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Sean Moore Associate Professor of English, COLA, travels to Ireland

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Sean Moore

Associate Professor of English, COLA ~ Ireland

In October, I travelled to Dublin, Ireland to deliver a talk at the 13th Dublin Symposium on Jonathan Swift at St. Patrick's Cathedral, where Swift was dean from 1714-1745. This invitation-only gathering, organized by Professor Emeritus Robert Mahony of the Catholic University of America, is the only annual meeting dedicated to Swift Studies in the world. It is rivalled only by the Münster Symposium on Jonathan Swift, which meets every four or five years in Germany and which I attend from time to time. It is made possible by the current Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral, the Very Reverend Victor Stacey, and the Jonathan Swift Foundation. My personal participation was funded by CIE, the UNH Center for the Humanities, and the UNH English department. This funding also enabled me to spend additional time in Dublin performing archival research on manuscripts at Marsh's Library, the eighteenth-century library of the Cathedral.



Professor Sean Moore speaking at 13th Dublin Symposium at St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin

The Dublin symposium features 3-4 speakers from all over the world to discuss their work on Swift, Ireland, and eighteenth century literature and history more generally. This year's speakers were Professors Claire Connolly of University College Cork, Christine Gerrard of Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, Jenny Davidson of Columbia University, and myself. Professor Frank Boyle of Fordham and Professor Emeritus Claude Rawson of Yale were respondents to the panel's papers. There were approximately fifty attendees from Irish academia, the Church of Ireland, and the general public, all of whom came prepared with compelling questions for the panel.

My own contribution to the panel was a paper that I had originally entitled "The Social Network of Dublin Printers," which was going to map the relationships of people engaged in that 18th-century profession, but after I discovered a ledger of secret service payments to printers in Marsh's Library, the paper ended up being more about those payments. I became particularly interested in interrogating Jürgen Habermas's claims that an independent media and public sphere emerged in the eighteenth century, given that secret service funding for newspapers makes it clear that government and the press in the period, unlike in our own era, were closely intertwined. In fact, I

found that the person administering the secret service ledger at Dublin Castle – the seat of the executive branch of the English government in Ireland – was also a printer who was a member of the guild of printers, booksellers, and stationers! Secret service money was both subsidizing the press and the arts in this period and regulating the press by paying some printers to advertise for the arrest of others. This overlapping of the social network of the Castle with the social network of journalists and other members of the guild suggests that it is difficult to define freedom of the press in the eighteenth century – a problem that helps us understand the background against which the U.S. founding fathers established the first amendment.

Boyle, Rawson, and the audience provided very helpful feedback on my paper, suggesting, among other things, that I may wish to assess the extent and impact that Dublin Castle's secret service funding of the press had, rather than just saying that they had such a fund. In addition, because Swift, at times when his Tory party was not in power, objected to secret service funding, Rawson said that it is important to explore whether Swift had any participation in secret service funding or publications while the Tories were in government. Other audiences members wanted to know how "secret" secret service funding for the press was, and what did the terms "secret service," or "secret" and "service," mean in the eighteenth century?

My participation in international seminars of this kind is absolutely crucial to maintaining my scholarly reputation in Ireland, the U.K., and other countries, and I am grateful to CIE, the Center for the Humanities, and the English department for their sponsorship.



In front of St. Patrick's Cathedral



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