

ventionally odious his client, the more zestful Williams's enthusiasm seemed. Watch me spring this guy, he seemed to be saying—this is going to take brains and bravado.

One difference between Williams and Corcoran lay in the arenas in which they worked. As a trial lawyer, Williams was a combatant whose foe was there to watch his every move. Corcoran operated *ex parte*, even to the point of approaching Supreme Court justices—some of whom may be said to have owed him their positions—in their chambers, urging them to reconsider a motion. That this could have earned him disbarment seems not to have seriously concerned him. He was in the game, and this was a play that might win it.

The life and adventures of Tommy the Cork, from serving as a clerk to Oliver Wendell Holmes to helping United Fruit find ways to overthrow the government of Guatemala, make for one of the most intriguing Washington books in years. Readers with a taste for the politically picaresque will seize upon it with delight.

—HARRY MCPHERSON

THE NORMAN PODHORETZ READER:

*A Selection of His Writings from the
1950s through the 1990s.*

Edited by Thomas L. Jeffers. Free Press.
478 pp. \$35

Described by Paul Johnson in the introduction to this collection as “the archetype of the New York intellectual,” Norman Podhoretz has enjoyed a career as varied as it has been long and distinguished. In addition to his 35 years as editor of *Commentary*, he has achieved prominence (or notoriety) as a literary critic and prolific memoirist. As a young man, he courted fame and flirted with radicalism; in old age, he reinvented himself as an exegete, recently publishing a book on the Hebrew prophets. Throughout, Podhoretz has remained a patriot, a fierce anticommunist, and, since the 1960s, a relentless combatant in the culture wars.

This hefty tome, a five-decade sampler

of Podhoretz's writings, provides a useful opportunity to take stock of his career and achievements. The book touches on all of the abiding preoccupations of Podhoretz's life: literature, totalitarianism, anti-Semitism, the well-being of Israel, the frequent dishonesty and fecklessness of his fellow intellectuals, and the dangers of anything suggesting appeasement, isolationism, or pusillanimity in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy.

Because Podhoretz is above all a sophisticated polemicist, the result makes for consistently lively reading. There is much here of lasting value. Yet the collection as a whole lacks balance and ultimately disappoints.

As an avowed enemy of the New Left and all its works, Podhoretz wielded his greatest influence in the years after the Vietnam War, when American politics and culture were still acutely afflicted with the fevers of the 1960s. Somewhat surprisingly, the book slights that phase of his career, offering only two essays from the 1970s. By contrast, the 1990s, a decade when ideological fevers had largely subsided (or perhaps migrated to the Right), are accorded 10 pieces, six from 1999 alone. Instead of inviting an evaluation of the man in full, *The Norman Podhoretz Reader* offers a somewhat skewed version of his intellectual legacy.

This is unfortunate. However insightful his reflections on Mark Twain, Saul Bellow, Ralph Ellison, and Norman Mailer (all included here), Podhoretz matters because of his contribution to the reshaping of American politics after Vietnam. One of neoconservatism's most influential exponents, he helped create the conditions that elevated Ronald Reagan to the White House, revived American power, and eventually ended the Cold War on terms favorable to the United States.

Though this book includes Podhoretz's “eulogy” for his movement, neoconservatism did not expire with the Cold War. Instead, it today provides the impetus and intellectual justification for policies—the war in Iraq not least among them—that much of the world and more than a few Americans have come to view with dis-

may. The neoconservative persuasion deserves a more searching examination than it gets here.

—ANDREW J. BACEVICH

**THE ENCYCLOPEDIA
OF IRELAND.**

Edited by Brian Lalor. Yale Univ. Press.
1218 pp. \$65

The reference book sector of the publishing world has been hit especially hard by the advent of the electronic age. Encyclopedias, once available through a variety of channels, including the storied door-to-door salesmen, now struggle against cheaper, less bulky sources of information—everything from inexpensive CD-ROMs to Google searches.

But encyclopedias have hung on, and some, such as Yale University Press's monumental *Encyclopedia of the City of New York* (1995), have met with acclaim and success. Many readers, it seems, mistrust the newer platforms and still look to print for authoritative information. In size, shape, and feel, not to mention Yale's imprint (on the U.S. edition), *The Encyclopedia of Ireland* evokes its New York predecessor.

Befitting a book on the Emerald Isle, this volume includes much lavish color, set within a superbly designed grid of type and illustrations. Brian Lalor, the author of several books about Ireland, has recruited a first-rate cast of writers and scholars to, as he puts it, "open a door into the Irish version of [the] collective unattainable past" and "celebrate the gift to the culture of the world of a vibrant and irrepressible people." Established authorities such as Harry White, Fintan Vallely, George O'Brien, Eamonn Wall, and William H. A. Williams are among "almost a thousand people" who helped create the book. (Several important voices, particularly on Irish-American matters, are, however, noticeably absent, including Charles Fanning, Kerby Miller, and Timothy Meagher.) The book's 5,000 or so entries include a host of excellent miniessays, but none are so engaging as those by the Dublin traditional singer Frank Harte, who

reveals himself to be a master of short, vivid narratives. His entries on the Invincibles and the "Rebellion of 1798 in song," among others, are gems.

The book has an agenda, or perhaps I should call it an editorial slant, which isn't surprising in such a potentially influential project. The subcutaneous message seems to be: "We are a modern nation with a rich tradition." The sensibility behind the encyclopedia proposes an Ireland not of "40 shades of green" and nostalgic romanticism, but of the European Union and the "Celtic Tiger." The most striking instance of this occurs alongside the entry on "development aid," where a half-page is devoted to a photograph of three African beneficiaries of a community development project in Zimbabwe partly funded by the Irish government. Including this in a book on Ireland seems an extravagance.

Indeed, the criteria for inclusion aren't always clear. There is no entry on Kevin Barry, a famous early-20th-century boy rebel, for example, or on Nuala O'Faolain, a contemporary feminist novelist and journalist; yet "Australian politician" Peter Lalor (an ancestor of the editor?) is included. The book seems to stick to native-born Irish people for the most part, but not always: Guglielmo Marconi makes it in on slim pretenses (near Dublin, he transmitted "the first live wireless report on a sports event"). The 700 or so illustrations are often wonderful, yet few are given so much as an approximate date. Of the thousands of beautiful tunes and songs in the Irish tradition, why single out "The Mason's Apron" and "My Lagan Love" for entries? Why is the great traditional singer, known throughout the Irish diaspora as Joe Heaney, listed under the Irish spelling of his name only (Seosamh Ó hÉanaí)? Errors of fact, perilous in a reference book, crop up here and there, as in William Butler Yeats's death year being off by a decade.

Any book of this magnitude will have its quirks and flaws, and readers should be forgiving. In the end, *The Encyclopedia of Ireland* offers a great bounty of entertaining information and knowledge.

—TERENCE WINCH