

IRISH LITERATURE IN TRANSITION,
1780–1830

The years between 1780 and 1830 are vital decades in the history of Irish writing in English. This book charts the confluence of Enlightenment, antiquarian, and romantic energies within Irish literary culture and shows how different writers and genres absorbed, dispersed, and remade those interests during five decades of political change. During those same years, literature made its own history. By the 1840s, Irish writing formed a recognisable body of work, which later generations would draw on, quote, anthologise, and dispute. Questions raised by novels, poems, and plays of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – the politics of language and voice; the relationship between literature and locality; the possibility of literature as a profession – resonated for many Irish writers over the centuries that followed and continue to matter today. This comprehensive volume will be a key reference for scholars and students of Irish literature and romantic literary studies.

CLAIRE CONNOLLY is Professor of Modern English at University College Cork in Ireland, Fellow of the Learned Society of Wales, and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. Her book *A Cultural History of the Irish Novel, 1790–1829* (Cambridge Studies in Romanticism, 2011) won the Donald J. Murphy Prize, awarded by the American Conference for Irish Studies. She has been a visiting Associate Professor of Irish Studies and English at Boston College, the O'Brien Professor at Concordia University in Montreal, and Parnell Fellow in Irish Studies at Magdalene College, University of Cambridge.

IRISH LITERATURE IN TRANSITION

General editors:

Claire Connolly, University College Cork
Marjorie Howes, Boston College

This six-volume series captures the dynamic energies transmitted over more than 300 years of the established literary landmarks that constitute Irish literary life. Ambitious in scope and depth, and accommodating new critical perspectives and approaches, *Irish Literature in Transition* captures the ongoing changes in the Irish literary canon. Each of the six volumes revises our understanding of established issues and texts and, simultaneously, introduces new questions, approaches, and authors. These volumes address periods of transition, but also periods of epochal upheaval and turning points of real significance. Each one of these books challenges in different ways the dominant approaches to a period of literature by shifting the focus from what happened to understanding how and why it happened. They elucidate the multifaceted interaction between the social and literary fields in the evolution of Irish literature until the present moment. Taken together, *Irish Literature in Transition* constitutes a new kind of literary history across centuries of intense cultural and literary creation. It offers a comprehensive analysis of the Irish literary experience, creating a new and dynamic version of literary history that highlights the significance of change as a lived, felt force.

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IRISH LITERATURE
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EDITED BY
CLAIRE CONNOLLY
University College Cork



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Contributors

MATTHEW CAMPBELL is Professor of Modern Literature at the University of York. He is the author of *Irish Poetry under the Union, 1801–1924* (2013). He has written and published widely on Irish and English poetry and is editor of *Irish Literature in Transition, 1830–1880* for Cambridge University Press.

JAMES CHANDLER is William B. Ogden Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His books include *Wordsworth's Second Nature: a Study of the Poetry and Politics* (1984), *England in 1819: the Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (1998), and *An Archaeology of Sympathy: the Sentimental Mode in Literature and Cinema* (2013). He has edited *The New Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature* (2008).

CLAIRE CONNOLLY is Professor of Modern English at University College Cork. She is a Fellow of the Learned Society of Wales and a Member of the Royal Irish Academy. Her book *A Cultural History of the Irish Novel, 1790–1829* (2011) won the Donald J. Murphy Prize, awarded by the American Conference for Irish Studies.

MARK CORCORAN's PhD research at the National University of Ireland, Galway, focused on nineteenth-century Irish literature. He continues to write on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Irish literature, including the work of George Moore. He is currently editing an essay collection titled *Shadowing the Arts: George Moore's Transnational and Cosmopolitan Networks*.

JIM KELLY is a lecturer at the University of Exeter, Cornwall campus. He is the author of *Charles Maturin: Authorship, Authenticity and the Nation* (2011) and editor of *Ireland and Romanticism: Publics, Nations, and*

List of Contributors

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Scenes of Cultural Production (2011). He has published a number of articles on Irish romanticism and writing in the post-Union period.

DAVID E. LATANÉ is Professor of English at Virginia Commonwealth University. He has published widely on romantic and Victorian British, Scottish, and Irish literatures. His monographs include *Browning's Sordello and the Aesthetics of Difficulty* (1987) and *William Maginn and the British Press, 1794–1842: a Critical Biography* (2013). He was editor-in-chief for *Victorians Institute Journal* from 1999 to 2009.

SONJA LAWRENSEN lectures in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her research centres on women's writing in eighteenth-century and romantic Ireland. She has published on authors such as Frances Sheridan, Elizabeth Hamilton, Maria Edgeworth, and Sydney Owenson, and more broadly on romantic orientalism, romantic popular fiction, and the eighteenth-century Irish stage.

