A COMPANION TO IRISH LITERATURE

VOLUME TWO

EDITED BY **JULIA M. WRIGHT**

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VOLUME I

Introduction

Julia M. Wright

This *Companion to Irish Literature* is designed to offer a range of theoretical approaches to the full history of Irish literature, and to provide a guide to a wide, but not encyclopedic, range of key issues and authors within that rich tradition. The essays sketch a literary-historical trajectory from the Middle Ages to the present and are divided according to literary period, but they can also be grouped for genre study (for instance, to consider Irish drama from the early modern period forward to the present or Irish poetry over a thousand years), or to investigate Irish-language literature from the medieval period to the present, or to consider the cultural history of gender, including the literary representation of masculinity from the Middle Ages forward. In both volumes, there are essays that deal with translation, religion, nationhood, gender and sexuality, and literary form, as well as myriad other shared concerns. The selection of topics and authors proceeded not on the basis of a canon in which authors constitute fixed literary coordinates, but a motile literary history in which authors are part of an always reflexive and constantly developing understanding of the past; the coverage of authors here is thus topical rather than exhaustive. Hence, both volumes include essays that focus on authors whose importance is newly emerging, others who were more important a few decades ago than now, and others who have been canonical since their work was first circulated. Other essays take a broader sweep of the cultural terrain than an author-centered focus allows and they, along with the author-specific chapters, bring dozens more significant authors into these pages. Together, these two volumes provide a diverse and flexible framework for the study of nearly fifteen hundred years of Irish literature – a companion for a literary journey.

A Companion to Irish Literature, edited by Julia M. Wright

International Celebrities and Irish Canons

A tourism site enthuses, "Ireland has many a literary celebrity, old and new!" (Tourism Ireland 2008). Swift, R.B. Sheridan, Morgan, and Moore, among others discussed in Volume I of this *Companion*, gained literary celebrity but without sparking much interest in their compatriots' literary work. From the turn of the century forward, however, Irish literature as such has enjoyed considerable status on the world stage – being an "Irish" writer has had a certain cachet, a kind of "cultural capital," that it did not before modernism (Nolan 2007:351). The centrality of Joyce and Yeats to international modernism has made them, and their insistently Irish subject matter, required undergraduate reading for decades, and they are widely included in general teaching anthologies and well represented in bookstores. Their canonical status has arguably contributed to modernizing Ireland's international face: Ireland could no longer be so easily represented as abjectly "primitive" – a view taken to racist depths in the nineteenth century (Curtis 1971; see also Deane 1986; Gibbons 1991) – if it could be a crucial site of modernist innovation for an international readership. Many authors discussed in this volume (and others who are not) have earned considerable sales and ongoing popular and academic recognition internationally, from literary prizes to book-club reading lists. Four have won the Nobel Prize in literature: W.B. Yeats (1923), G.B. Shaw (1925), Samuel Beckett (1969), and Seamus Heaney (1995). The same number have won Booker prizes (now the Man Booker Prize): Iris Murdoch (1978), Roddy Doyle (1993), John Banville (2005), and Anne Enright (2007). A list of international theatrical releases in which Irish authors have writing credit would run into dozens of titles, including such recent films as *P.S. I Love You* (2007), based on a novel by Cecilia Ahern, and *Public Enemies* (2009), co-written by Ronan Bennett. Thus, while many of the essays in Volume I had the task, in part, of introducing writers who are rarely anthologized, sometimes mistaken for "English," and/or known only to specialists on that literary period, most of the essays in this volume focus on authors who, as the saying goes, need no introduction.

