

# KIRKUS REVIEWS

## TITLE INFORMATION

### THE ROOF WALKERS

Henderson, Keith

DC Books (266 pp.)

\$34.95 hardcover, \$21.95 paperback

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## BOOK REVIEW

Henderson's (*The Beekeepers*, 1990, etc.) spy novel explores the North American activities of Irish nationalists during the Victorian era.

Eoin O'Donoghue is a man of two minds. On the one hand, he's an Irish Catholic, the son of a Fenian agitator, and the assistant of an ad hoc senator of the ersatz Irish Republic in exile. On the other hand, as a loyal son of Canada West and servant of the British Crown, Eoin has volunteered to spy upon the clandestine revolutionary organization to which he is pledged. His work takes him from his native Montreal to the multiple New Yorks of the 1860s: the crime-ridden tenements of Five Points, the nouveau riche mansions of Brooklyn and the broad Manhattan avenues teeming with the inglorious veterans of the recent Civil War. In letters back to his handler in Canada, Eoin describes the colorful characters who are plotting to turn America into an Irish battlefield: C.E. Linehan, the charming and radical newspaperman; William Roberts, the grand and egotistical draper-cum-senator; and Deidre Hopper, the deadly beauty whose passion may prove enough to lure the young spy from his mission. Eoin must decide if New World political loyalties trump those of the Old World and if any political loyalties trump those of the heart. In an epistolary novel that lovingly mimics works of the period, Henderson reminds readers that the 1860s had two things in great supply: political violence and verbiage. The political movements of the period—American and Canadian, Irish and English—may be largely unknown to the modern reader, and Henderson doesn't waste much time trying to explain them. Bits of ideology dress the story just like the details of flophouses and oyster bars or the linguistic flourishes and contemporary cultural memes that flow from Eoin's pen. The book works most impressively as the painstaking reconstruction of a time that feels alien to our own: a time when seemingly every man on the street had a perspective, a pistol and a pun at the ready, when history was not so set in stone that a motivated man might not affect it.

A dense, manneristic potboiler for the historically inclined.

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