

## *Introduction*

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William Dunkin's exuberant comic poem, *The Parson's Revels*, offers a useful starting point for this collection because it gives voice to something of the complexity of eighteenth-century culture in Ireland. The poem's setting is a Christmas-time feast held in the mid-1740s at Beauchamp Hall, near Athy, County Kildare.<sup>1</sup> Within the poem's fiction, the Rev. Richard Beauchamp gathers together a motley assembly of guests, whose rich diversity allows the poet to introduce a miscellany of historical and fictional characters: Captain Cudmore, a blustering soldier; Fr. Fegan, a Roman Catholic priest; Dennison, a Presbyterian; Oaf, a Puritan weaver; Dr Mackaway, a physician; Crab, a Quaker; and one Judge Jowler. All of these appear to be figurative types, whereas a number of identifiable contemporaries are also offered by the poem: the printer George Faulkner; the blind Irish harper Murphy; and a supporting cast of Trinity College graduates, neighbours from the county, and relatives of Beauchamp. Differences of occupation, religion, political views, temperament, and drinking habits comically collide when they gather together at the one feast:

In equal wise the Parson had  
 Some sober Folks, and many mad,  
 Some humoursome, and some as sad  
As Smedly.

The World he knew from long Conviction,  
 Was all made up of Contradiction,  
 And so he chose without Restriction  
A Medly. (p. 73)

The language of the poem enacts these differences at the level of voice, as the diverse range of the characters' voices is registered through Hiberno-English, drunken stuttering, linguistic bulls or inadvertent puns, brogue-inflected English and Latin, and, occasionally, some macaronic Irish. The Catholic guests, Fegan and Murphy, speak with a heavily accented pronunciation

that, though vivid in performance, looks odd on the page. A certain condensation in reproducing Irish brogue on the page meets a relish for the pungency of different voices and a revelling in the exuberance of language.

The social, class, cultural, and geographical diversity of *The Parson's Revels* is shared by other literary works that have attracted recent attention. The novel *Vertue Rewarded* (London, 1693), for example, features a cast of characters which includes a German Prince and Commander in King William's army and his English aide-de-camp, two gentlewomen of the Anglo-Irish lower gentry, a native South American Antisuyan woman, a Spanish conquistador, and, in an interpolated tale, a pre-Norman Irish princess. Walk-on parts, no less significant for their brevity, are given to a group of Jacobite rapparees, the Irish Jacobite commander Patrick Sarsfield and King William himself.<sup>2</sup> In *The History of Mr. Charles Fitzgerald and Miss Sarah Stapleton* (Dublin, 1770) by the Catholic doctor Dominick Kelly, we encounter members of the rural gentry of County Westmeath but also their servants, a Presbyterian physician and his Catholic servant, a Catholic priest and an Anglican chaplain, and a Dublin lawyer. Kelly's novel speaks to an Irish Catholic audience through its explicit allusions to Catholic texts, but its readers would also have been alert to its depiction of intermarriage, its satirical guying of Ascendancy gentry and its mocking treatment of strategic religious conversion.<sup>3</sup>

In Dunkin's poem, the combination of a diverse cast given to quarrelling and copious amounts of drink ensures that misunderstanding and insults ensue. These involve not only the predictable clash between the Presbyterian Dennison and the Catholic priest Fegan, but also heated exchanges between Mackaway and Faulkner, with Faulkner accused first of Jacobitism and then of political trimming. The images embroidered on Captain Cudmore's belt and jerkin recall a career of drunken street brawling. But just as Cudmore's grotesque rampaging figures in the poem as art, the poem everywhere transmutes the sectarian, political and personal grudges and animosities into a rollicking paean to Irish hospitality. All the various characters, whether Catholic priest or Puritan Protestant, blind musician or unruly soldier, join together in enjoying the parson's generosity, in rounds of eating, drinking, dancing, singing, and noisily declaiming toasts. The harper Murphy plays and sings of Irish heroes – Fionn mac Cumhaill, Brian Boru, 'Red' Hugh O'Donnell and Shane O'Neill – before finishing, 'though much against his Heart', with a song which retells William's victory at the Boyne, while Fegan joins in with a general toast to the health of the departing Lord Lieutenant, Chesterfield. The conviviality of the host, the setting of a Christmas feast, and the high spirits of the

*Introduction*

3

poem sweep its readers up in the heady noise of a moment in which differences are, if only temporarily, set aside.