The perception of their works' significance is, however, dynamic and historically contingent. Beckett, Joyce, and Yeats were at the heart of the modernist canon long before "Irish studies" became an academic force, institutionalized in scholarly associations, university programs, and journals (in North America, most of these were founded in the 1960s and later), and scholarship on these central modernists was thus grounded in New Criticism's concern with close reading, form, and ambiguity. In more recent decades, Beckett studies has built on this foundational New Critical interest through poststructuralist thought, while the apolitical turn of New Criticism and early modernism studies has been reversed in Yeats and Joyce scholarship through postcolonial theory (see, for instance, Uhlmann 1999; Attridge and Howes 2000), particularly in the wake of Edward Said's groundbreaking 1988 essay, "Yeats and Decolonization." Feminist theory, at the same time, has sharpened work on Irish women authors from the eighteenth century forward, and these feminist approaches

are now being developed further through explorations of the wider cultural terrain in which Irish women wrote, including the ways in which religion and class can be more significant political allegiances than gender (see, for instance, Nolan 2007), as a number of essays in this volume demonstrate. Queer studies and other theoretical approaches to identity have further enriched the critical terrain, and ecocriticism is beginning to make its mark in Irish studies (see Dennis Denisoff's essay in Volume I and Maureen O'Connor's in Volume II). These theoretical movements have shifted the canon as well as scholarly understanding of the wider literary history of the twentieth century. Still, Yeats remains central to current academic views of Irish modernism, and he is cited in more essays in this volume than any other author. But the general reading public and academic readers outside of Irish studies are more likely to know Joyce than any other twentieth-century Irish author. Joyce's celebrity is registered in popular culture, including international Bloomsday celebrations and treatments of "The Dead" from John Huston's last film, *The Dead* (1987), to the closing scene of a recent episode of the police procedural *Criminal Minds* (Mundy 2009). Hence there is a large body of work on Joyce and popular culture, largely founded on interest in Joyce's own use of popular culture (Herr 1986; Kershner 1996; Wicke 2004), but less on other modernists in that context, with such notable exceptions as Elizabeth Butler Cullingford's work on Yeats (Cullingford 2001). There is, however, a steadily growing list of important Irish writers, and a steadily changing canon as new writers dislodge older ones, even though some remain fixed at the center of the academic canon.

Celebrity and canonicity are significant forces in the study of twentieth-century Irish literature, as well as objects of scholarly enquiry themselves. Readers of major authors' works are the beneficiaries of the interest (and marketability) such celebrity elicits because it facilitates the publication of diaries, interviews, and other papers – many of the essays in this volume are enriched by such resources. All of this writing about writing by the authors themselves has a significant impact on the nature of criticism on this body of work, and reinforces the centrality of authors in a culture of celebrity – their own pronouncements on their work and on literature become a force to be reckoned with, a kind of authorial control over interpretation that undercuts more poststructuralist views of literary discourse in which the author is decentered or exposed as an organizational concept (Foucault 1984). One of the benefits of situating these twentieth-century authors in relation to the wider history of Irish literature, as is done in this two-volume *Companion*, is to take us beyond the immediacy of the author's historical moment and interpretation of his or her work in relation to it. A longer historical view reveals a more Barthesian intertextuality in which there are myriad threads of concern and allusion that bind the twentieth century to the past, and not just in the long-discussed Revivalist concern with Irish myth and pre-colonial sagas.

The politics of representing the peasantry, for instance, is evident not only in the infamous *Playboy* riots (see Saddlemyer's essay here), but also in the shifting literary fortunes of writers who wrote realist fiction about rural Ireland; it is traceable back to the work of Edgeworth, Carleton, and others in the nineteenth century who are

discussed in Volume 1. Writing in Irish continues to be subject to the difficulties, and possibilities, of translation, and other concerns continue from the previous volume. Julia O'Faolain, to take one example, is part of a larger trajectory of Irish women's fiction that extends in this volume from Somerville and Ross forward to Elizabeth Bowen in the early decades of Independence, and to Emma Donoghue in our present, but also reaches back to Frances Sheridan, Edgeworth, Morgan, and others discussed in Volume I. One of the striking features of Volume II is the heavy lines of influence and acknowledgment which criss-cross the essays here. Yeats is mentioned most frequently, but in this he is followed closely by Joyce, Heaney, and Beckett, with O'Casey, O'Faoláin, Lady Gregory, and others also making a number of appearances. But Edmund Spenser, too, is repeatedly cited in this second volume. For the twentieth-century writers discussed here, Spenser is less the author of the notorious *View* – as he was for many writers in preceding centuries – than a poet, particularly of the *Epithalamion* and the less objectionable books of the *Faerie Queene*. Other authors and texts discussed in the first volume echo through this one – from Swift's ongoing influence on satiric writing to the resonance of Finn for writers from the Revival to Edna O'Brien, and from Synge's use of Keating to Ní Chuilleanáin's evocation of courtly love poetry.

Perhaps the strongest literary tie between the two volumes of this *Companion*, however, is realism. Emerging as a literary mode in the early nineteenth century, simultaneously with cultural nationalism as a political mode of representation, realism is deeply yoked to claims about the "real" Ireland. Realism is an intrinsically deceptive mode, an approximation of "reality" that at once relies heavily on literary convention, including in the selection of detail, and yet also makes truth claims. Toril Moi responds to a feminist complaint that fiction never depicts women shaving their legs by adding that "toe-nail clipping" and other grooming practices are also "neglected as fictional themes," but that this "complaint rests on the highly questionable notion that art can and should reflect life accurately and inclusively in every detail": "Resolutely empiricist in its approach, this view fails to consider the proposition that the real is not only something we construct, but a controversial construct at that" (Moi 1985:45). In this volume, this "construct" is nowhere more overtly controversial than in claims to present the "real" Ireland. Many of the chapters here examine challenges to the straitjacket of realism through the even more traditional modes of parody and satire, as well as postmodernism's attention to the instability of language (and meaning). These challenges often seek to resist and/or complicate realism's truth claims, whether those claims address the representation of a particular historical moment (such as the Easter Rising) or examine universalizing myths of "true" Irishness, including "mother Ireland" and other gendered types.

History and the Problem of Periodization

Dividing the twentieth century into literary periods is an ongoing problem in many national literatures, arguably because we are still too close to it. The Romantic period

was carved out of literary history a century after it ended, and we do not yet have that much distance even from modernism. There are, moreover, overlapping paradigms: the Victorian era, the long nineteenth century, the (Celtic/Gaelic) Revival, the Irish Literary Renaissance, and modernism constitute a series of cross-connected cultural movements; (late) modernism and the postmodern rely on an organization of literature that stresses literary form; post-war (Rising, Civil, World War I, or World War II), the Troubles, and, more recently, the Good Friday Agreement, mark periods which ground literature in its political-historical moment. There are cross-national constructs as well – international modernism most significantly, but also 1960s counterculture, globalization, Irish-American and other diasporic literatures, different "waves" of feminism, and so on. Moreover, access to education and print (as well as other media) has diversified the reading and writing publics to a degree not seen in previous centuries. David Pierce's *Irish Writing in the Twentieth Century: A Reader* (2000) handles the problem by going decade by decade – starting with the 1890s – and organizing works by date of publication rather than by author. This mode of organization is supported by criticism which refers to writers by decade (such as the "Thirties Poets" of Irish and British literary studies), and by other decentering anthologies which are also strictly arranged chronologically (such as McGann 1993). Most recent anthologies of twentieth-century Irish literature, however, eschew period divisions, usually by taking a smaller slice of the twentieth-century pie in focusing on genre or region or a specific part of the period (see, for instance, Muldoon 1986; Craig 2006; Harrington 2008).

