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White Savage: William Johnson and the Invention of America

Fintan O'Toole

Faber and Faber, £9.99

In a planned series of three books about Ireland's historical contribution to America's mythology of itself, O'Toole's first subject provides for a complication of the Irish postcolonial narrative – an established scheme in his journalism – and for an intriguing illustration of the complex history of Anglo-America. Johnson, an ambitious native Irishman brokering the British Empire among the native Americans of the north-eastern frontier in the mid-eighteenth century was a model for Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*. Lusty and lordly in deportment, Johnson emerges in O'Toole's empathetic hands not as the cynical and greedy collaborator others would have him, but as an adept of *realpolitik* whose lifelong adaptability was schooled in the complex strategies of conversion and evasion he developed at home as the scion of a Gaelic Jacobite family. O'Toole is both biographer and dramatist here, and his combination of reader-friendly narrative drive with scholarship suggests by the end that he would surely have the flair for a fine historical novel.

John Kenny