There is much here that seems characteristic of literature of the period: the free abandon of the poem's linguistic word-play played off against its interlacing rhyme scheme, the sudden juxtapositions of the earthy and the learned, the combination of gravity and comedy. The work is eccentric, whimsical, and facetious, in a way reminiscent of many other literary texts of the eighteenth century: Jonathan Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*; the fiction of Thomas Amory and Laurence Sterne; Seán Ó Neachtain's satire, *Stair Éamuinn Uí Chléirigh*; and Brian Merriman's *Cúirt an Mheán Oíche* all come to mind.<sup>4</sup> A homage to Irish hospitality, it alludes openly at one point to Aodh Mac Gabhráin's famous poem, 'Pléaráca na Ruarcach', which also celebrates a Christmas feast and which had recently been set to music by the Irish harper Carolan and by the Dublin-based Italian composer Lorenzo Bocchi, and translated into English by Charles Coffey and by Swift. Irish hospitality, a motif of many poems, plays, and novels, is here celebrated as a confident synecdoche of the nation.

Some of this confidence may be due to the apparent stability of Protestant Ireland in the wake of the defeat of Jacobitism at Culloden in April 1746.<sup>5</sup> So, while the poem often expresses the undoubted sectarianism of eighteenth-century Ireland, it also satirises the various members of its cast, including the Protestant gentry, with something like equality. Cudmore and Oaf suffer the indignity of having 'tails' docked and are unceremoniously upended (Oaf has his wig catch fire when he falls asleep with pipe still clamped in his mouth); Crab, against his conscience, joins in the drinking; one of the Athy neighbours, Bradford, speaks with drunken, slurred speech. Fegan's pride in his descent from 'Sir Teague O Regan', meanwhile, is unexpectedly confirmed by Dunkin's note on O Regan as: 'An Irish gentleman of remarkable courage and conduct, allowed to be one of the best officers in King James's army' (p. 74). The prospect of revels at which Irish Anglicans, Dissenters, and Roman Catholics put aside their differences to enjoy rounds of drink, song, and feasting may be an obvious fiction, but the poem's high spirits resist older views of 'Anglo-Irish' culture as representing a static, and segregated, social order.

The poem's reference to Mac Gabhráin's 'Pléaráca' (p. 95) appears to suggest a tradition of Irish feasting shared by 'native' and 'settler' communities in Ireland. The hospitality of the Irish was, indeed continues to be, proverbial. ('Céad míle fáilte' is among the lyrics of one of the most popular Irish songs of the period – 'Eibhlín a rún'.)<sup>6</sup> But the exuberance of Dunkin's poem is in stark contrast to the work of poets such as Dáibhí Ó

Bruadair, Séamas Dall Mac Cuarta, and Aogán Ó Rathaille who more typically lament the lack of hospitality they endure, as poets without patrons in a country of dispossession.<sup>7</sup> The political causes of that change are usually made quite clear, as for example in the popular Jacobite song, ‘Dromineann donn dílis’ (‘My dear Droimeann Donn’):

Níl fearann, níl tíos agam, fionta ná ceol,  
 níl flaithibh im choimhdeacht, níl saoithe ná sló,  
 ach ag síor-ól an uisce go minic sa ló  
 agus beathuisce ’s fíon ag mo naimhdibh ar bord.

