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Book Review: Irish Catholic Writers and the Invention of the American South

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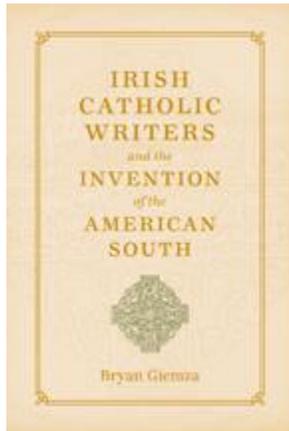
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BOOK REVIEWS

Irish Catholic Writers and the Invention of the American South. Giemza, Bryan. Baton Rouge, Louisiana : LSU Press, 2013. ISBN 978-0-8071-5090-0. 384 pages. \$49.95.



How does being Irish and Catholic affect writers living in the south in the 19th century? And how did their ethnic identity affect their work? Randolph-Macon College professor Bryan Giemza spends almost 400 pages trying to answer those questions.

Giemza writes about dozens of Irish Catholic southern writers who struggled with their own Irish identity; their beliefs about their religion; and their views on the south. Some joined the Confederate side as many others perceived themselves as outsiders in the South.

The author's premise is that Irish Catholic writers had an especially unique experience living in the South. Furthermore, Giemza asserts that being Irish or Catholic in the south was, in some points of view, living a life that was "un- Southern."

He scrutinizes the works and lives of Flannery O'Connor; Kate Chopin; and Joel Chandler; Margaret Mitchell, among many others.

And how Irish, Southern or Catholic did Giemza's subjects need they be to be included in his study? "Not very," Giemza admitted.

Giemza bases his book on letters the authors wrote to other acquaintances; their literary works; and his own correspondence with some writers, namely Valerie Sayers and Anne Rice.

The author's premise of writers who were Irish, Catholic, and living in the South as having a strong common denominator wasn't always well demonstrated. Nor does he ever explain what connection these writers have to the "invention of the American South."

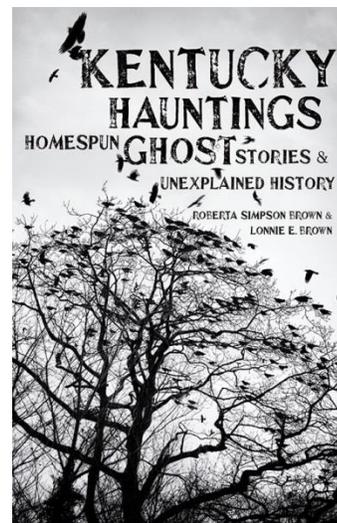
But Giemza's study is a strong beginning point for researchers of Irish Catholic writers of the South, as it has a very detailed bibliography. This book could very well complete certain research sections in library collections, including studies of Irish writers; Irish Catholics; of Southern Catholics.

This book is clearly written for scholars. Readers with a casual interest in this topic may find this book hard to delve into.

This book would make a good addition to academic libraries.

Peter R. Dean
University of Southern Mississippi

Kentucky Hauntings: Homespun Ghost Stories & Unexplained History. Brown, Roberta Simpson & Lonnie E. Brown. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2013. 174 pages. ISBN 978-0-8131-4320-0.



I'm not sure how many children these days have the experience of sitting back and listening to an "old-timer" tell the tales of our past. All ghost stories by nature have at least a bit of the past involved. They have to. Somewhere, sometime there was always a sad tragedy, a murder, or an unexplained event that benefited the listener by a retelling. Not only were these tales entertaining but often a learning experience for the kids and adults who heard them even if it was only, as the authors of *Kentucky Hauntings* point out, learning how to handle fear.

While visiting my mother's relatives in West Virginia one summer when I was a child, I had the pleasure of listening to a great uncle tell the tales he could remember from his boyhood about local ghosts, family experiences, and strange events. It was late in the evening after sundown. No TV in the house. Only the sounds of the creek and the