



A COMPANION TO  
*IRISH*  
*LITERATURE*  
VOLUME ONE

EDITED BY JULIA M. WRIGHT

 WILEY-BLACKWELL

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*LITERATURE*

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## Notes on Contributors

**Guinn Batten** is the author of *The Orphaned Imagination: Melancholy and Commodity Culture in English Romanticism* (1998), a contributor to *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, the editor (and author of an Afterword for) Medbh McGuckian's *The Soldiers of Year II* (2002), and the author of a dozen essays on contemporary Irish poetry that include contributions to two *Cambridge Companions*.

**Scott Boltwood** is the author of *Brian Friel, Ireland, and the North* (2007) and articles on Dion Boucicault, Augusta Gregory, Brian Friel, and the Ulster Group Theatre. He has been a Research Fellow at the Academy of Irish Cultural Heritages, University of Ulster, and Visiting Professor at Queen's University Belfast. He is currently an Associate Professor at Emory & Henry College.

**Joseph Brooker** teaches modern literature at Birkbeck College, University of London. He is the author of *Joyce's Critics: Transitions in Reading & Culture* (2004) and *Flann O'Brien* (2005). He has co-edited special issues of the *Journal of Law & Society* (on law and literature) and *New Formations* (on the 1990s). His next book concerns the literature of the 1980s.

**Helen M. Burke** is a Professor of English at Florida State University. She is the author of *Riotous Performances: The Struggle for Hegemony in the Irish Theatre, 1712–1784* (2003), and is currently completing a book on the Irish diaspora and the eighteenth-century London stage.

**Matthew Campbell** teaches English literature at the University of Sheffield. He is the author of *Rhythm and Will in Victorian Poetry* (1999) and editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Poetry* (2003), as well as co-editor of two volumes on nineteenth-century literature.

**Andrew Carpenter** is Emeritus Professor of English at University College Dublin and a Member of the Royal Irish Academy. His most significant publications in recent years are two anthologies, *Verses in English from Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (1998) and *Verses in English from Tudor and Stuart Ireland* (2003).

**Gregory Castle** is Professor of British and Irish Literature at Arizona State University. He has published *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* (2001), *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman* (2006), and the *Blackwell Guide to Literary Theory* (2007). He also edited *Postcolonial Discourses* (2000) and is editor of volume 1 (1900–66) of the *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Literary and Cultural Theory* (2010). He is currently working on a book project, “Inventing Souls: Pedagogies of Irish Revivalism.”

**Heather Clark** is Professor of Literature at Marlboro College in Marlboro, Vermont, and teaches at NYU’s Glucksman Ireland House. She is the author of *The Ulster Renaissance: Poetry in Belfast 1962–1972* (2006), and a forthcoming book on Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes. She reviews Irish poetry for the *Harvard Review*, and is currently working on a book about Paul Muldoon.

**Bernadette Cunningham** is Deputy Librarian of the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin. She is author of *The World of Geoffrey Keating: History, Myth and Religion in Seventeenth-Century Ireland* (2000) and *The Annals of the Four Masters: Irish History, Kingship and Society in the Early Seventeenth Century* (2010).

**Paul Delaney** is a Lecturer in the School of English, Trinity College Dublin. His work includes the edited collection *Reading Colm Tóibín* (2008). He has written widely on Irish literature and on representations of Travelers in Irish writing. Current projects include an essay collection on William Trevor (co-edited with Michael Parker) and a study of Seán O’Faoláin.

**Dennis Denisoff** is the Chair of English at Ryerson University, Toronto. His current research focuses on nineteenth-century decadence, paganism, and non-human animals’ subjectivity. Past publications include *Aestheticism and Sexual Parody: 1840–1940* (2001) and *Sexual Visuality from Literature to Film: 1850–1950* (2004).

**Elke D’hoker** is an Associate Professor at the University of Leuven, Belgium. She has written a critical study of John Banville’s work (Rodopi 2004) and has published several articles on modern and contemporary Irish fiction. She is currently working on a book about the modern short story by Irish women writers.

**Ann Dooley** is a professor with the Centre for Medieval Studies and the Program for Celtic Studies at the University of Toronto. She is the author of *Playing the Hero: Reading the Táin Bó Cúailnge* (2006).

