
REVIEWS

Philip O'Leary. *Gaelic Prose in the Irish Free State (1922-1939)*.
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O'Leary's *Gaelic Prose in the Irish Free State (1922-1939)* is a continuation of his previous book, *The Prose of Literature of the Gaelic Revival 1881-1921: Ideology and Innovation*, and an exhaustive account of the Gaelic literary movement in the first two decades of Irish Independence (1922-1939). The Irish Free State was the name given to the twenty-six counties of the newly formed Irish Republic that came together under the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The first priority of the state was the revival and expansion of the use of the Irish language and subsequently the increase in publication of books, magazines, and novels that would put Gaelic at the same level of other world languages, particularly English.

Nevertheless, this problem was exacerbated by the divisions and partisanship that characterized Irish cultural and political life at that time. Sides were taken in the decisions of what would be the best: the massive production of materials in Gaelic or the publication of a few good, high-quality manuscripts. Another decision had to be made regarding the orthography and type of font used in those publications as well as the dialect in which they should be written. At the same time, it was very worrisome to see how many of these writers of Irish would earn a living, considering that only a part of the Irish population was comfortable with the language and was choosing it as their literary language.

Nevertheless, the focus of O'Leary is not on calligraphy or the political upheavals as much as about how Gaelic came to be a modern language in the heart of all the Irish people, no matter where their situation was. In the first chapter: "Maimed from the Start. Debates within the Gaelic Literary Movement," O'Leary states the definition of Gaelachas given by the Gaelic League as being not only the use of the Gaelic language but the knowledge and practice of those elements: dances, sports, and games that were part of the national consciousness (46).

For O'Leary, this advancement of the Gaelachas is obtained through Gaelic prose with the identification and return to the Irish roots, the recovery of the historical past (beyond the 20th century) and the renovation of vocabulary and adaptation of genres from literatures of other countries. This binary road back to the origins

and pressing towards the future is what O'Leary so clearly exposes in his book. For O'Leary, the Gaelic writer found Irish roots and the reclaiming of Ireland's past neither as part of an idyllic portrayal of the countryside nor as part of history books that did not recognize the existence of Ireland before 1916. The true Ireland, according to O'Leary, is to be found with the return to Southern rural life, making a life of hardship and misery the subject of their literature. Writers had to take advantage of the knowledge found in the peasants and fishermen, authentic bearers of the Irish national and cultural heritage, and to explore accurately important topics previously overlooked in Irish society like emigration to America, the institution of marriage, and the problem of drinking and violence. In the same way, writers had to pursue the recovery of the authentic Irish past. It is in this period when many realized, according to this author, that Irish history must go beyond military accomplishments and wars. The Irish language and culture were also part of Irish history, and it was at this moment that they started to focus on what that history meant for the revival.

On the other hand, regarding the problems of working with a language that was anchored in the past, O'Leary describes some of the ways in which the state tried to find viable solutions to help expand Gaelic vocabulary. One of these ways was to promote the production of lists and glossaries of new words, task financially supported by the Department of Education. Another influence was the Galway lectures, whose participants took upon themselves to bring the Irish language into the modern age and incorporated a variety of subjects like history, geography, grammar, science, commerce, music, and literary criticism. In the same regard, the government of the Irish state, as well as other institutions, financed the work of writers who ventured into new genres completely unknown in the Gaelic language such as the western, detective stories, and futuristic fiction.

O'Leary's book is a must-read for everyone who is studying Irish history and literature or for anyone with an interest in the cultural language revival in the aftermath of the Easter Rising. O'Leary's clear exposition of the situation that Ireland was going through in those years as well as his knowledge of Irish places, personalities, and problems make of this book a fascinating adventure. ✱