I’ve no land and no home, no music or wine,  
 no princes to guard me, no scholars or troops,  
 only water to drink every hour of the day  
 with whiskey and wine on my enemies’ table.<sup>8</sup>

Mac Gabhráin’s ‘Pléaráca’, though composed in the early eighteenth century, celebrates a legendary sixteenth-century feast given by the Irish chieftain Brian na Múrtha Ó Ruairc in his family’s castle in Dromahair, County Leitrim. Ó Ruairc was the last traditional ruler of the lordship of West Breifne, his lifetime of resistance against the English culminating in his being hung, drawn, and quartered at Tyburn in 1591, convicted of eight articles of treason.<sup>9</sup> Although the poem itself does not refer to Ó Ruairc’s political resistance, the poem is inevitably a representation of a life and culture long past.<sup>10</sup> And given the sweeping changes in land ownership which the Williamite settlement effected – Catholic ownership of land had been around 59 per cent in 1641 but had dropped to at most 20 per cent by 1688 – celebrations of lavish Gaelic feasting were more likely nostalgic reminiscences, shot through with the melancholy of contemporary realities.<sup>11</sup>

Eighteenth-century Irish society can be characterised by its sociability and associationalism, by its linguistic variety and proliferating print cultures, its wit and brio. But the century is also marked by the experiences of famine, migration, religious oppression, economic crises, and rural agitation. In the famine of 1740–41, for example, up to 15 per cent of Ireland’s population died; while the Penal Laws openly discriminated against Catholics in statutes drawn up between 1695 and 1756. For all the fun of Dunkin’s poem, then, its ‘exemplarity’ also needs to be set against such contexts.

### Historicising the Period

Older accounts of a society divided between ‘settler’ and ‘native’ have given way to a new history of a changing, heterogeneous nation. The confident

*Introduction*

5

‘Protestant Ascendancy’ of previous studies is now viewed as troubled and riven, rather than complacent and secure, a cultural world fractured by the disjunction between authoritarian ambitions and complex contingencies. The evidence of bilingualism, the prominence of dissent, and the importance of a European dimension to the period’s politics and culture are just some of the subjects of new studies. The turn to the history of ideas in Ireland, which includes the emergence of ‘enlightened’ philosophies which were held in tension with strongly upheld hegemonies of power and orthodoxy, has also led to a greater interest in ideological debates of various kinds and an awareness that the eighteenth century preceded the formation of ideas of racial or ethnic difference. In this context, the examination of beliefs, opinions, values, and feelings has much to tell us of the fine-grained experiences of eighteenth-century Ireland. And literary culture of the period – whether in print, manuscript, or performance – offers an unrivalled source for the specificities of lived experience, albeit one mediated and refracted through the conventions and traditions of the material cultures of print, coterie exchange, the theatre and the street, and of literary and popular genres.

Such terms as ‘colony’ or ‘*ancien régime*’, around which late twentieth-century historical debates tended to revolve, are, of course, not always inappropriate: Ireland was undoubtedly experienced in these terms by significant numbers of its population during this time. As one contemporary historian of the period has noted, the two models are not mutually exclusive alternatives: ‘In many ways Ireland had the outward appearance of a European kingdom; but the legacy of Tudor and Stuart conquests meant that Irish society was repeatedly conceptualised in terms of settlers and natives.’<sup>12</sup> A sensitivity to nuance and intersectionality in particular instances of class, gender, religion, and politics has meant that earlier generalisations and broad-brush distinctions are now difficult to sustain. New attention to the histories of Irish Dissent has ensured that binary models (of Protestant versus Catholic, or Irish versus English) can no longer claim the kind of explanatory power they once did. These reconceived historical frameworks undoubtedly influence, and are in turn shaped by, a renewed literary criticism. The broadening of critical interest beyond the formerly canonical (Swift, Oliver Goldsmith, Edmund Burke, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan, most obviously) has led to increased interest in women writers, popular writers, and genres beyond the narrowly literary ones of fiction, poetry, and drama. Many of these writers remained in Ireland – William Dunkin, for example – rather than turning to publication or performances in London. Irish writers were drawn to