**Susan B. Egenolf**, Associate Professor at Texas A&M University, teaches courses in British and Irish literature and culture. She authored *The Art of Political Fiction in Hamilton, Edgeworth, and Owenison* (2009) and has published essays focused upon women writers and the intersection of literature and visual culture. Her current project investigates the works of Josiah Wedgwood and the cultivation of eighteenth-century aesthetics.

**Silvia Diez Fabre** is Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Burgos, Spain. She is a founder member of the Spanish Association for Irish Studies and was its Secretary until 2008. She has published essays about the literary interpretation of the

Big House in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Irish fiction. Her interest in Jennifer Johnston's fiction grew from this area of studies.

**Danine Farquharson** is Associate Professor of Irish Literature at Memorial University in St John's, Newfoundland, Canada. She is co-editor of *Shadows of the Gunmen: Violence and Culture in Modern Ireland* (2008) and has published and presented papers on Roddy Doyle, Robert McLiam Wilson, Edna O'Brien, John McGahern, and Liam O'Flaherty.

**Melissa Fegan** is a Reader in the Department of English at the University of Chester. She is the author of *Literature and the Irish Famine 1845–1919* (2002); she is currently working on the poetry and prose of James Clarence Mangan, and twentieth- and twenty-first-century representations of the Great Famine.

**Luke Gibbons** is Professor of Irish Literary and Cultural Studies at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, and the author of such books as *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Colonial Sublime* (2003), *Gaelic Gothic* (2006), and *Transformations in Irish Culture* (1996).

**Michael Patrick Gillespie** is a Professor of English at Florida International University. He has written books on James Joyce, Oscar Wilde, William Kennedy, chaos theory, and Irish film.

**Alan Gillis** lectures at the University of Edinburgh. His award-winning first collection of poetry, *Somebody, Somewhere*, was followed by *Hawks and Doves*, which was shortlisted for the 2007 T.S. Eliot Prize. As a critic, he is author of *Irish Poetry of the 1930s* (2005), and he is currently co-editing *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Poetry*.

**Clement Hawes** is Professor of English and History at the University of Michigan. His recent books include *The British Eighteenth Century and Global Critique* (2005) and, as editor, *Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings by Jonathan Swift* (2003).

**Barbara Lisa Hillers** is an associate of the Celtic Department at Harvard University. She has taught Irish and Scottish Gaelic language, literature, and folklore at the University of Edinburgh and at Harvard, and has published on medieval and modern Gaelic literature and folklore. She is currently completing *The Medieval Irish Odyssey*, and editing, jointly with Joseph Harris, *Child's Children: Ballad Study and its Legacies*.

**Lisa Hopkins** is Professor of English at Sheffield Hallam University. Her previous publications include *Bram Stoker: A Literary Life* (2007), *Screening the Gothic* (2005), and *Giants of the Past: Popular Fictions and the Idea of Evolution* (2004). She has also worked extensively on Renaissance literature.

**Christopher Innes** holds the Canada Research Chair in Performance and Culture at York University, and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. Author of fourteen books – which have been translated into eight different languages – and over a hundred articles, he is also General Editor of the Cambridge Directors in Perspective series and editor of the *Cambridge Companion to Bernard Shaw* (1998).

**Jennifer M. Jeffers** is Professor of English at Cleveland State University. Professor Jeffers' books include *The Irish Novel at the End of the Twentieth Century: Gender, Bodies, and Power* (2002), *Britain Colonized: Hollywood's Appropriation of British Literature* (2006), and *Beckett's Masculinity* (2009). She is the General Editor for Palgrave Macmillan on the work and legacy of Samuel Beckett.

**Robert W. Jones** is a Senior Lecturer in Eighteenth-Century Literature at the University of Leeds. He is the author of *Gender and the Formation of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain: The Analysis of Beauty* (1998), as well as articles on Barbauld, Chatterton, and Reynolds. He is currently writing a book on "The Theatre of Richard Brinsley Sheridan."

**Vera Kreilkamp** is Visiting Professor at the Irish Studies Program at Boston College, Professor of English at Pine Manor College, and co-editor of *Éire-Ireland: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Irish Studies*. Her publications include *The Anglo-Irish Novel and the Big House* (1998) and chapters in the *Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel* (2006) and *Ireland and Empire* (2004).

**Harriet Kramer Linkin** is a Professor of English at New Mexico State University. She is the editor of the first scholarly edition of *The Collected Poems and Journals of Mary Tighe* (2005) and co-editor (with Stephen C. Behrendt) of *Romanticism and Women Poets: Opening the Doors of Reception* (1999) and *Approaches to Teaching Women Poets of the British Romantic Period* (1997).

