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FRANK O'CONNOR A Life

By Jim McKeon

By JOELLE ZOIS

Jim McKeon's biography of the Irish writer Frank O'Connor (1903-66) is almost as readable as any fiction told by his subject. Like so many Irish writers of the period, O'Connor -- born Michael O'Donovan -- was forced to use a pseudonym as protection against censorship by church or state. "I spent 10 years trying to save this country from itself when I should have been saving myself from this country," he once lamented. O'Connor was scorned by family and neighbors for his writing, for leaving the church and for his personal life (he married three women, two of whom, albeit briefly, found themselves living with O'Connor and their respective children under the same roof). "Frank O'Connor: A Life" also provides a fascinating perspective on his political activities, as well as revealing the range of his literary accomplishments, including writing for and managing the Abbey Theater and translating ancient Gaelic myth and poetry into modern Irish. McKeon, an Irish writer, also makes astute connections between O'Connor and a legendary cast of characters, including Yeats, Oliver St. John Gogarty, Sean O'Faolain, George Russell and Richard Ellmann.