The problem is further complicated by differences of dating even for the more well-established cultural movements. The Gaelic Revival is usually taken to begin with the work of Standish O'Grady and Douglas Hyde (and soon afterwards Yeats and Lady Gregory), roughly 1880–1920, and associated in particular with the activities of the Gaelic League as well as a broader interest in the recuperation of the Irish language and Irish-language material. But Seamus Deane has argued for a longer "Celtic Revival" that runs 1780–1880 (Deane 1986) and others have pushed the terminus of the movement later into the twentieth century (for instance, Sheehy 1980). The Irish Renaissance (or Irish Literary Renaissance or Irish Literary Revival) is sometimes used interchangeably with the Gaelic Revival but refers less to the Gaelic researchers than the leading lights of Irish modernism, writing in English and gaining international acclaim, many (but not all) building on the Gaelic Revival and centered in Dublin (for a suggestive exploration of Revivalism's complications, see, for instance, Hutton 2003). Using "Revival" without an adjective (Literary or Gaelic) allows a conceptual merging of the two movements for the 1880–1920 period. Modernism, as a term which refers to an international movement, is notoriously difficult to assign precise dates: 1890–1930 is common, but 1890–1940 or simply the first half of the twentieth century are not unusual. Moreover, as a movement associated with both innovation in form and a break with the past, it strains against the recovery work of the Revival, though modernist nostalgia is a better fit with Revival aims. And, of course, authors' bodies of work do not fall neatly into these paradigms or datings.

Bram Stoker and Oscar Wilde, addressed in Volume I, were contemporary with Yeats and Synge, and shared literary as well as social connections. Periodization only gets messier after modernism. There is no definitive "postmodern" era (and if there were it would need to run at least from the 1940s to the present), and the modern and postmodern are so conceptually entangled with each other that that are sometimes difficult to distinguish – Beckett, to take just one example, is widely discussed as a leading modernist and as a founding postmodernist. "Contemporary" is increasingly unwieldy, working well in the 1970s and 1980s when it could be used to refer to two or three decades of writing after modernism, but with each passing decade it expands almost exponentially and now leaves us with the somewhat untenable implication that 1960s literature is "contemporary" with that of the digitized, globalized twenty-first century.

Periodization is not simply a problem of how to organize – or even just provisionally compartmentalize – a diverse array of literary materials, but also a question of the relationship between literary history and political history. The Renaissance/Revival, by its most-used dating of 1880–1920, begins during the Land War (1879–82) and continues through the various Home Rule bills of 1886, 1893, and 1914, part of a century-long fight against the 1800 Act of Union which had abolished the Irish parliament and replaced it with a block of Irish seats in the British parliament. The suspension of progress on Home Rule for the duration of World War I fueled the militant nationalism that led to the Easter Rising of 1916 and the declaration of an Irish Republic. Reaction against the violent suppression of that Rising – including the execution of a number of its leaders – contributed to an election result in 1918 in which Sinn Féin won 73 of 105 Irish seats. That majority led, in turn, to the Declaration of Independence and establishment of an Irish parliament by those Sinn Féin MPs in 1919. The British government did not accept the Declaration, and the Irish War of Independence was fought from 1919 to 1921, ended by the Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921), one of the legislative moves which allowed the eventual partition of Ireland into Northern Ireland and the south (first termed the Irish Free State [1922–37], then Éire [1937–49], and then the Republic of Ireland). Thus, the intense period of nationalist activity from the Land War to Independence almost precisely matches the usual dates for the "Revival" – the Gaelic Revival's idealization of rural people and recovery of pre-colonial literature and myth (as well as the indigenous language) are to an extent the cultural complements of these nationalist movements. Moreover, the Revival comes to an end in the early "Troubles," in the conflict between different political factions in the Civil War (1922–23), a difficult period that arguably made it hard to imagine a cultural-nationalist vision of an inherent Irishness and coherent Irish culture – in the midst of this difficult era, Joyce published *Ulysses*, often seen as a foundational modernist text.

