A HISTORY OF THE IRISH NOVEL

Derek Hand’s *A History of the Irish Novel* is a major work of criticism on some of the greatest and most globally recognisable writers of the novel form. Writers such as Laurence Sterne, James Joyce, Elizabeth Bowen, Samuel Beckett and John McGahern have demonstrated the extraordinary intellectual range, thematic complexity and stylistic innovation of Irish fiction. Derek Hand provides a remarkably detailed picture of the Irish novel’s emergence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He shows the story of the genre is the story of Ireland’s troubled relationship to modernisation. The first critical synthesis of the Irish novel from the seventeenth century to the present day, this is a major book for the field, and the first to thematically, theoretically and contextually chart its development. It is an essential, entertaining and highly original guide to the history of the Irish novel.

DEREK HAND is a lecturer in English at St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra.
A HISTORY OF
THE IRISH NOVEL

DEREK HAND
For Paula
## Contents

**Acknowledgements**  
ix  

**Introduction:** A history of the Irish novel, 1665–2010  
1  

**Interchapter 1:** *Virtue Rewarded; or, the Irish Princess:* burgeoning silence and the new novel form in Ireland  
14  

**Chapter 1:** Beginnings and endings: writing from the margins, 1665–1800  
24  

**Interchapter 2:** Beyond history: Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent*  
60  

**Chapter 2:** Speak not my name; or, the wings of Minerva: Irish fiction, 1800–91  
70  

**Interchapter 3:** Edith Somerville and Martin Ross’s *The Real Charlotte: the blooming menagerie*  
106  

**Chapter 3:** Living in a time of epic: the Irish novel and Literary Revival and revolution, 1891–1922  
114  

**Interchapter 4:** James Joyce’s *Ulysses: choosing life*  
144  

**Chapter 4:** Irish independence and the bureaucratic imagination, 1922–39  
154  

**Interchapter 5:** Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Last September* and the art of betrayal  
182  

**Chapter 5:** Enervated island – isolated Ireland? 1940–60  
189
Contents

Interchapter 6: John Banville’s Doctor Copernicus: a revolution in the head 218
Chapter 6: The struggle of making it new, 1960–79 225
Interchapter 7: Seamus Deane’s Reading in the Dark and the rebel act of interpretation 247
Chapter 7: Brave new worlds: Celtic Tigers and moving statues, 1979 to the present day 254
Interchapter 8: John McGahern’s That They May Face the Rising Sun: saying the very last things 284
Conclusion: The future of the Irish novel in the global literary marketplace 290

Notes 293
Bibliography 320
Index 335
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my editor Ray Ryan of the Cambridge University Press for encouraging me to take up this project: a casual conversation many years ago has led to this book coming into being. He has been a great help throughout, and his patience and understanding have been very much appreciated. Maartje Scheltens has also been of great assistance as the project came to a conclusion.

I would like to thank the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences for a Research Fellowship Award 2008–2009, St Patrick’s College for a Research Fellowship 2005–2006, and An Foras Feasa for research leave in 2008. I would also like to thank the staff of the National Library of Ireland, Trinity College Library, and St Patrick’s College Library.

Declan Kiberd – as a teacher and friend – is one of the reasons that this book exists at all. I thank him for many years of encouragement, as I thank P. J. Mathews for being a great friend and a true inspiration. I would also like to thank Noreen Doody and Anne Fogarty who read the first draft of the manuscript. They offered many insights but all errors are now my own. I would like to acknowledge my departmental colleagues in St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra: Brenna Clarke, Tom Halpin, Celia Keenan, Eugene McNulty, Pat Burke and Julie Anne Stevens. I would also like to thank for many years of friendship and sustaining conversation on a variety of topics Tony Roche. Other friends and colleagues who have been a source of ideas and debate are Frank McGuinness, Brian Donnelly, Eamon Maher, Alan Roughly, Eibhhear Walsh, Pauric Travers, Malcolm Sen, Katherine O’Callaghan, Stanley Van Der Ziel, Dermot O’Brien, John Kenny, Keith Hopper, Eugene O’Brien, John McDonagh, Laura Izarra, Caroline Walsh, Hedwig Schwall, Elke d’Hoker, Enrico Terrinoni, Jefferson Holdridge, Wanda Balzano, Ian Campbell Ross, Edwina McKeon, Sharon Murphy, Jim Shanahan, Margaret Kelleher and the late John Devitt with whom I shared many a canter. I would also like to thank the numerous members of the committees I have the pleasure to have served on, the Literatures in
Acknowledgements

English Committee of the Royal Irish Academy and the European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies (EFACIS). Some of the ideas here have been rehearsed at symposia and I would like to thank Patrick O’Donnell and Jim Rogers in St Paul, Minneapolis, Hedda Freiberg in Sweden, Rui Carvalho Homem in Portugal, and Neil Murphy in Singapore. Over the years I have had the opportunity to discuss writing with a number of contemporary Irish writers: the late John McGahern, John Banville, Joseph O’Connor, Claire Keegan and Éilís Ni Dhuibhne, and I would like to acknowledge their insights into the form of the novel in Ireland.

My family of course are the real sustaining energy in a project such as this and I would like to thank my mother Mary and brother Brian, Mick and Bridie Hastings, Noreen and Paul, Alan and Caroline, Emma, Alex, Jared and Luke, Mary, Peter, Grace and Conor and all the Mainers, and Ruth and Michael. Of course, this book would not have been possible without the constant support and belief of my wife Paula and last, but not least, Sophie Dang who reminds me every day how extraordinary the world actually is.