

Irish Migrants in New Zealand, 1840–1937. 'The Desired Haven'. By Angela McCarthy. The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2005. 314 pp. US price: \$90.00. ISBN 1-84383-143-0.

ONE OF THE MOST NOTABLE TRENDS in the recent historiography of Irish migration has been the increasing use of immigrants' letters as source material, although historians do not agree on how reliable letters are or even often on what they exactly mean.

In his influential 1985 book, *Emigrants and Exiles*, Kerby Miller relied heavily upon letters to argue that the Irish who went to the US during the nineteenth century were reluctant and unhappy immigrants — 'exiles', as he chose to characterize them. In the previous year Patrick O'Farrell had published a pioneering collection, *Letters from Irish Australia, 1825–1925*, using the letters of Ulster immigrants held by the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. O'Farrell, too, painted a fairly grim picture of the Irish immigrant experience, characterized in Australia, he claimed, by 'isolation, loneliness and eventual alienation'. In 1994 David Fitzpatrick's massive *Oceans of Consolation* appeared, which offered a sophisticated analysis of the value and meaning of letters as expressions of popular culture, as well as reproducing and discussing 111 Irish-Australian letters exchanged between 1843 and 1906. Fitzpatrick questioned earlier negative interpretations, claiming that: 'For every "exile", there was an adventurer; for every alien, a settler'.

Angela McCarthy completed a PhD thesis in 2000 at Trinity College, Dublin, under Fitzpatrick's supervision, and her book, based upon that thesis, is obviously informed by his views. It analyzes, but does not reproduce, 253 letters sent to and from New Zealand between the 1840s and 1930s, written by 74 correspondents. The majority of letters were exchanged in the period from the 1860s to the 1900s. McCarthy focuses on 36 of the immigrant letter writers, nine of whom only wrote one letter. As these statistics demonstrate, McCarthy's database of both immigrants and letters is quite small, and she readily acknowledges that her group of writers is certainly not a representative sample of the Irish settling in New Zealand during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (p.3).

Many historians, more used to books that employ huge numbers and ranges of documents, will inevitably question how reliable any of McCarthy's findings can be with such limited source material. Can this book be any more than a small collection of randomly surviving family stories and biographical sketches? McCarthy certainly begins the book in biographical mode, with some 40 pages devoted to 'pen portraits' (p.11) of each of her 36 letter-writing immigrants. She then goes on to offer a survey of Irish migration and migration to New Zealand in particular, mainly based on secondary sources, with statistics on New Zealand supplied by Terry Hearn, who is engaged on a large study of British and Irish migration to New Zealand before 1945 (p.57).

Subsequent chapters are devoted to topics such as the voyage out, employment, family relations, social networks, politics, identity, religion and return migration. In these McCarthy uses her letters to reflect upon major issues raised by historians of Ireland, of migration, of New Zealand and of the Irish in New Zealand. So her study ranges far more widely than the personal lives of her 36 correspondents, although their lives remain at the core of the book.

McCarthy, for instance, explores in some detail the practicalities of organizing the long voyage from Ireland to New Zealand, in particular what the trip cost, what immigrants took with them, what shipboard accommodation was like and how they got on with their fellow passengers. Unlike O'Farrell, she does not detect much evidence of sectarian or class conflict among Irish passengers (pp.110–11) and, unlike Miller, she finds no evidence of homesickness among her immigrant group during the voyage itself (p.113). Throughout the book she stresses the continuing importance of family connections and networks,

in not only initiating and facilitating migration, but also in sustaining Irish settlement in New Zealand. And she supports the work done on New Zealand by Raewyn Dalziel, Maureen Molloy, Caroline Daley and Lyndon Fraser, all of whom have highlighted, to quote Fraser, ‘the persistence of deeply embedded social ties based on ethnicity and kinship’ (p.168). Adopting Donald Akenson’s ‘small differences’ argument, McCarthy also suggests that Catholic and Protestant Irish immigrants were remarkably similar in their utilization of kinship and community networks (p.188). But, while there is much interesting information about the lives of McCarthy’s 36 immigrants, both in Ireland and New Zealand, and their experiences are used to explore important issues, does this book tell us anything really new? Miller, O’Farrell and, to a lesser extent, Fitzpatrick used letters as evidence in support of sweeping and often controversial arguments. What does McCarthy’s use of letters contribute to the existing historiography of the Irish in New Zealand, developed over the last 15 years by scholars such as Akenson, Richard Davis, O’Farrell, Fraser, Malcolm Campbell, Brad Patterson, Rory Sweetman and Séan Brosnahan?

McCarthy in fact operates very much within the existing historiography, while certainly being critical of aspects of it. In her conclusion she asks what her work has to contribute, firstly to the history of the Irish diaspora, secondly to the history of the Irish in New Zealand, and latterly to migration theory and the use of immigrant letters (p.264). It is significant that she asks her questions in this order, for her disagreements are mainly with the historians of the Irish diaspora, especially Miller and O’Farrell, rather than with most of the historians of the Irish in New Zealand. This book adds further detail to the existing New Zealand historiography of the Irish, but it does not fundamentally alter the current picture. It especially confirms the distinctiveness of the New Zealand Irish experience, which was less traumatic and more harmonious than the Irish experience in Britain, the US and even Australia. For most immigrants New Zealand largely proved to be the ‘desired haven’ of McCarthy’s subtitle.

McCarthy is far less bold and adventurous in her use of letters than were Miller and O’Farrell. However, many historians these days think that both were altogether too bold in building sweeping interpretations on handfuls of letters from small groups of unrepresentative immigrants. McCarthy’s book reflects Fitzpatrick’s justified criticisms of this ‘psychological’ approach. She uses her limited sources cautiously — but probably wisely — to deepen our existing understanding of the Irish experience in New Zealand rather than to advance radical new interpretations.

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New Rights New Zealand: Myths, Moralities and Markets. By Dolores Janiewski and Paul Morris. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2005. 206 pp. NZ Price: \$35.00. ISBN 1-86940-345-2.

SCARCELY A GENERATION HAS PASSED since New Zealand’s turbulent years of economic reforms, but already the fierce controversies about the merits and mistakes of those years are passing from politics and economics into the realm of history and myths. Dolores Janiewski is Associate Professor of History, while Paul Morris is Professor of Religious Studies, both at Victoria University of Wellington. This book is a cross-disciplinary analysis of New Zealand’s ideological encounter in the 1980s and 1990s with ‘the New Right’, drawing on the authors’ Marsden Fund research project ‘Marketing Morality: The Campaign to Remoralise New Zealand, 1984–1999’.

A good place to begin understanding the book’s argument is its chapter 8, which analyzes New Zealand’s homosexual law reform between 1985 (Fran Wilde’s original