Sociopolitical action in Ireland in this period is not limited to debate and armed conflict over the state(s) and mechanisms through which Ireland would be governed. The Revival is also contemporary with first-wave feminism, and the impact of women writers in this era was widespread, extending far beyond the vital and much-discussed

work of Lady Gregory. The New Woman movement and later the struggle for women's suffrage were significant in Ireland as in Britain (see Meaney 2002), and to some degree forged an Irish–British solidarity among women that transcended nationalist concerns. Emily Lawless responded to the New Woman movement in *Grania* (1892), for example, while Eva Gore-Booth – author of such Revival texts as *The Triumph of Maeve* (1905), and sister of Countess Markievicz, an officer in the Irish Citizen Army and later MP – was a member of the women's suffrage movement in England along with her partner Esther Roper (see Donoghue 1997; Edwards 2008). At the same time, while the Revival-modernist canon has traditionally centered on Dublin, a "Northern Revival" was underway as well, and that other Revival's significance is emerging from re-examinations of the literary record (see Kirkland 2003; McNulty 2004), including the substantial authorial and editorial work of Alice Milligan and Anna Johnston (who used the pseudonym Ethna Carbery). Attention to women writers in this period, in other words, is not only uncovering the significance of feminist politics in this nationalist period but also other centers of literary activity.

The 1930s and 1940s would see the rise of Éamon de Valera, founder of the influential political party Fianna Fáil and leader of the Irish government, under various titles, for most of the 1937–73 period. This is also the era in which remaining political ties to Britain were severed, particularly through the 1937 Constitution and the Republic of Ireland Act (1948). As many of the essays in this volume show, the new order in the south required a rethinking of class, sectarian divisions, and the cultural-nationalist project. Partition, and intensifying sectarian divisions, contributed to rising tensions in the north. The early 1970s were thus tumultuous at best, not always for the same reasons, on both sides of the border. In the 1966–72 period, such diverse groups as the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, the Ulster Volunteer Force, and the Provisional IRA were founded in the north, with protest marches becoming riots, and growing factional violence leading to injuries and deaths on all sides (including bystanders) – the "Troubles." For many, the iconic event of the Troubles is Bloody Sunday in January 1972, when fourteen civil rights marchers were shot and killed by the British army. In the south, political alliances shifted. The Republic joined what would later become the European Union in 1973, and the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 gave the Republic a place at the table in discussions with Britain about Northern Ireland affairs. Starting in the early 1970s, the Republic recognized rights and increased opportunities for women and marginalized groups. Notable events in the Republic include the partial legalization of contraception (1974), the election of Ireland's first woman president (1990), and the decriminalization of homosexuality (1993). While much of the modernist period was concerned with identifying and promoting a distinctively Irish culture in response to a centuries-old colonial context in which Irish culture was abjected, erased, or ignored, the impact of globalization (including the growing influence of US consumer culture and closer ties to Europe), became significant by the 1970s. American culture is an issue for many of the writers in Part Ten, whether in poets' echoings of Robert Frost, Sylvia Plath, and Wallace

Stevens, in Paul Muldoon's interest in Native American culture and history as well as American popular culture, or in Brian Friel's and Neil Jordan's examinations of US influence in Ireland. The 1990s were also marked by an economic growth spurt associated with the moniker "Celtic Tiger," a period of substantial growth which not only transformed the Irish economy but also reversed a centuries-old trend in migration: Ireland became a place to which to emigrate rather than a place to leave. In the north, the Troubles met their match in various grassroots and high-level movements for peace, culminating in the Good Friday Agreement (1998).

This volume is divided into four parts to organize the diverse array of material here with an eye both to history and to literary issues. Part Seven considers the range of literary production in the 1880–1930 period, placing writers often identified with "Victorian" literature alongside those central to the "Revival" and "modernist" movements, but also seeks to survey major genres. Part Eight focuses on the 1930s and 1940s, but centrally attends to innovations in genre and debates about mode during both the emergence of the postmodern from late modernism and the political sea-changes of the period. Part Nine focuses on the struggle with realism in relation to social change in the 1960s and after, and particularly responses to second-wave feminism and the ongoing divisions of class and religion. Part Ten defines "contemporary" loosely as beginning in 1980. The founding of the influential Field Day project in 1980 offers both a political and a literary milestone, and allows us to think of the "contemporary" as responding to, and moving forward from, the transformations and crises of the 1970s. The post-1980 era is also a remarkable period of literary production – as is evident from such recent books as *Irish Literature since 1990: Diverse Voices* (Brewster and Parker 2009), covering less than two decades of writing – and so Part Ten is the largest section here, sampling authors of different languages, regions, genres, and generations.