JOEP LEERSSEN holds the Chair of Modern European Literature at the University of Amsterdam. His Ireland-related publications include *Mere Irish and Fíor Gael* (2nd edn 1996) and *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (1996). His work on nineteenth-century romanticism and nationalism includes *National Thought in Europe: a Cultural History* (3rd edn 2018), *Commemorating Writers in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (with Ann Rigney, 2014), and *The Rhine: National Tensions, Romantic Visions* (with Manfred Beller, 2017). He is the editor of the *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe* (2 vols., 2018; online at ernie.uva.nl).

HARRIET KRAMER LINKIN is Emerita Distinguished Professor of English at New Mexico State University. Her research focuses on the work of romantic-era women poets, with particular emphasis on the poetry of Mary Tighe. She has co-edited two essay collections, *Approaches to Teaching Women Poets of the British Romantic Period* (1997) and *Romanticism and Women Poets: Opening the Doors of Reception* (1999). Scholarly editions include *The Collected Poems and Journals of Mary Tighe* (2005), *Selena by Mary Tighe: a Scholarly Edition* (2012), *Mary Tighe's Verses Transcribed for H.T.: an Electronic Edition* (2015), and *The Collected Letters of Mary Blachford Tighe* (forthcoming).

NICOLA LLOYD is senior lecturer in English literature and digital humanities at Bath Spa University. She has published articles and chapters on

the popular novel in the romantic period, the digital image archive and illustrations studies, and Lady Morgan. She is one of the authors of *The Palgrave Guide to Gothic Publishing: the Business of Gothic Fiction, 1764–1835* (2017).

JANE MOORE is Reader in English Literature at Cardiff University. Her research focuses on British and Irish romanticism, in particular the works of Thomas Moore. She is the author of *Mary Wollstonecraft* (1997) and editor of the volume of essays *Mary Wollstonecraft* (2012), as well as being co-author, with John Strachan, of *Key Concepts in Romantic Literature* (2010). She also edited the first scholarly edition of *The Satires of Thomas Moore* (2003).

WILLA MURPHY is a lecturer in Irish writing in English at the University of Ulster. She has published on cultures of secrecy in nineteenth-century Ireland, on the relationship between literature and religion, and on the theology of Fredrick Hervey. For 2020, she is the Bell Professor of Anglican Studies at the University of Tulsa.

LESA NÍ MHUNGHAILÉ lectures on Irish language literature in the National University of Ireland, Galway. She is the author of *Charlotte Brooke's Reliques of Irish Poetry* (2009) and *Ré Órga na nGael: Joseph Cooper Walker, 1761–1810* (2013). She is co-editor of a special issue of new perspectives on the penal laws for *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (2011).

JENNIFER ORR lectures in eighteenth-century literature at Newcastle University. She is the author of *Literary Networks and Dissenting Print Culture* (2015). Her recently published work includes studies of working-class print culture, the poetic circles of Robert Burns, and the Irish poets Samuel Thomson and James Orr.

DAVID O'SHAUGHNESSY is Associate Professor for Eighteenth-Century Studies at the School of English, Trinity College Dublin. He has published widely on William Godwin, including *William Godwin and the Theatre* (2010). He edited *Networks of Aspiration: the London Irish of the Eighteenth-Century*, a special issue of *Eighteenth-Century Life* (2015), and *Ireland, Enlightenment and the English Stage, 1740–1820* (2019). He also edited *The Letters of Oliver Goldsmith* (2018) with Michael Griffin and is currently editing a new eight-volume edition of Goldsmith's works, also with Griffin, for Cambridge University Press.

List of Contributors

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ADRIAN PATERSON is a lecturer in English at the National University of Ireland, Galway, and has published widely on nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and writes on the artistic interactions of modernism and the fin-de-siècle. He was the curator of the multimedia exhibition *Yeats and the West for Yeats 2015* and is author of *Words for Music: W. B. Yeats and Musical Sense* (forthcoming).

MURRAY PITTOCK is Bradley Professor and Pro Vice-Principal at the University of Glasgow. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the English Association, the Royal Historical Society, the Royal Society of Arts, and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, and an honorary Fellow of the Association for Scottish Literary Studies. His most recent books include *Enlightenment in a Smart City: Edinburgh's Civic Development, 1660–1750* (2018), *The Scots Musical Museum* (2 vols., 2018), *Culloden* (2016), *The Reception of Robert Burns in Europe* (2014), *The Road to Independence? Scotland in the Balance* (2014), *Material Culture and Sedition* (2014), *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (2011), *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Romanticism* (2011), and *Robert Burns and Global Culture* (2011).

JOSEPH REZEK is Associate Professor of English at Boston University and specialises in early and nineteenth-century American literature, British romanticism, early black Atlantic literature, transatlantic studies, the history of race and racism, and the history of the book. He is the author of *London and the Making of Provincial Literature: Aesthetics and the Transatlantic Book Trade, 1800–1850* (2015).

