

his friend and fellow Young Irelander Charles Gavan Duffy in Brussels, he was able to provide Duffy with detailed advice about living in Victoria.

Pardoned by the British government, O'Brien returned via India in 1854, spending much of the remaining decade of his life touring Europe, journeys that provided him with as 'wide a European perspective', Davis claims, as any twentieth century Irish leader before Garret Fitzgerald. Utilising contacts brought by both his class status and celebrity as an Irish patriot, O'Brien moved far beyond the more characteristic routes of the grand tour, visiting current-day Poland, Romania and Turkey, as well as Austria-Hungary, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. Throughout his journals, O'Brien exhibits keen observational skills about the cultures he encounters, displaying a particular interest in the condition and treatment of the poor. His experiences abroad reinforced his sense of Irish deprivation and poverty. Outside of India and Naples (where an 'almost universal spirit' of mendacity prevailed), there were few places where the rural population was worse off than Ireland. O'Brien's travel accounts also display a sense of humane cosmopolitanism, a worldly tolerance for cultural and religious difference that contrasts favorably with hardening racial and sectarian divisions in Britain and Ireland in the 1850s.

There are some problems here. The production quality of the book is not particularly impressive, particularly the often blurry images that are interspersed throughout the text. As the above comparison to Fitzgerald implies, Davis's efforts to emphasise O'Brien's importance and legacy often verge on the hyperbolic. This is a minor critique, an issue of balance rather than a serious flaw, and it certainly does not undermine the book's value. If O'Brien's journals are not quite 'essential reading', William Smith O'Brien's public career and global life merit greater attention from scholars and general readers alike, and we have Richard Davis to thank for making these travel journals more accessible.

SEAN FARRELL

*Northern Illinois University*

MATTHEW LEWIS, *Frank Aiken's War: The Irish Revolution, 1916–23*, Dublin: UCD Press, 2014, 250pp. €28. ISBN 9781906359829.

In the midst of an intensifying commemorative decade, Matthew Lewis's *Frank Aiken's War: The Irish Revolution, 1916-23* is a welcome addition to the literature on this momentous era. This book focuses on the motivations, realities and consequences of this revolutionary conflict at the grassroots level, in Ulster, by blending biography with local history around Aiken's native Armagh. Unsurprisingly, the author focuses on the traumatic consequences and legacy of violence, but insists that the discourse of tribalism and sectarian hatred is too simplistic to understand the harrowing developments in the North at the time and following decades. Lewis builds on a fundamental overarching question: what are the motivations which bring individuals

to engage in armed struggles? In this instance, how was it that, over seven tumultuous years, Aiken transformed from a teenage farmer to a provincial activist, guerilla leader to ultimately Chief-of-Staff of the Irish Republican Army?

Extending from the Easter Rising to the end of the Civil War, this narrative depicts an effervescent yet gradual radicalisation within Armagh and South Down. While an exploration of Aiken's early years returns tentative conclusions concerning his politicisation, the initial chapter attests to the importance of socialisation in the development of nationalist outlooks. Lewis insists on the crucial influence of local opinion makers and self-appointed organisers such as Aiken, on status and prominence within local communities, on peer pressure and expectations, in shaping the structures of leadership and support. For Lewis, the republican movement gained the ascendancy over constitutional nationalism by controlling these primary social outlets. Much more than the aftermath of the Easter Rising, it was the continued uncertainty surrounding home rule and Ulster's increasingly likely exclusion which were behind the local radicalisation.

