

A central though unarticulated thrust of Newby's overall analysis is that the lowland towns, so long viewed as the oppressors of Highland life and culture and the repository of its economic migrants, actually became in some sense the source of their liberation. The success of the towns in this regard would, of course, be difficult to quantify in any meaningful sense, and Newby concentrates instead on the much more tangible impact of a particular group of Irish and Scots radicals for whom Highland land agitation was but one of many arenas for their politics.

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MICHAEL DAVITT: FROM THE GAELIC AMERICAN. By John Devoy. Edited by Carla King and W. J. McCormack. Pp 192. Dublin: University College Dublin Press. 2008. €20. (Classics of Irish History)

Carla King and W. J. McCormack's latest contribution to U.C.D. Press's series, Classics of Irish History, is a much-needed and highly interesting edition of John Devoy's series of articles about Michael Davitt and the 'new departure', originally published in the *Gaelic American* immediately after Davitt's death, and running from 16 June to 3 November 1906. Devoy's seventeen articles have been supplemented with a critical introduction, Devoy's own obituary of Davitt published in the same newspaper on 9 June, and a series of editorial footnotes that, despite occasional errors (such as the statement that John Boyle O'Reilly escaped from Australia in the *Catalpa* (p. 157)), will prove valuable to lay readers and non-specialists in the period. Perhaps the footnotes' most useful features are the brief but numerous biographical profiles, and the editors' painstaking identification of almost every nameless Fenian appearing in the narrative.

As the editors explain (p. 1), Devoy's retrospective is incomplete as a biography of Davitt, but offers a privileged backstage pass into the world of Fenianism during the late 1870s, with its heated internal controversies surrounding the 'new departure' scheme and the genesis of the Land War. Both episodes have been meticulously recounted and analysed by later historians, from T. W. Moody to Owen McGee, but King and McCormack's edition recovers for the reader the immediacy of Devoy's first-hand account. As the editors conclude, it is not quite clear what Devoy's ultimate reasons were for publishing such a detailed exposé over twenty-five years after the events; possibly a combination of nostalgia, a sense of posterity, the needs of Clan na Gael propaganda, personal self-vindication and a belated (and unconvincing) attempt to reclaim Davitt for Fenianism (pp 10–11). The backdrop of the Wyndham Land Act suggests some additional contemporary relevance.

Much in the style of his *Recollections of an Irish rebel* (New York, 1929), Devoy intersperses his narration with a wealth of anecdotes and personal stories, but as is usually the case with autobiographical works, the most interesting portrait given is that of the writer himself. 'Able, dedicated but disputatious' is the editors' description of Devoy (p. 1), and all three qualities stand out from the pages. As a chronicler, Devoy is to the Fenian movement what Charles Gavan Duffy was to Young Ireland. His account is well documented, factually accurate and scrupulously objective in tone. He downplays his own achievements, occasionally acknowledges his own biases, and gives his adversaries credit for intellectual honesty. It is sometimes easy to forget that he was not a neutral observer but a participant, and that his perspective of events must be taken with due reservation. This is especially the case with his account of the two different interviews between himself, Davitt and Parnell in April and June 1879 (pp 120–33), and the conditions on which Parnell supposedly accepted the leadership of a blurry parliamentary-Fenian-agrarian compact. As the editors explain, quoting F. S. L. Lyons (p. 4), it was a 'psychological necessity' for Devoy to believe that such an agreement had taken place, even if Parnell's later conduct belied it.

But leaving aside the intricacies of the 'new departure' negotiations, Devoy's narrative affords numerous other sources of interest. It presents the reader with fascinating portraits of Davitt and Parnell, and it does reconstruct an important period in Davitt's career, even if he soon loses centre stage to Devoy's first-person perspective. In spite of the implication (pp 43–4) that Devoy's enlightening 'interviews' with Fenian leaders in the aftermath of the 'new departure' telegram were doctored, the series also provides a revealing insight into Fenian ideas, not only on the land question, but on anti-sectarianism, education, the Catholic Church, and the inner tensions in the Fenian mind between the democratic ideal and a persistent fascination for chieftain figures such as Parnell (pp 124–5).

King and McCormack have made a series of necessary editorial modifications to the original articles, notably the suppression of most section titles and chapter headings, but this does not detract from the general accuracy of the transcription or the excellent introduction, and despite the occasionally disappointing footnotes, researchers will find this an extremely useful addition to the bibliography on the 'new departure' and the Land War. Until followed by the Davitt diaries, it will certainly be the most important primary source for the period available to the general public.

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BETWEEN COMRADES: JAMES CONNOLLY, LETTERS AND CORRESPONDENCE 1889–1916. Edited by Donal Nevin. Pp 688. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan. 2007. €29.99.

James Connolly has been the subject of a full shelf of books that vary from three major biographies to polemical pamphlets. But only a fraction of Connolly's writings have been published. In editing these letters, Donal Nevin has produced an essential volume for students of Connolly and a major source for the early history of the socialist movement in Ireland.

The introduction refrains from analysis, amounting to a political biography based on the letters. There are helpful footnotes, and a hundred pages of biographical notes vividly recreate Connolly's milieu, including the correspondents, the leading British socialists before the First World War, and most of the few dozen active socialists in Ireland.

But the editor fails to provide some basic information. We are not told where each document is held. Most, the editor says, are in the National Library of Ireland in the papers of the trade unionist William O'Brien. Available to researchers since the 1970s, many have already been filleted for quotations (notably for Samuel Levenson's *James Connolly: A biography* (1973)). But obvious questions are left unanswered: is this a complete collection of the known surviving letters, and has the editor trawled the catalogues of likely American and British collections?

C. Desmond Greaves, author of the classic *Life and times of James Connolly* (1961), did not have access to these letters. Donal Nevin's recent *James Connolly: a full life* (2005) corrects Greaves's factual errors and draws on new sources, while integrating the letters' contents. Nevin's biography, however, does not make their publication redundant.

Except for Connolly's early letters to his wife, most deal with his work as a socialist organiser, propagandist and union organiser. So they include a good deal of mundane detail. Letters both from and to Connolly are included. He emerged from his political apprenticeship in Scotland as a fine writer who had read widely. From the mid-1890s, his letters provide a trenchant commentary on the socialist and labour movements in Ireland, Britain and America. He was in the thick of debates among Marxists on the compromising tendencies in European and British Marxism; on the new, broader labour and socialist parties, such as Keir Hardie's Independent Labour Party and the Socialist Party of America; on the established trade unions and, later, the new revolutionary syndicalist unions; and