GREGORY A. SCHIRMER is Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Mississippi. His publications include *The Poetry of Austin Clarke* (1983), *William Trevor: a Study of his Fiction* (1990), *Reviews and Essays of Austin Clarke* (1995), *Out of What Began: a History of Irish Poetry in English* (1998), *The Irish Poetry of J. J. Callanan* (2005), *After the Irish: an Anthology of Poetic Translation* (2009), and *The Midnight Court: Eleven Versions of Merriman* (2015).

FIONA STAFFORD is Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Oxford. She is a Fellow of the British Academy and the Royal Society of Edinburgh. Her books include *The Last of the Race* (1994); *Starting Lines in Scottish, Irish and English Poetry: From Burns to Heaney* (2000); *Local Attachments* (2010); *The Long, Long Life of Trees* (2016), and *The Brief Life of Flowers* (2018).

NORMAN VANCE is Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Sussex. His published work, particularly *The Victorians and Ancient Rome* (1997) and *Irish Literature since 1800* (2002), is mainly literary history. His most recent book is *Bible and Novel: Narrative Authority and the Death of God* (2013). With Jennifer Wallace, he has edited the fourth volume (1790–1880) of the *Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature* (2015).

JULIA M. WRIGHT is University Research Professor at Dalhousie University, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and a former Canada Research Chair (2002–12). Her books include *Blake, Nationalism, and the Politics of Alienation* (2004), *Ireland, India and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Literature* (2007), *Representing the National Landscape in Irish Romanticism* (2014), and *Men with Stakes: Masculinity and the Gothic in US Television* (2016).

Series Preface

Irish Literature in Transition provides a new account of transitions between and across the centuries of Irish literature. Adopting varying frames and scales of reference, the series offers an original map of a territory too often navigated via the narrow channels of political history. Each of the six volumes revises our understanding of established issues and texts and, simultaneously, introduces new questions, approaches, and authors. Together, these books generate alternative genealogies across time and space and help readers to understand and interrogate the ways in which one period reimagines and remakes another.

Discussions of Irish culture have long focused on the close relationship between literature and history. For all the power of such narratives, however, the field has yet to develop a sufficiently dynamic sense of that relationship. Literary transitions do not ‘reflect’ historical change in any simple or straightforward way. Rather, the complex two-way traffic between these realms involves multiple and uneven processes such as distortion, selection, repression, embrace, and critique. The temporal relationships involved in such traffic include simultaneity, time lag, and anticipation.

The six books in this series track patterns of transmission and transformation across Irish culture. More specifically, they ask: what kinds of transitions are registered and provoked by literature and culture? What are the levers and mechanisms of change? How helpful are our current concepts of literary movements, time periods, and national traditions? What is the status of the literary in our literary histories and how do we understand the relations among form, genre, and chronology?

We consider these questions from our own location in a time of scholarly transition. The sheer weight of archival material now available is transforming our sense of both the past and present of Irish literature, while prompting us to produce new kinds of critical narrative. Older literary histories of Ireland are coming under pressure from new modes

of reading, such as those attuned to ecocritical issues, affect theory, queer genealogies, questions of scale, and diasporic and transnational geographies. As the concept of the ‘survey’ itself comes under scrutiny in classrooms and universities, these volumes show how authoritative interpretations can be innovative, challenging, and enabling for future readers and writers. Each volume intervenes in continuing critical conversations about culture rather than summarising the field or closing down debate. At the same time, the series charts the contours of literary history across the centuries in ways that highlight the significance of change as a lived, felt force.

Transition: the term means passage from one well-defined period to another; it also helps to track subtle interconnections, contingencies, or modulations; and it will provoke questions about the definition of change itself. In adopting that term, *Irish Literature in Transition* seeks to provide insight into the future of Irish Studies as it reimagines the literary past and present.

CLAIRE CONNOLLY, *University College Cork*
MARJORIE HOWES, *Boston College*

General Acknowledgements

As General Editors of Irish Literature in Transition, we wish to record our thanks to everyone who helped bring this six-volume series to publication. Our fellow editors, Moyra Haslett, Matthew Campbell, Eve Patten, Eric Falci, and Paige Reynolds, have worked tirelessly on books that make significant new contributions to our understanding of Irish literature across time and space. We also record our thanks to the many contributors who helped shape the intellectual identity of this series with their thoughtful and innovative chapters. Dr Ray Ryan of Cambridge University Press prompted us to rise to the challenge of shaping a new narrative of Irish literature in transition. We thank him for that opportunity and for all his insight and support along the way. Thanks also to Edgar Mendez of the Press for his help and hard work in seeing the books through to publication.

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CLAIRE CONNOLLY, *University College Cork*
MARJORIE HOWES, *Boston College*
GENERAL EDITORS, *Irish Literature in Transition*

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CLAIRE CONNOLLY, FLSW MRIA
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK