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The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It Up in Ireland

R. F. Foster

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The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It Up in Ireland R. F. Foster
Roy Foster is one of the leaders of the iconoclastic generation of Irish historians. In this opinionated, entertaining book he examines how the Irish have written, understood, used, and misused their history over the past century.
Foster argues that, over the centuries, Irish experience itself has been turned into story. He examines how and why the key moments of Ireland's past--the 1798 Rising, the Famine, the Celtic Revival, Easter 1916, the Troubles--have been worked into narratives, drawing on Ireland's powerful oral culture, on elements of myth, folklore, ghost stories and romance. The result of this constant reinterpretation is a shifting "Story of Ireland," complete with plot, drama, suspense, and revelation.
Varied, surprising, and funny, the interlinked essays in *The Irish Story* examine the stories that people tell each other in Ireland and why. Foster provides an unsparing view of the way Irish history is manipulated for political ends and that Irish misfortunes are sentimentalized and packaged. He offers incisive readings of writers from Standish O'Grady to Trollope and Bowen; dissects the Irish government's commemoration of the 1798 uprising; and bitingly critiques the memoirs of Gerry Adams and Frank McCourt. Fittingly, as the acclaimed biographer of Yeats, Foster explores the poet's complex understanding of the Irish story--"the mystery play of devils and angels which we call our national history"--and warns of the dangers of turning Ireland into a historical theme park.
The Irish Story will be hailed by some, attacked by others, but for all who care about Irish history and literature, it will be essential reading.

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