The Road to Cuzco: An Irish woman writer’s journey to the navel of the world

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Abstract:
Although it was not published until 1950, Ena Dargan’s travel book The Road to Cuzco: A Journey from Argentina to Peru (1950), was set in the 1930s. The book documents her journey from Buenos Aires (Argentina) to Cuzco (Peru), the ancestral home of the Incan Empire; an area once known as the navel of the world. Her aim is to seek out and observe the ways of the Indians, expressed through their customs, dances, music and architecture, in order to see how much they have remained unchanged and how much they have been influenced by Europe. In so doing, she stumbles upon a series of folk plays performed in Oruro (Bolivia), which recall the events which led to the Spanish colonisation of Latin America during the sixteenth century. The principal play, The Death of Atahualpa, long thought lost and sought after by scholars, is told in the Quechua dramatic tradition and performed by the native Indians during Carnival. Dargan’s recording and retrieval of the much-coveted manuscript of the play, ensures her a place in Quechua literary history. Furthermore, her travel account is an important intervention by an Irish woman writer and situates Dargan as an intellectual whose life and work requires further study.

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