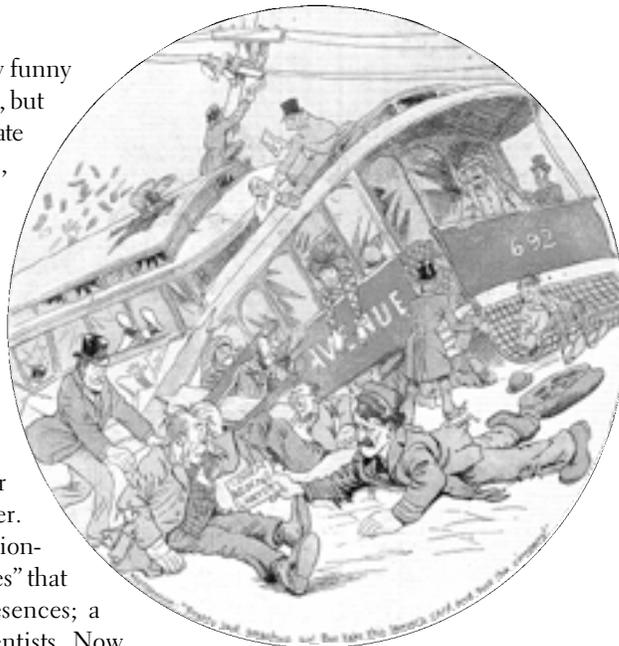


only a slew of very eccentric, very funny editorial cartoons and comic strips, but also breathless features that celebrate robber barons, Arctic explorers, bathing beauties, world's fairs, subways, skyscrapers, airships, and the most amazing phenomenon of the age, Teddy Roosevelt.

The *World* was a paper of record, at least in the United States, with its Sunday edition read by more than half a million Americans, yet its editors never lost their sense of giddy wonder. They sometimes slid into sensationalism—a spread on “spirit pictures” that purported to show spectral presences; a headline declaring that “Scientists Now Know Positively That There Are Thirsty People on Mars”; a lurid, warmongering cartoon on Spanish atrocities in Cuba. But even in the era of yellow journalism, the paper’s reporters dedicated a surprising amount of space to explaining the dizzying new world around them. The modern reader can still get absorbed by “The Busiest Hour on Earth”—a Manhattan rush hour—or the “12 New Americans Every Minute” passing through Ellis Island, or the way electricity was making Broadway “The Street That Knows No Night.”

The most striking element of all, and the one that most starkly distinguishes this ca. 1900 newspaper from its ca. 2000 counterpart, is the heady energy of the *World*’s graphics. The works of Pulitzer’s brilliant artists and designers epitomize what has nearly been lost in American popular culture: an idiosyncratic, nuanced, subjective vision. Consider a single illustration, and far from the best one: Dan W. Smith’s 1908 magazine cover about an upcoming carnival to celebrate the 10th birthday of the automobile. Smith depicts a luminous night scene at Columbus Circle, cars festooned with glowing Japanese lanterns and besieged by a crowd of eager swells. It’s like a Toulouse-Lautrec poster, the sort of cultural artifact that gives you a palpable desire to *be there*. Contrast it with what a Sunday magazine section might serve up today: a shapeless modern car, set against some vast and desolate landscape, perhaps with a skin-



A typically elaborate Sunday World illustration skewers both trolley safety and the greed of “ambulance-chasing” lawyers.

ny model standing alongside.

One finishes this book wishing only that Brentano’s captions had gone on a bit longer. But as Baker makes clear in his introduction, a large part of the goal behind *The World on Sunday* is to further the two authors’ crusade to rescue original periodicals and newspapers from those space-saving fanatics bent on mutilation and monochromatic microfilming. Baker laid out the argument in his 2001 book *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper*. Here, he and Brentano mostly let the *World* speak for itself, and it makes their case brilliantly.

—KEVIN BAKER

BOOKING PASSAGE:

We Irish and Americans.

By Thomas Lynch. Norton.

296 pp. \$24.95

“Bits & Pieces” and “Odds & Ends” are the titles of two of the essays in *Booking Passage*, a collection by Irish-American poet and undertaker Thomas Lynch. They also describe the nature of this book, which meanders in many directions as Lynch explores the geography of his life, spiritual terrain included.

The organizing principle here is Lynch’s relationship with Ireland and the Irish. The

Current Books

great-grandson of an earlier Thomas Lynch, who immigrated to Michigan in the 1890s, Lynch began investigating his Irish roots as a young man in the 1970s. His increasingly close relationship with a distant cousin led her, in 1992, to bequeath him the family homestead in Moveen, County Clare, where he now spends as much time as he can: “I count . . . thirty-some crossings in thirty-some years between my home in Michigan and my home in Moveen. I owe to both places my view of the world, my sense of myself, whatever I know about life and times.”

That knowledge is conveyed through an intimate voice and persuasive prose. The book starts out as a way for Lynch to “reconnect” his family with its Irish origins, through his “chronic, acute, and likely terminal” obsession with his Irish identity. And indeed, we are treated to a thoroughly researched account of Lynch family history. “Can the bigger picture be seen in the small?” he asks at one point, and, though no single Irish immigration size fits all stories, the Lynch saga is a convincing synecdoche.

Lynch’s book is especially strong where he passionately analyzes contemporary Ireland, with a sharp-eyed focus on the transformation of the Catholic Church’s place in Irish life. “Since 1970,” he writes, “everything here has changed. Ireland has gone from being the priest-ridden poor cousin of Western Europe to the roaring, secularized Celtic Tiger of the European Union.” “For the first time ever,” he adds, “the Irish have to contend with the perils of too much rather than too little.”

This process of secularization, he argues, has spelled doom for the church. Lynch expresses incisively the outrage of many Irish Catholics, in both Ireland and the United States, over the “self-inflicted” blows—the sex scandals above all—by which the church has lost its way. But what hits home most forcefully is an encounter with a priest who tells Lynch that his second marriage, performed in a courthouse, “has no standing in the eyes of God.” The priest, “giving out with the cant of a mind colonized by years of clericalism,” typifies a church that just doesn’t get it.

Lynch writes with perception and feeling about traditional Irish music (though, in his homage to the great concertina player Elizabeth Crotty, he erroneously suggests that she

composed such classics as “The Wind That Shakes the Barley”), and, as might be expected, he is always interesting and authoritative on the subject of death. Perhaps the best line in the book comes from a neighbor who, instead of expressing grief at news of a friend’s death, proclaims, “Fair play to Patsy. . . . He’s that tough job behind him, so.”

—TERENCE WINCH

AN AMERICAN THEATRE:

The Story of Westport Country Playhouse.

By Richard Somerset-Ward. Yale Univ. Press. 304 pp. \$39.95

The Westport Country Playhouse is one of the nation’s most venerable summer theaters. Through the doors of the old barn, still standing in an ever more expensive part of Connecticut, has passed a virtual history of 20th-century American theater. A battery of stars has appeared on stage there, and many a play has had its world premiere. Over the years, interns have included Tammy Grimes and Stephen Sondheim. Great theater minds have run the place: Lawrence Langner, patent attorney and theatrical visionary; James McKenzie, producer who always managed to find a way; and today, Joanne Woodward, who arrived on the scene in 2000, at ex-

