

*peutic Perspective* (1984) and *Against the Spirit of System* (1997).<sup>2</sup> But Swenson is not writing for historical nuance so much as he wants to advance the master narrative of the history of the American medicine from where Starr left it in 1983, a goal that *Disorder* may very well accomplish.

## The First World War and Irish Independence

**Destenay, Emmanuel. *Conscription, US Intervention and the Transformation of Ireland 1914–1918: Divergent Destinies*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. xx + 249 pp. \$115.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-1350266582.**

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Emmanuel Destenay’s monographic account of the rise of Irish republican nationalism—his second book in as many years—is an impressive accomplishment for a young scholar. But it may have been improved with a little more time and reflection. Destenay sets out to demonstrate the interconnectedness between the Irish conscription crises of the First World War, the impact of U.S. intervention in the war, and the development of Sinn Féin’s political fortunes in the aftermath of the Easter Rising of 1916. He also proposes to “fuse international and diplomatic perspectives with the concerns of social and cultural history” (12). If these are not ambitious enough goals, particularly given the monograph’s 224 pages of text, Destenay also proposes to utilize the correspondence and reports of French diplomatic representatives to Britain, Ireland, and the United States. These are laudable goals, but unevenly executed.

Destenay begins his investigation by emphasizing the importance of the domestic politics of both Britain and Ireland and diplomacy with allies such as France and neutrals such as the United States. In his first chapter, Destenay provides an overview of the prewar struggle for Irish Home Rule, specifically between 1911 and 1914. This chapter should provide the context that allows Destenay to articulate the key contradictions and controversies of the Home Rule issue and to indicate the importance of the impasse during the first two years of the war. This important chapter is somewhat problematic. First, Destenay needs to clarify minor and major points. Some material is clearly either

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<sup>2</sup>John Harley Warner, *The Therapeutic Perspective: Medical Practice, Knowledge and Identity in America, 1820–1885* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); John Harley Warner, *Against the Spirit of System: The French Impulse in Nineteenth-Century American Medicine* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

factually or contextually off. The important context of the progress of the Home Rule Bill erroneously refers to the bill being passed in 1913, a full year before it was passed, then suspended in August and September 1914, respectively. Additionally, the prime minister from 1911 to 1916, Herbert Henry Asquith, has been knighted as Sir Herbert (20); later, Sir Auckland Geddes gives a 1918 speech in the House of Commons as *Lord* Auckland Geddes (166), prematurely ennobled by two decades. Nomenclature is sometimes imprecise (“Honorary” instead of “Honorable”), government processes are confused, and Sinn Féin is often misspelt as “Sin Féin.” These may seem like minor quibbles, but they matter: Accuracy in such details provides confidence in the author’s main arguments; inaccuracy breeds the opposite.

Destenay turns to the lead-up to the Easter Rising. Here, too, more care is needed with the setting out of the reasons for the Rising. Some inclusion of the proclamation of the rebels would have helped to address these reasons and offer readers a better understanding of how the proclamation came to be appropriated and its meaning altered into something else altogether in the subsequent months. Destenay does later demonstrate that the republican—and thus anti-Home Rule—Sinn Féin party, which had no direct role in the Rising, started to co-opt the meaning and legacy of the 1916 insurrection, especially after the execution of fifteen of the leaders of the Rising. Destenay explains that Sinn Féin grafted concerns that the British government would extend conscription to all of Ireland (something that was not part of the 1916 Conscription Bill) onto its interpretation of the Rising and its own agenda for an Irish republic.

It is important to note that, despite its title, most of the monograph does *not* address U.S. intervention in the war. Aside from some passing comments about the importance of the Irish American community in the United States and its clear anti-British (and, by implication, anti-Allied) rhetoric, these pale in comparison with Wilson’s own pro-British political and scholarly tendencies. Despite the significance of Irish American voters, Destenay does not offer evidence that Wilson supported the Irish republican cause. Rather, Destenay correctly indicates that while Wilson’s representatives to Britain cautioned the United Kingdom’s government to be careful not to inflame the situation in Ireland, this falls far short of any U.S. official endorsement of Sinn Féin’s aspirations.

Destenay’s main contention regarding the U.S. intervention is that Sinn Féin incorporated the Wilsonian rhetoric of “self-determination” and called for some sort of postwar peace conference to “internationalize” the call for Irish independence. In other words, Sinn Féin asserted that self-determination applied to Ireland and Irish independence would be achieved through international agreement. It might have helped Destenay’s argument to explicitly make, and reiterate, the point that Sinn Féin’s position on both issues was never encouraged or endorsed by Wilson (nor, in the end, supported by him at the Paris Peace Conference). This did not deter Sinn Féin leaders from making these claims. Destenay explores this in the last half of the book. Here he makes his most important contributions. His coverage of the 1917–1918 by-elections (or special elections) demonstrates how Sinn Féin outmaneuvered the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) by advancing a clear case against Home Rule and for independence as a republic outside of the British Empire.

Destenay’s use of French diplomatic correspondence provides additional corroborating evidence of public opinion during this period. Most of it adds support or color to other source material. There are a few occasions when this material provides unique insights, especially in the second half of his monograph.

What does Destenay’s research add to our understanding? For Irish and British historians, much of this interpretation has been the accepted perspective: that the Rising

was successfully reshaped by Sinn Féin (aided, ironically, by the contemporary British press) as its own rebellion, refocused as a protest against conscription, and transformed into an effective campaign tool against its political rivals in the IPP. Destenay does his finest work laying out the various Irish by-elections in the aftermath of the Rising. And while he demonstrates that Sinn Féin candidates utilized the language of U.S.-inspired self-determination and internationalism as a means to garner votes, it is not entirely clear how much this influenced voters or whether this had much resonance beyond election campaigns. The French diplomatic representatives provide additional gloss that fleshes out the narrative a bit more. For U.S. historians, this work might be of tangential interest to Wilson's vision of the war and the postwar international order.

## A Fictionalized History of Popular Theater

**Hajdu, David and John Carey. *A Revolution in Three Acts: The Radical Vaudeville of Bert Williams, Eva Tanguay, and Julian Eltinge*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2021. 176 pp. \$19.95 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0231191821.**

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*A Revolution in Three Acts* is an entertaining graphic novel about three prominent performers who appeared in vaudeville in the early twentieth century. The three characters it presents, Eva Tanguay, Bert Williams and Julian Eltinge, are seen as confronting, in performance, normative constructions of race, sex, or gender. Tanguay's high-spirited sexuality is presented as overt and powerful at a time when such expressions were shocking; Eltinge's cross-dressing act is interpreted as gender fluid and a precursor to today's burlesque drag performance; and Bert Williams is depicted as struggling to subvert the minstrel tradition with dignified, understated and sympathetic comedy. The authors' intent seems to be to excite interest in the past by highlighting its contemporary connections. I can imagine the book stimulating lively classroom conversations about race and gender and sexuality, and how the past anticipates the present.

The book serves up a fun mix of historical fact, art, and fiction. The comics are drawn with delicate, wiggling lines by John Carey in a way that captures the flickering, scratchy feel of early silent films. This isn't how artists depicted vaudeville at the time—they tended to render the dim theater lighting, the luminance of the costumes, and the garish solidity of the performers with heavy globs of paint—but the drawings are evocative of a generic "earlier time."

David Hajdu's text compliments Carey's unstable images with an episodic text. The narrative weaves in and out of the lives of three performers who rarely intersected. It