London by the far superior economic prospects it offered to writers: the 1709 Copyright Act gave authors in England a share of any book's profits, unlike in Ireland, where the Act did not apply; and the custom of the author's benefit night disadvantaged dramatists in Dublin, where extended runs of plays were much less common. However, print editions of Irish fiction in the period show Dublin assuming increasing importance across the century: several key works of the early period are reprinted later in Dublin than elsewhere, while a number of later-century novels are printed in Dublin before their London editions.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, where earlier work on Irish drama focused almost entirely on the careers of the famous dramatists who made their careers primarily in London – George Farquhar, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Oliver Goldsmith – more recent studies have concentrated on theatre in Dublin, and, to a lesser extent, on regional theatre in Ireland.<sup>14</sup> Such critical work has paid particular attention to the ambivalences, equivocations, and ambiguities of texts and performances. William Philips depicts, in *Hibernia Freed* (1722), Irish victory over the Danes prior to the Norman Conquest but the play closes with a prophecy of the later conquest of Ireland; Robert Ashton's frequently performed *The Battle of Aughrim* (1728) appealed to both Catholic and Protestant audiences in combining a celebration of the victors with a lament for the vanquished. A greater attention to the totality of theatre – its specific production and performance histories – has also permitted a more inclusive understanding of Irish theatre. Farquhar's character Sir Harry Wildair, for example, was a role dominated by Irish actors on the London stage (Robert Wilks in the first performances, from 1701, then Peg Woffington, in breeches, from 1740). Attention to the 'pop-up' theatres of puppet, tumbling, and rope-dancing shows, Lilliputian troupes of child actors and musical performances, has broken the monopoly of critical attention once enjoyed by the Theatre Royal, Smock Alley; while its theatre riots have been studied as forms of productions in themselves.<sup>15</sup>

The once near-exclusive axis of Dublin–London has thus been decisively fractured by more complex geographies. We might think here of the mapping in the following fictions: *Vertue Rewarded* (1693), Amory's *Memoirs of Celebrated Ladies of Great Britain* (1755), and Elizabeth Sheridan's *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion* (1781). All three novels avoid London almost entirely. The main plot of *Vertue Rewarded* takes place in Clonmel, Tipperary, in the summer of 1690, while its interpolated stories take us to latter-day Peru and to the south of Spain.<sup>16</sup> The characters of Amory's *Memoirs* travel from the north of England to the Hebrides to

the Canary Islands. And the two heroines of *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion* travel out of Ireland to France, stopping in London, associated with vice and immorality, for as short a time as possible. It is noteworthy, then, that Toby Barnard opens his book on reading in Ireland, *Brought to Book* (2017), with the example of the sea-captain who, in the 1680s, carried books from Bristol and distributed them throughout Munster, which Barnard argues is typical rather than anomalous in terms of the distribution of books.<sup>17</sup>

Once the dominance of the Dublin–London relationships is qualified, the number and variety of writers is amended, and the underpinning framework of binary connection is broken, then the usefulness of that explanatory term ‘Anglo-Irish’ also comes under sustained pressure.<sup>18</sup> While ‘Anglo-Irish’ continues as a term in the essays which follow, it does so in specific contexts in which the power of the Anglican political establishment is invoked. In terms of literary studies, however, the term appears to fit fewer and fewer writers.

