas Russell, Tone's closest friend and confidant, is so thorough that her work will surely be the starting place for Russell's future biographers.

Without doubt, however, the most important, and even compelling aspect of this work is the liberation of Tone and his thought from the polemical trap in which he has long been ensnared. This achievement will certainly win her much criticism from polemicists of all persuasions, but it should be welcomed by every student of Tone, Irish republicanism, and 18th-century society and politics. Those who refuse to recognize this can only do so because they are uncomfortable with the fact that

Tone was a deist who disliked institutionalized religion and sectarianism of any hue; that he had no time for the romantic Gaelicism which has become part of Irish nationalism, and was far less dogmatic about England or the resort to arms than is commonly supposed ...

and, most especially, that "his central message was not that Ireland's abiding evil was England, but rather that her people were disunited." Surely, all readers, with our vantage of two centuries, will be able to see the logic of Tone's greatest Irish understanding: until the problem of sectarianism is solved, the problem of England will remain. "This is why, nearly two hundred years after his death, Wolfe Tone is still a living force in Ireland" (1).

Kevin O'Neill
Boston College

Alain Erlande-Brandenburg — *La Cathédrale*. Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1989. Pp. 418.

This work traces the development of the cathedral physically from its fourth-century visible presence in Gaul through the end of the Gothic period. Throughout his study, the author invokes geographic variations, particularly those between northern France and the Midi, although gestures are made periodically to England, Germany, Italy, Spain, and, at times, eastern Europe. The author states that he will scan the major eras of development: emergence and initial organization, Carolingian impact, Romanesque revisions, and Gothic *épanouissement*. Focusing on topographic evolution, Erlande-Brandenburg centers the cathedral squarely in its urban context with attention to the spiritual and political dynamics of each succeeding era. This study is a synthesis of recent and more venerable research, at times elucidating archeological findings through confrontation with written records.

The author opens his work with an illuminating examination of the nineteenth-century rediscovery of Gothic architecture, exploring the spiritual vision of Victor Hugo and the practical and aesthetic impact of Viollet-le-Duc in the general context of "mythification de la 'cathédrale'" (13). Moving on to his medieval topic, Erlande-Brandenburg correctly presents the cathedral as an urban phenomenon of singular importance in its many manifestations over the centuries. Numerous sketches and layout plans help to anchor the author's arguments. However, the result of new research will be difficult for the concerned reader to pursue, given the lack of specific