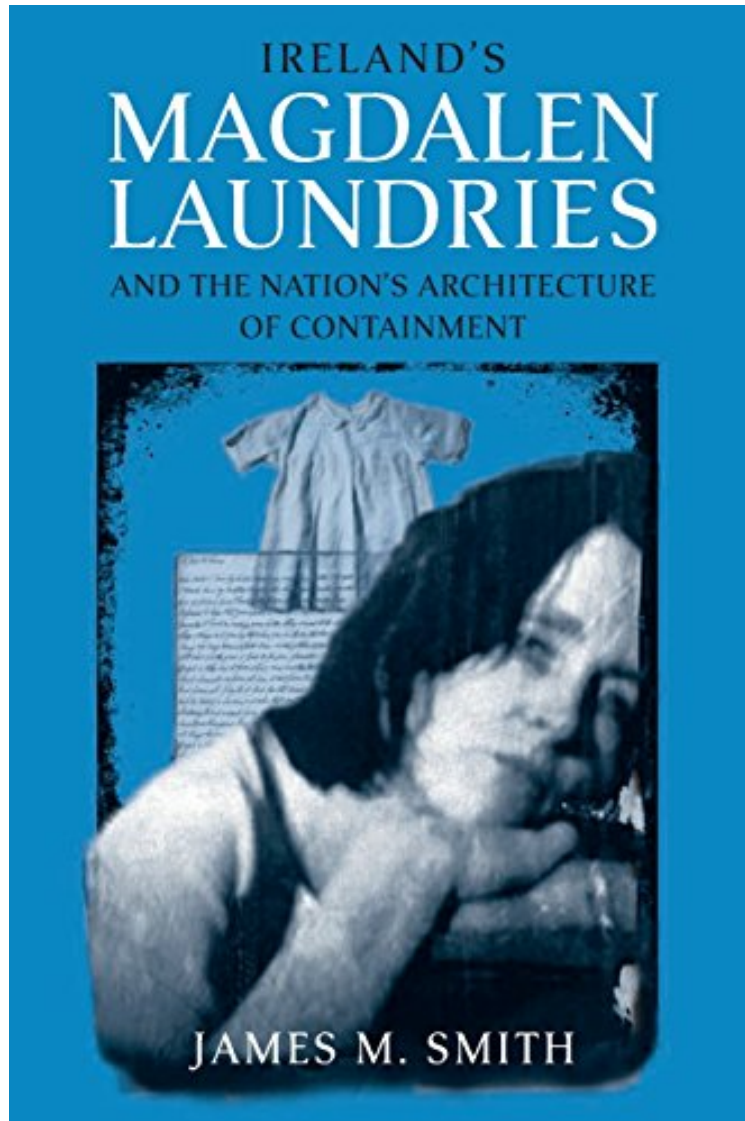


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Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment

James M. Smith

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James M. Smith : Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. An Absorbing, Insightful Account By Alexander James M. Smith has written a first-rate account of the Magdalen Laundries and their place within the larger context of Irelands history.

Written with clarity and power, Smiths prose is compelling. I couldnt put it down and devoured all 188 pages (the length of the book not including the footnotes) in little more than a single day. Smith provides a solid history of the laundries but also describes their place in what he calls Irelands architecture of containment. He shows how they fit into the overarching system of church-state collusion that also birthed the horrors of the Industrial Schools. He points out that the Irish state as well as Irish society at large is complicit in the tragedy. He also shines a light upon the double-standard in which thousands of Irish women were sentenced to lives of incarceration and slave labor for perceived sexual deviancy while the men involved customarily escaped all punishment. Finally, he analyzes a variety of modern artworks about the Magdalen Laundries (plays, a film, and two art exhibits) and what they say about the modern perceptions of the tragedy. Along the way, Smith pulls no punches. He describes the horrors of the institution as well as the cultural assumptions which allowed it. An absolute must-read for anyone interested in the topic as well as anyone interested in Modern Irish History.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. An interesting, but dry investigative report
By William E. Hewitt Jr
If you saw the movie "The Magdalen Sisters" this book will add a bit of new information. A bit dry and hard to read, it still stands as a stunning indictment of the cruel and inhuman treatment of the poor girls who were forced to suffer at the hands of sanctimonious "moralists" and the collusion of church and government who perpetuated this crime for so many years.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. This book would be excellent for a college course
By Juana D Perley
This book would be excellent for a college course. It does show how the legal system was in league with the church in stripping women of their rights. What is so sad is this was going on so late in the 20th century.

The Magdalen laundries were workhouses in which many Irish women and girls were effectively imprisoned because they were perceived to be a threat to the moral fiber of society. Mandated by the Irish state beginning in the eighteenth century, they were operated by various orders of the Catholic Church until the last laundry closed in 1996. A few years earlier, in 1993, an order of nuns in Dublin sold part of their Magdalen convent to a real estate developer. The remains of 155 inmates, buried in unmarked graves on the property, were exhumed, cremated, and buried elsewhere in a mass grave. This triggered a public scandal in Ireland and since then the Magdalen laundries have become an important issue in Irish culture, especially with the 2002 release of the film *The Magdalene Sisters*. Focusing on the ten Catholic Magdalen laundries operating between 1922 and 1996, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* offers the first history of women entering these institutions in the twentieth century. Because the religious orders have not opened their archival records, Smith argues that Ireland's Magdalen institutions continue to exist in the public mind primarily at the level of story (cultural representation and survivor testimony) rather than history (archival history and documentation).

James M. Smiths book . . . fills a significant gap in research about the Magdalen laundries and their impact on Irish society. . . . As well as being an overview of laundries run by various religious orders, Smiths monograph also positions the Magdalen laundries within a variety of discourses that overlap and interconnect, including religion, politics, sexuality, and the arts. . . . The topic of this book is fascinating, its execution is excellent, and its contribution to Irelands social and cultural history is essential. s in History