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Phyllis Gaffney, *Foreign Tongues: Victorian language learning and the shaping of modern Ireland.*

(Published by University College Dublin Press, 2024)

Phyllis Gaffney's *Foreign Tongues* is arguably the most extensive and in-depth book that has ever been written about the teaching of modern languages in Ireland. While focusing particularly on Victorian times, the book spans many centuries, many cultures and many languages. During the Victorian era (1837 to 1901) modern languages began to take their place beside the classics in schools and universities. It was a period when access to learning was extended to new groups – especially women – and cultural nationalism peaked. The book is particularly notable for its attention to the often-unheralded contributions of academic women, a perspective that has traditionally been sidelined in other narratives of Ireland's modernisation.

One of the book's strengths is its exploration of the historical context in which modern language education developed. Ireland, at the time, was transitioning from a colonial society under British rule to one on the cusp of nationalistic movements. Gaffney contextualizes the shifting tides of Irish identity, emphasizing how the language practices in university settings were not only influenced by academic trends but also by the political, social, and cultural upheavals of the time. By detailing the spread of modern European languages—particularly French, German, and Italian—Gaffney reveals how they became integral to the intellectual elite's conception of Ireland's place in the European world.

The author argues that the pace, impact and scale of these combined changes helped to change the face of Ireland. The sub-title of the book "*the shaping of modern Ireland*" consciously draws on the titles of Conor Cruise O'Brien's book in 1960 and the more recent book of the same title edited by Eugenio Biagini and Daniel Mulhall in 2016. In light of the male/female imbalance, especially in Conor Cruise O'Brien's book, the author attempts to redress this imbalance by highlighting the role of women, especially women academics, in language teaching in Ireland in the 19th and early twentieth centuries.

The book offers readers rich pen portraits of the professors of modern languages in Irish universities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Gaffney brings these individuals to life, examining their personal backgrounds, teaching philosophies, and their contributions to the development of language learning in Ireland. Perhaps the most distinguished was the polyglot John James O'Carroll, S.J. who when he applied for a Professorship of Modern Languages in the Royal University of Ireland in the 1880s, claimed a mastery of French, German, Italian and Spanish as well as Latin and Greek. In addition, he stated that he had a good knowledge of Portuguese, Dutch, Swedish, Danish and Romanian along with Icelandic, Anglo-Saxon, Magyar, Polish, Bohemian, Russian and various Slavonic dialects. He was also fluent in Irish. His knowledge of European languages had been perfected during his time studying theology in no fewer than seven Jesuit centres across Europe.

The detailed portrayals of not just university lecturers and professors, but also of secondary schools, highlight the intellectual energy of the period and the way in which language education helped shape the cultural discourse of the time. Gaffney's attention to the professional lives of educators serves to underscore their important roles in introducing modern European thought to Irish academic circles. By weaving these personal stories into the larger narrative of Ireland's intellectual history, Gaffney gives a human face to the historical developments she explores.

The description of the French College (now Blackrock College) is particularly interesting given the influence of its past pupils on so many areas of Irish life. It was opened in 1860 by a French Spiritan priest to provide secondary education for the sons of the increasingly numerous Catholic middle class. In its early years the college was staffed entirely by French priests and all classes were taught through French. French was also the language in daily use outside the classroom. Some girls' secondary schools also emphasised the French language. For example, in St. Louis Convent Boarding School, Monaghan, French was "the language of the establishment", and according to one of its past pupils, Mary Maguire (the wife of Padraic Colum) the school "having been founded by a French religious order for the education of girls, had all sorts of French customs".

Chapter 4 provides a fascinating insight into the teaching of Irish (or Celtic languages) in Irish Universities in the nineteenth century. Initially the focus was on old and middle Irish as a significant aspect of philology. In 1818, one Celtic scholar wrote: "As the Irish language is considered the best preserved dialect of the ancient Celtic, a knowledge of it is highly important to the philological scholar and the antiquarian". Modern Irish was regarded as "the vernacular idiom of a very uncivilized people ...". However, as the century progressed modern Irish was introduced. In 1840 at Trinity College Dublin a chair of Irish was funded by evangelicals within the School of Divinity to provide an Irish speaking clergy. But Irish was not a degree subject in Trinity College until 1908 and was not separated from Divinity until 1919. However, Irish was taught in Maynooth from the early nineteenth century and each of the three Queen's Colleges had a Chair of Celtic Language and Literature from the start - in effect a Chair of Irish. Irish scholars and teachers, often innovative in their theories and methods, were instrumental in shaping the language study agenda of the post-Independent Irish state, and language teaching pedagogies in other countries influenced the methodologies adopted at the beginning of the 20th century by Conradh na Gaeilge for the teaching of Irish.

Foreign Tongues runs to 350 pages - 74 pages of which are dedicated to detailed endnotes for each chapter. Most chapters have at least 200 endnotes which provide almost as much fascinating information as the text itself. The appendix includes a detailed and very helpful timeline as well as a mind-boggling list of "works consulted" by the author when writing the book. This list covers 26 pages and includes references to more than 700 primary and secondary sources – personal letters, articles, manuscripts and original files and documents.

It is a virtual treasure trove of references for any researcher interested in undertaking further research on the topics and the period. In terms of academic rigour, *Foreign Tongues* is an outstandingly well-researched and meticulously crafted work.

In conclusion, *Foreign Tongues* is a compelling and original contribution to the historiography of modern Ireland and this review has only touched on a tiny proportion of its richness. By focusing on the development of language learning in Ireland from the mid-19th century to 1900, Gaffney offers readers a unique lens through which to understand the broader cultural and intellectual currents shaping the country. Her careful attention to the role of women in academia, alongside her exploration of the varied methods of language education, makes this book an important work that challenges traditional narratives about the shaping of modern Ireland. It is a scholarly achievement that will be of lasting value to those interested in the intersection of language, education, and national identity in Victorian Ireland.

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