Lewis's analysis places public defiance at the start of a gradual and almost inexorable march towards an armed conflict. The narrative continuously presents Aiken as a conflicted actor whose 'predilection for politics was – and always had been – as much a part of his character as his propensity for violence' (p. 200). Like many other local nationalists, Aiken seems to have favored political means over military tactics for much longer than what is commonly acknowledged. Political means may well have had wide support, but, communities became locked in an ever-intensifying escalation of violence. Throughout the North, this violence became a symbolic means for republicans to demonstrate an unflinching opposition to British rule, to act on the growing fears pertaining to partition and refuse its normalisation. Therefore, sectarianism alone cannot justify the atrocities committed on each side as violence always retained a sense of selectivity and never veered into ethnic cleansing. Individuals were overwhelmingly targeted for their political affiliations rather than religious beliefs. Local knowledge of unionist and republican paramilitary forces increased brutality and improved the quality of the intelligence. Violence was experienced in a very personal and intimate manner, as much for the victims as their aggressors, as reprisals and counter-reprisals were motivated by personal remembrance or vendettas, complex emotional responses and long-standing antagonism.

Moving on to the Civil War, Lewis's study is at its most rewarding. As Aiken ventures in the Southern political territory in order to prevent a republican split, we see how deeply his motivations were influenced by Northern dynamics, convinced that the loss of republican unity in the South would end the Northern campaign and solidify partition. Aiken is once again seen as warily leaving aside political and constitutional means to embrace renewed violence. Portraying Aiken as a reluctant participant in the Civil War, Lewis insists on how traumatised he was by this experience and how it shaped his transition from gunman to politician and statesman thereafter.

If there is one minor drawback to the biographical approach it is that, through no fault of his own, the author can never totally bring Aiken into clear focus. Aiken

himself felt that he would be best forgotten and, accordingly, left very few sources behind. Nonetheless, this work can be lauded for making us reflect on the ‘relatively obscure experience of grassroots revolutionary republican activism in the six counties that became Northern Ireland’ (p. 207) and how local history feeds into wider debates on politics, violence and ideologies. More contributions of this nature will be needed to demonstrate that: ‘contrary to the prevailing notions of Ulster’s endemic and atavistic tribal hatreds, sectarianism was not an immediate or inherent characteristic of the violence experienced in the region’ (p. 210). What can be seen is a hardening of attitudes and a gradual radicalisation which had dire consequences and a traumatic legacy. Aiken was an active participant within the violent world he inhabited, yet, he would not forever be caught in this web. Lewis concludes that ‘for whether in pursuit of independence, a united Ireland, or the overthrow of the Irish Free State, their (republicans) violent path had ultimately achieved nothing’ (p. 217). This is the biggest challenge this book raises. Since conflicts and tensions seem to repeatedly trigger ill-fated violence, continued attempts are needed to better understand its destructive appeal in order to counter it more effectively.

ANTOINE GUILLEMETTE

*Victoria University, Melbourne*

LISA GODSON AND JOANNA BRÜCK, *Making 1916: Material and Visual Culture of the Easter Rising*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015, 320pp. £25. ISBN 9781781381229.

The Easter Rising of 1916 has become a heavily narrated event. Its centenary has given momentum to the digitisation of hundreds of witness statements in the Bureau of Military History; of testimonies contained in Military Pensions records; and of letters and diaries written in 1916. Indeed, several commentators have measured Ireland’s ‘maturity’ by the ways in which the society has complicated the narrative of the events of Easter week. There is a sense in which, one hundred years after it took place, the Easter Rising can be more fully ‘known’ because of the multiplicity of voices heard. *Making 1916* is a particularly welcome contribution to this conversation. Not only does it shift the emphasis from the written word to a broader understanding of material and visual culture, it concerns itself with the ways in which meanings are created and transmitted. It explores how our understanding of the Easter Rising shifts and moves in non-linear and complex ways.

*Making 1916* brings together a selection of seventeen short case studies and five longer essays and is beautifully illustrated. Lisa Godson and Joanna Brück have organised the book into four sections: fabric of the Rising (the relationship between materiality and discourse); affective bonds (objects and images as communicators and conduits of personal and community identities); revivalism (the re-configuring of artefacts) and remembering (how the ‘material memory’ of the Rising has been forged and represented). *Making 1916* challenges the reader to consider the importance of materiality; an area which the editors claim has received little interest from the majority of Irish scholars.