

inherent in both areas meant the most successful Irish leader of the age had to appease an increasingly fractured movement at home as well as the all-essential British people, a task that was never going to be easy. This problem was rendered the more difficult by the second phase of the Land War, the 'Plan of Campaign', and an increasingly aggressive, self-confident and effective Conservative policy spearheaded by Arthur Balfour. But, as Bew convincingly observes, it was the divorce that broke Parnell's authority; without this catalyst, Parnell was unchallengeable. By making this case Bew puts to rest a recent historiographic tendency to see the collapse of Parnellism as almost inevitable.

In a stimulating conclusion, Bew shows where his interpretation sits within the expanded literature on Parnell. He notes that Parnell appreciated the problem of sectarian division and, belatedly, the significance of northern concerns but intervened only fitfully, thereby surrendering 'not the leadership, but much of the initiative, to other, inferior hands'. This is not so much unique as a forcefully-argued assessment. In a short and fast-paced account there are bound to be lacuna. The author does not deal with economic factors as adeptly as he does political considerations; as noted above, he is too Irish-centric; there is not always a strong sense of the impact of ideas and ideology; and Parnell's associates and rivals sometimes receive short-shrift.

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CONSTRUCTING IRISH NATIONAL IDENTITY: DISCOURSE AND RITUAL DURING THE LAND WAR, 1879–1882. By Anne Kane. Pp 298. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2011. £65.

In recent scholarship on the Irish Land War (1879–82), there has been a notable focus on the largely neglected cultural dimensions of the conflict, specifically on the cultural significance of aspects such as evictions, boycotting, crowd rituals, newspapers and public reading, and the administration of justice through the Land League's subversive courts. Scholarly attention has come from several disciplines. This latest work by Kane, aspects of which have already been published in a number of academic journals and essay collections, approaches the subject from the perspective of cultural sociology.

Kane examines the interplay between discourses. Her study is concerned less with the outcome of the Land War than with the discursive processes which forged a unified nationalist identity and ideology at this pivotal point in the shaping of modern Ireland. Taking newspapers as her primary source-material, she examines reportage of land meetings, demonstrations, branch meetings, and responses to court proceedings, in order to find and designate 'crucial symbolic concepts, embedded narratives, and patterns of symbolic transformation' (p. 27). 'Rent', for example, is transformed during the conflict to mean oppression, domination and injustice, rather than merely a legalistic term in landlord–tenant transactions (p. 12). Through this form of text analysis, Kane argues, we are able to trace the discursive struggle of various groups during the Land War, and to better understand the dynamics of mass mobilisation.

Kane charts the shifting contours of the 'intertwined discursive structures' of agrarianism, Catholicism and nationalism at play during the Land War. In the early stages of the campaign, a 'retributive discourse' emerged in the west, at odds with the politics of conciliation, and signifying the demand for the restitution of historic land rights. In the later part of 1880, when the movement had spread beyond the west and had won the support of Catholic clergy and large farmers, this gave way to 'militant constitutionalism', a 'refurbished concept of constitutionalism' which stressed collective unity over individualism (p. 150). As an 'unforeseen, and ironic', consequence of the acceptance of this discourse, we ultimately see a 'rehabilitation' of the meaning of conciliation in the late stages of the Land War, which served to temporarily settle the conflict with the Land Act of 1881 (p. 219). Kane's argument is that nationalist identity-formation in these years was

not predictably shaped by emerging group alliances and shared grievances; rather, the process was 'fluid, contingent and undetermined ... due in part to the constant interpretation and reinterpretation of events by group participants' (p. 234).

Group participation is crucial for Kane, and that explains the importance which she attaches to newspapers. She identifies newspaper reading as a ritualised event in which readers are drawn into discursive struggle. In her study, she takes thirteen newspapers and examines at least a thousand accounts of Land War events and speeches. (Over one-third of the pages in the book contain quite lengthy, indented quotations from these sources.) It is odd, however, that a work which lays such emphasis on the role of newspapers in disseminating versions of Irish identity should provide no estimates of the newspapers' circulation figures. Yet Kane clearly appreciates the importance of circulation, noting at one point the role of the national daily *Freeman's Journal* in reporting, 'across the country', a speech by Michael Davitt at the first mass land meeting in County Leitrim in December 1879 (p. 107).

More seriously, there are problems with Kane's methodology. Not only is symbolism at times derived from text where it might not exist, but, beyond that, she can only imagine – albeit an informed imagining – how readers of newspapers interpreted and processed reported events and the 'embedded' narratives and symbolism in the texts. That is not to deny the role of the press in politicisation, or the appetite at that time for communication through the printed word. Nor indeed can we deny the deliberate uses of symbolism and imagery; Philip Bull's work on the land movement, *Land, politics and nationalism* (1996) highlighted the depiction of 'land as a metaphor for the nation'. However, the speculative nature of the methodology in Kane's study is problematic.

Some less serious issues with the book are also worth noting. The general contextual discussion of developments during the land campaign, which are now well-established, is at times laboured and repetitive. And some basic errors stand out: Charles Gavan Duffy and John Blake Dillon were not 'Protestant nationalists' (p. 36); the Irish Republic was not 'established' in 1921 (p. 227); and the nationalist community in late nineteenth-century Ireland did not constitute the 'Irish people', as is claimed on a number of occasions.

Multidisciplinary approaches to Irish history can be productive and mutually enriching. Unfortunately, however, this work does not significantly advance our understanding of the Land War, or indeed its mass participants.

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LAND, POPULAR POLITICS AND AGRARIAN VIOLENCE IN IRELAND. THE CASE OF COUNTY KERRY, 1872–86. By Donnacha Seán Lucey. Pp xiv, 270. Dublin: University College Dublin Press. 2011. €28 paperback.

With no official branches till the autumn of 1880, the Irish National Land League was something of a latecomer in County Kerry. The organisation spread quickly, however, as did agrarian violence. By the winter of 1880–1, Kerry held the highest rate of outrages in Ireland after Galway and Mayo. Since the Great Famine, evictions and landlordism in Kerry had been central to perceptions of misgovernment in the country as a whole, and developments there during the Land War often became the focus of national politics. The county was also the backyard of Timothy Harrington, prominent Land Leaguer and later principal secretary of the National League, though a figure that has been neglected by historians. When the Land League came to a close in 1882, agrarian agitation diminished, but soon revived and, by the mid-1880s, the county was the 'most politically active and agitated region in the country' (p. 6). There are numerous reasons, then, for a study of agrarian politics in Kerry and there is no doubt that Lucey's book is a welcome addition to the historiography of nineteenth-century Ireland.