

2014-01-07

Foreword to 'Memoir' by Journalist and Writer Tomás Bairéad

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Recommended Citation

Kilroy, Ian, Foreword to A Memoir of Ireland's Nascent Years, by Tomás Bairéad (translated and edited by Mícheál Ó hAodha). Forthcoming from The Edwin Mellen Press, New York.

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Foreword to *A Memoir of Ireland's Nascent Years*, by Tomás Bairéad (translated and edited by Mícheál Ó hAodha)

Forthcoming from The Edwin Mellen Press, New York

The human drama of history is brought to life for us by Tomás Bairéad in this remarkable memoir. The fear inherent in setting out at night as an Irish Volunteer to burn a police barracks; the inherent dangers of covering the Irish Civil War as a journalist; the guilt that accompanies the cruel actions of a revolutionary soldier -- all this is rendered immediate and real by the gifted pen of Tomás Bairéad. But one would expect no less from such a distinguished writer of fiction, as well as of journalism.

However, this autobiography also honours the more personal and local pleasures of Irish rural life, as lived in Co Galway at the start of the last century. Far from the public stage of history, from the violent events that shaped modern Ireland, we get a glimpse of a country where people had little and were resourceful by necessity. We learn of a time when ash trees were cut to make hurleys, of how the youth stitched their own footballs for their sport, we learn of the games and amusements that were prevalent in a time where fun was home-spun and married women would never venture out without a shawl.

Bairéad's autobiography, therefore, is of interest to the historian, as well as to anyone interested in the life and customs of rural Ireland in this bygone time.

As for the student of Irish journalism, Bairéad offers invaluable insights into the early years of the craft in the fledgling Irish republic. His accounts of the difficulties faced by the republican press during the War of Independence are of particular interest. What a time to learn your craft, and under what trying conditions, as presses were often broken up by the colonial police force with no warning. This was a time when newspaper editors were wanted men, when many were even on the run. Bairéad's depiction of his time working for the Sinn Féin-owned Galway Express is full of rich detail and important factual information that fleshes out our knowledge of Irish journalism during this fraught period. His descriptions of later writing copy for the Irish Independent to the sound of machine gun fire during the Irish Civil War are full of the detail and colour that mark out the best memoir writing. For anyone

seriously interested in the history of Irish journalism, Bairéad's autobiography is required reading. The author's contribution to the national newspaper culture was truly significant in his invention of an Irish shorthand. With this book, Bairéad has made an equally important contribution.

But it is to the diligent work of editor and translator Mícheál Ó hAodha that credit must go for this present volume. Previously available in the original Irish, Tomás Bairéad's memoir will now win a wide and appreciative audience in this new English translation. The fact that Ó hAodha is himself an author of some note is evident in the rendering of this work into English – each sentence is carefully tended to, ensuring a highly readable and flowing version of Bairéad's original prose in the new language.

By bringing this work to a new audience, Ó hAodha is making an important and scholarly contribution to many areas: to journalism studies, Irish studies, and to Irish history, both local and national. He also enriches our understanding of one of our noted writers in Irish, a man that moved in the same circles as the great Liam Ó Flaithearta, and that master of modernism, Máirtín Ó Cadhain. For this careful and important work, Ó hAodha is due our gratitude. And the pleasure you will get in reading will prove that it is a gratitude earned.

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