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Erraught, S. orcid.org/0000-0003-1569-5063 (2023) Dreams of the future in nineteenth century Ireland edited by Richard J. Butler, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2021, 344 pp., £90.00 (Hardback), ISBN 9781800856752. Irish Studies Review, 31 (4). pp. 603-605. ISSN 0967-0882

https://doi.org/10.1080/09670882.2023.2268412

Dreams of the future in nineteenth century Ireland, edited by Richard J. Butler, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2021, 344 pp. £90.00 (Hardback) ISBN 978-1800856752

As editor Richard J. Butler writes in his comprehensive introduction to this engaging volume, "within Irish studies, much existing research has focused on dreams – and especially utopian visions – in the early modern and contemporary period, with rather less said about the nineteenth century" (2–3). Nineteenth century Ireland, he continues "is all too often portrayed in terms of stagnation or nostalgia […] for a golden age: (3). This volume goes a long way towards dispelling this conception of the century as a fallow period and, given the cataclysm of the Great Famine, a tragic interlude between the hopes of the late 18th century and the revival that informed the revolutionary early years of the 20th century.

The book on occasion betrays its conference origins: some areas are covered comprehensively while there are also, on the surface, odd imbalances. There are, for example, as many chapters on Irish diasporic – or colonial? – adventures in Australia, and in particular, Victoria, as on similar experiences in North America, despite the much greater number of emigrants from Ireland who ended up in the latter. However, the two contributors who look at Irish lives in Australia shed valuable light on how comfortably the supposedly "rebellious" Irish could adjust to life in the imperial dominions. Christopher Morash's chapter, in particular, looking at the afterlives of two Young Irelanders, Charles Gavan Duffy and Thomas D'Arcy Magee, in Australia and Canada respectively, demonstrates how relatively seamlessly each was able to translate their earlier Irish nationalism into "a colonial nationalism that was not incommensurate with the British empire and British imperialism" (125). Sophie Cooper's chapter on "Melbourne Visions of an Irish Future" similarly show

how the celebration of Irish heritage and culture in Victoria's capital could coexist with an embrace of "Melbourne's position as a 'jewel' in the British Empire" (143)

The two chapters that do deal with the experience of the Irish in the United States illustrate intriguing and underrepresented areas of research. Fiona Lyons' chapter on Irish language columns in US print media show how the belief that "knowledge of the vernacular … was important in the quest for Irish freedom" (103) survived the journey across the Atlantic, and how the weighted concept of "slavery" as a consequence of linguistic surrender was invoked, in the 1880s by P.J. Daly, editor of the *Irish Echo* in Boston, an image that must surely have been somewhat overdetermined in the context of post-Civil War America. Catherine Healy paints a vivid picture of the philanthropic work of Charlotte Grace O'Brien among Irish emigrants, first in Queenstown (Cobh) and later in New York, and provided a service that matched "girls with employers approved by their own priests" (86) thus providing for both their economic and moral welfare.

In a chapter that to some extent complements the above, Aoife O'Leary McNeice looks at how organisations responded to the humanitarian disaster of the Great Famine. As she notes, "many nineteenth-century observers" saw Ireland as almost irredeemably "backward" and "feudal" (175) and that this perception was "seemingly vindicated" by the Famine (176). She looks closely at the work of the Central Relief Committee (CRC) and the Belfast ladies' Association for the Relief of Irish Destitution (BRA) and details a marked difference in their view of Ireland after the present emergency: the BRA was concerned with relief, almost to the exclusion of prevention, whereas the CRC saw "man-made factors" and historical injustices and inefficiencies at the root, and, in their documentation, understood it is as their task to

highlight these (184) – and to suggest ways in which Ireland might modernise to prevent future famines.

It must be remarked that the dreams of this volume are almost exclusively middle- and even upper-class dreams: anyone hoping for an Irish analogue to Rancière's (2012) Parisian and proletarian utopian visions will be disappointed. Many of the "dreams" were commercial and entrepreneurial schemes, intended to open up trade routes that, for example, in Richard Butler's own chapter, would have seen Belmullet developed as a transatlantic port with rail links to Dublin and on to markets in Britain. These were, as Butler writes, "technological and geo-spatial dreams of modernity" (216) and illustrate that, even if, to observers, Ireland appeared "trapped in an impoverished past" (175), there was no shortage of "dreamers" fully invested in taking advantage of the opportunities offered by new technologies of production, and in particular, of transport, to pull the country into step with the neighbouring island and the world beyond.

Alongside the above key themes, mention must also be made of the "imaginaries" of the era: Pauline Collombier-Lakeman's intriguing look at "home rule fictions" investigates how the literacy boom in late nineteenth century Ireland and Britain afforded the opportunity for some quite eccentric literary productions that sought to "sell" the idea of a radical restructure of the relations between the two islands. They were not, as Collombier- Lakeman concludes " literary masterpieces" (62) but were hardly intended to be.

The book is well-illustrated with figures and maps, and attractively bound, and all of the chapters will prove useful to students of the intellectual life of nineteenth- century

Ireland and its exiles, in the case of Loughlin J. Sweeney's chapter, as far afield as China!

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