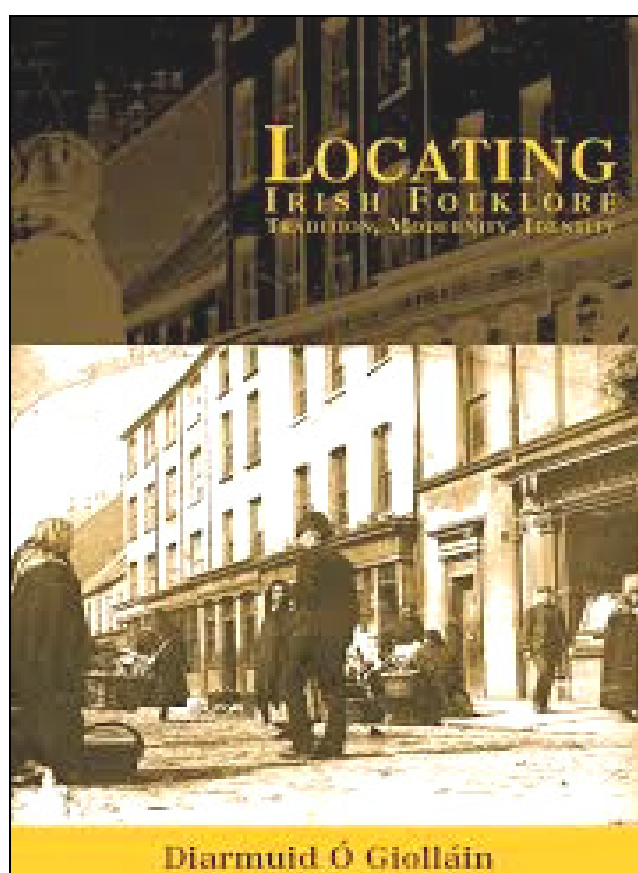


BOOKS

Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, *Locating Irish Folklore: Tradition, Modernity, Identity*, Cork: Cork University Press, 2000, 256 p.



Published in 2000, as part of Cork University's critical research of folklore and ethnology, Diarmuid Ó Giolláin's much-anticipated study introduces readers to Irish folklore and a wide range of theoretical concepts associated with it. Ó Giolláin takes on the challenging task of locating folklore, a term so accessible and readily

used in the public space, yet so vague when judged against scholarly standards. Acknowledging the versatility and generosity of this term, the author does not attempt any conceptual framing but sets out to contextualise Irish folklore in a comparative study that weighs its value in a broader European and global background. His com-

parative analyses challenge the traditional geo-historical approach and invite readers to consider folklore beyond the confines of a territory and to look at it as an overlap of social, political, cultural, economic and symbolic dimensions.

By and large, folklore survives in the form of stories, songs, tales and traditions that make up a repository of symbols which lends itself to cultural ideologies and nationalist agendas. The author seeks to legitimise its tradition and assert the potential of folklore as an academic discipline. Ó Giolláin argues that the vital prerequisites for any folklore related research are the constant mining and gathering of extensive raw data. His findings help us navigate the various notions of folklore, which get more intricate the deeper we dig, and urges us to entertain a cumulative definition that takes into account all of its nuances.

Ó Giolláin begins his intellectual exercise into the nature of folklore by listing salient features such as the local flavour, the adherence to a residual peasant culture, or the appeal to an imagined, communal past. The author outlines these attributes in relation to Ireland, and more specifically to an idealised, marginal location such as the Irish countryside, the Gaelic-speaking West, the Blasket or Aran Islands. From the outset, Irish folklore presented itself as a peripheral category, self-limited in space and time, but one of crucial importance in the construction of the national identity. Folklore gained traction as a reactionary culture at odds with a centralised, metropolitan culture, and for many years folklore held up a mirror for values which were not reflected in the dominant culture.

Ó Giolláin identifies folklorists as nation-builders and 'defenders of regional culture'. He also recognises folklore as the

primary instrument of the local historian and a valuable resource for historical validation. However, recent studies have shown that folklore is no longer pinned just to an idealised, remote location, or to a particular moment in time. Ó Giolláin makes sure to address the reemergence of folklore into newfound territories such as mainstream culture or urban space to offer readers a thorough overview.

The text brings under scrutiny two major topics: folkloric discourse and the Gaelicization of folklore. Ó Giolláin discusses the origins and application of folkloric discourse, focusing on the historical and socio-political context. Here, the author distinguishes between folklore proper, an ideologically charged notion, and that of folklife, a quantifiable, pragmatic category. Irish folklore managed to transcend political divisions but benefited most from the rise of cultural nationalism and the establishment of the Gaelic League, an avid promoter of folklore studies for the merit of their Gaelic character alone. In the chapter "The Gaelicization of Folklore", Ó Giolláin credits the Folklore Commission with conducting one of the most meaningful cultural projects in Irish history.

Throughout the text, Diarmuid Ó Giolláin remains focused on the development of folklore as a fully fledged academic subject, which will benefit from the intersection with adjacent disciplines such as anthropology, ethnology, cultural studies, to name but a few. The author dazzles with his original thought and in-depth analysis which reveals fresh perspectives and a greater understanding of the subject. The first study of its kind, *Locating Irish Folklore* is a must-read handbook for folklorists and ethnologists, and a comprehensive introduction for anyone interested in the subject.

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