### The Anglo-Irish?

Eighteenth-century literature in Ireland has long enjoyed an almost unrivalled claim on literary studies more broadly through the profile of Swift, Burke, Sheridan, and Goldsmith, central figures to any consideration of, say, satire, philosophy, theatre, and the professionalisation of writing in this period. Only the prominence of Yeats and Joyce within literary modernism can rival the importance of Irish writers to the literary history of the eighteenth century. For many previous literary critics, these eighteenth-century authors were more ‘Anglo’ than ‘Irish’ and their absorption within the canon of English literary studies was automatic. Within Irish studies, however, such writers were often ‘insufficiently Irish’. In 1995 one critic used this phrase to defend the choice of 1800 as the starting point of his study of ‘Anglo-Irish’ writing. Only after the Act of Union, he argued, did the ‘Anglo-Irish’ become ‘Irish enough for a viable literature to begin’. A consequence of such a decision, as poet and critic Bernard O’Donoghue noted in a review, was to cut Samuel Beckett’s *Watt* off from Swift ‘with whom it has more in common than with novelists from Edgeworth through to Bowen’.<sup>19</sup> The exchange gives us an immediate sense of the foreclosures that definitions and date parameters necessarily impose upon our choices of research interest, the direction of our scholarly debates, and the shaping of our readings.

Rather than re-orient a field in a manner comparable to later volumes in this series, this multi-authored study is the first book to offer a full account of Irish literature written between 1700 and 1780. Despite the excellent pioneering work by a number of scholars, no ‘signature’ book on all genres of writing has previously been attempted. It is perhaps ironic that the first attempt to assemble such a collection comes at a moment of awareness regarding the provisional nature of histories and surveys. Even a book containing nineteen chapters cannot do full justice to the diversity and richness of the literary cultures of this period, and exclusions or omissions may be immediately apparent to many readers. Equally apparent, however, will be the ways in which important changes within the disciplines of literary studies and history in particular have shaped its contours. Within literary criticism of the last twenty years we can point to the challenge to established canons of authors, the importance of historicist procedures in our reading of literary texts, and the consolidation or emergence of newer interests such as empire, the environment, transnational and transcultural crossings, and the figurings of gender and sexuality. Equally potent have been changes within contemporary histories of the period, in the recognition of the complexity of a country which might be seen to be both a British colony and an exemplar of a European *ancien régime* model of politics, which buttressed the power of an Anglican elite while both suppressing and negotiating with a numerically dominant population of Catholics and a significant population, particularly in the north, of Dissenters.

As well as generating adjustments to existing political narratives, these developments have also led to new studies of women authors; oral, manuscript, and popular cultures; theological debate and the Enlightenment; the hybridity and intersections of the languages of eighteenth-century Ireland (Irish and English, most obviously, but Ulster-Scots, Latin, and French too); public and private theatricals.<sup>20</sup> Particularly enabling for the recent expansion of the scope of the field have been new editions of primary work from the period.<sup>21</sup> Poets such as William Dunkin and Olivia Elder, novelists such as Thomas Amory and Charles Johnston are newly accessible and have begun to attract well-deserved attention. Bibliographical and theatre production resources have enabled the rediscovery of countless authors, texts, and performances once prominent though often long forgotten.<sup>22</sup> As mentioned above, the very term which for so long defined literature of this period – ‘Anglo-Irish’ – has become even more problematic as an identifier for writing in and of eighteenth-century Ireland as a result of this expansion. Whether used in its loosest sense, to signify, simply, writing in English, or in the narrower sense of writing by Irish Protestants, the term



*Introduction*

9

carries connotations of privilege and power which only sometimes reflect the realities of the lives of the authors so named. ‘Anglo-Irish’ may be used accurately to designate poetry by Olivia Elder, a Presbyterian minister’s daughter living near Coleraine, the Jacobite romance *Irish Tales* by the unknown ‘Sarah Butler’ (1716), and the ballad operas of the shadowy Charles Coffey, with their tune-settings from popular Irish-language airs; to do so is, however, to diminish the descriptive and critical power of the phrase so as to make it simply equivalent to Anglophone writing. ‘Anglo-Irish’ also hides the complexity even of those authors seen as exemplary of the term: Swift’s embittered battles with Whigs in power both in London and in Dublin; Burke’s strong affiliation with and support for Irish Catholics; the critical considerations of empire in the work of Goldsmith and Sheridan, in addition to their families’ histories of conversion and ‘Old English’ origin respectively. An eighteenth-century ‘Ascendancy’ class undoubtedly existed – what it itself referred to as ‘the Protestant [implicitly Anglican] interest’.<sup>23</sup> But its authors were not always entirely of this class. Neither Swift nor Goldsmith, Sheridan nor Burke shared the kind of political and financial power and privilege enjoyed by the propertied elite. An Irish Ascendancy class, or the Anglo-Irish elite, may have enjoyed the compositions of Irish Anglophone culture, but they were not its principal creators. Their patronage supported many forms of cultural life – evident in book dedications, subscription lists, and theatre sponsorship – but they were not the only audience for literary works of this period. More complex, more subtle histories of the period make shorthand, unquestioning synonyms of ‘Protestant’, ‘Anglo-Irish’, and ‘Ascendancy’ impossible to sustain, at the same time as literary scholars seek out print ephemera, the vestiges of oral culture, the popular entertainments of the lower and middling classes, and define the terms of ‘Irishness’ more generously.