Eleven Decades, Four Parts

Part Seven deals with the most canonical of Irish literary periods – Revivalism and modernism – and its ongoing affiliation with the literature of the nineteenth century. As with other literary periods, there are many more authors of significance than can be substantively addressed here, but the price of selectiveness is perhaps higher for modernism and the Revival than other literary movements because the canonicity of the period itself heightens the importance of its authors; in addition to the long-central figures of Yeats, Joyce, Lady Gregory, and Synge, important authors include such figures as AE (George Russell), Ethna Carbery, Eva Gore-Booth, Alfred Percival Graves, Douglas Hyde, Alice Milligan, Patrick Pearse, Dora Sigerson, and Katharine Tynan, among others. In his opening essay on cultural nationalism, Michael Mays begins with the incompatibilities of Irish modernism – of modernism's philosophical differences with nationalism, of modernism's characteristic discomfort with itself, and, symptomatically, of the biographical and literary differences between the two

exemplary figures of Irish modernism, Yeats and Joyce. Mays then traces the emergence of cultural nationalism both in Europe and in Ireland, situating the work of Pearse, AE, Yeats, Joyce, and others – and their disputes – in relation to its pressures to sanction particular ideas of Ireland and of Irish identity. The next two essays address authors who bridge the divide between modernism and the Victorian era (though we could easily add Yeats and Synge to this group as well, allying the first with nineteenth-century antiquarianism and the second with *fin-de-siècle* Aestheticism). As Christopher Innes demonstrates, Shaw is not only between periods but also between islands. He is often left on the margins of Irish literary history despite his strong connections to Irish literary culture, including to the Abbey Theatre and the leading figures associated with it (such as Lady Gregory and Yeats). Yet he stands as one of the last of a long line of Irish dramatists who moved to London – and as the first of many writers addressed in this volume who challenged dominant ideas of "Irishness." In the final part of his essay, Innes addresses Shaw's significance on the London stage, particularly in relation to another Irish expatriate playwright, James Fagan, in the wider context of the rich exchanges between the theatrical worlds of London and Dublin. In the next essay, Vera Kreilkamp discusses the writing team of Somerville and Ross and their many contributions to the Big House novel, a tradition rooted in the gothic. As Kreilkamp shows (and other essays in this *Companion* reinforce), the Big House tradition is crucial to Irish literary history for over a century. Somerville and Ross's novels are focused on the Ascendancy as the growing middle class and shifting nationalist politics eroded the Ascendancy's power, symbolized by the rural Big House. Kreilkamp offers an extensive discussion of the writing pair's alliances with and differences from Revival politics and literature, their novels overlapping with the modernism of Yeats and Synge, while their potential to contribute to an emerging feminist literature is checked by their focus on issues of class – their lives remain their most radical contribution to the reimagining of women's roles and options in the early twentieth century.

The final essays in Part Seven deal with three of the key figures of Irish modernism, each representing one of the three major genres: the poet Yeats, the novelist Joyce, and the dramatist Synge. All three worked in other genres, of course: in their essays here, Gregory Castle addresses Yeats' dramatic work, Michael Patrick Gillespie considers Joyce's poetry, and Ann Saddlemyer examines Synge's famous account of the Aran Islands. But the weight of these essays is on the genres for which these three writers are best known, making this section of Part Seven a survey of modernist genres as well as a selection of major modernists. Castle organizes his essay on Yeats according to three stages of his literary career, beginning with his early Revivalist work in folklore and drama as well as verse, focusing on the trope of "tactical misrecognition" – of the past, of the nation, of places, of the peasantry – in relation to the complicated temporality of his writing, and closing with the poet's ambivalent relationship to the Free State and postcoloniality. Yeats thus synecdochally images the complex shifts in nationalism from the Revival, aiming to reconstruct a lost Gaelic past, to the inscription over it of a new, modern order in the Free State, including the displacement of