Irish Protestants living in London (or perhaps in Bristol, Bath, or Scarborough) remained always, if only partially or attenuatedly, ‘Irish’. One of the ways in which they were demarcated as being different is particularly pertinent to literary studies: the versions of English spoken and written by them were often marked with the syntax and vocabulary of Irish, which might manifest itself in a ‘brogue’, a ‘bull’, verbal ingenuity, or self-consciousness. Friendships and collaborations were also often marked by shared Irish affiliations. Recent work has begun to recreate the condition of being Irish in London more fully, with the vast networks of friendship and enmity, of business and sociability within which Irish authors worked in London being recovered. Goldsmith did not leave

Ireland behind when he moved to England: the London which became his home was filled with fellow Irishmen, including Edward Purdon, John Pilkington, Samuel Derrick, and Paul Hiffernan. These friendships ensured that Ireland was almost as present to him in London as it would have been in Dublin.<sup>24</sup> Such recent critical trends as the heightened attention to the ‘archipelagic’ and the ‘transnational’ suggest that we are now working in an auspicious climate in which to reconsider the ‘Irishness’ of English-language, London-based authors. Charles Shadwell’s *The Humours of the Army* (1713) and Charles Molloy’s *The Half-Pay Officers* (1720), for example, both respond to Shakespeare’s *Henry V* in dramatising soldier figures from Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. In invoking explicitly archipelagic themes, both plays speak to current critical interests, and simultaneously shift the focus of study.<sup>25</sup>

‘Anglophone’ literature of the period remains more widely accessible to twenty-first-century readers than Irish as the forces of modern globalisation join earlier historical forces in restricting the numbers of Irish speakers. Latin literature of the period remains even less accessible than Irish (and is arguably undervalued as a result).<sup>26</sup> Systematic discrimination against Catholics entailed that print culture in Ireland in the period was overwhelmingly in English rather than in the Irish in which they spoke, recited, transcribed, and sung. Sensitivity to this requires that we are mindful of the exclusions which a focus on print culture thus entails. Irish oral and manuscript cultures are more obviously multilingual than that of print. In all three domains, however – oral, manuscript, and print – we find playful and strategic uses of hybridised language, evident in the deployment of macaronic verse and Hiberno-English, and in the stereotypically Irish infelicity of linguistic ‘bulls’ and early instances of Ulster-Scots.<sup>27</sup>

‘Literature’ is now generally understood as incorporating many diverse kinds of artistic and cultural expression. The manuscript circulation or oral recitation of poetry; private and regional theatrical performances; broadsheet satires and other kinds of printed ephemera; popular fiction and ‘improving’ pamphlets: all of these are increasingly the focus of our studies, and thus are included in the chapters which follow. Texts and performances are formed within and shaped by wider contexts of the totality of creative expression (manuscript, song, ephemera), printed materials of all kinds (including not only works of verse, prose fiction or drama but also political pamphlets, histories, sermons, philosophical works), and the totality of lived experience (the situatedness of class, gender, sexuality, religious background, linguistic competency). Of all