**Patrick Lonergan** teaches drama at National University of Ireland, Galway. His book *Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era* won the 2008 Theatre Book Prize, and he is the editor of critical editions of two of Martin McDonagh's plays. He also writes about theater for *The Irish Times* and *Irish Theatre Magazine*.

**Eamon Maher** is Director of the National Centre for Franco-Irish Studies at the Institute of Technology, Tallaght (Dublin). He edits the Reimagining Ireland and Studies in Franco-Irish Relations series for the Peter Lang Publishing Group. He is currently working on a monograph entitled "'The Church and its Spire': John McGahern and the Catholic Question."

**Susan Manly** is a Reader at the University of St Andrews. She is the editor of several volumes in the *Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth* (1999–2003), and the author of *Language, Custom and Nation in the 1790s: Locke, Tooke, Wordsworth, Edgeworth* (2007). She is currently working on *Schools for Treason*, a book about Jacobin writing for children.

**Michael Mays** is Professor and Chair of English at the University of Southern Mississippi. He is the author of *Nation States: The Cultures of Irish Nationalism* (2007).

**F.C. McGrath** is Professor of English at the University of Southern Maine. He has published and presented widely on Irish literature and culture. His books include *Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama: Language, Illusion, and Politics* (1999) and *The Sensible Spirit: Walter Pater and the Modernist Paradigm* (1986).

**Brian McIlroy** is Professor of Film Studies at the University of British Columbia. He is the author of *Irish Cinema: An Illustrated History* (1988), *Shooting to Kill: Filmmaking and the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland* (1998; revised edition 2001), and editor of *Genre and Cinema: Ireland and Transnationalism* (2007).

**Sarah E. McKibben** is Assistant Professor of Irish Language and Literature at the University of Notre Dame. She has published articles in such journals as *Éire-Ireland* and *The Irish Review*, and essays in *Geographies and Genders in Irish Studies* and *The Midnight Court: A Critical Edition* (forthcoming). She is currently completing a book-length manuscript entitled "Endangered Masculinities: Gender, Colonialism, and Sexuality in Early Modern Literature in Irish, 1540–1780."

**Alison Milbank** is Associate Professor of Literature and Theology at the University of Nottingham. She is the author of *Daughters of the House: Modes of the Gothic in Victorian Fiction* (1992), with chapters on Le Fanu, *Dante and the Victorians* (1998), and *Chesterton and Tolkien as Theologians: The Fantasy of the Real* (2007).

**Robert Miles** is Chair of the Department of English at the University of Victoria. He has written widely on Romantic and gothic subjects. His books include *Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress* (1995), *Gothic Writing 1750–1820: A Genealogy* (2002), and *Romantic Misfits* (2008).

**Joseph Falaky Nagy** is Professor in the Department of English at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he has taught since 1978. He is the author of books and articles on medieval Celtic literature, and the founding editor of the *Celtic Studies Association of North America Yearbook*.

**Eugene O'Brien** is Head of the Department of English Language and Literature at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, Ireland. His publications include *Seamus Heaney: Creating Irelands of the Mind* (2002); *Seamus Heaney and the Place of Writing* (2003); *Seamus Heaney: Searches for Answers* (2006); and "Kicking Bishop Brennan up the Arse": *Negotiating Texts and Contexts in Contemporary Irish Studies* (2009).

**Stiofán Ó Cadhla** is Head of Folklore in University College Cork. He has published *Cá bhFuil Éire: Guth an Ghaisce i bPrós Sheáin Uí Ríordáin* (1998), *The Holy Well Tradition: The Pattern of St Declan, Ardmore, Co Waterford 1800–2002* (2002), *Civilizing Ireland: Ordnance Survey 1824–1842: Ethnography, Cartography, Translation* (2007), and *An Creidmbeach Déanach*, poems from Coiscéim (2009).

**Helen O'Connell** is a Lecturer in English Studies at Durham University and is the author of *Ireland and the Fiction of Improvement* (2006).

**Maureen O'Connor** lectures in the Department of English at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, Ireland. She is co-editor, with Lisa Colletta, of *Wild Colonial Girl: Essays on Edna O'Brien* (2006), and, with Kathryn Laing and Sinéad Mooney, of *Edna O'Brien: New Critical Perspectives* (2006). She is the author of *The Female and the Species: The Animal in Irish Women's Writing*, forthcoming from Peter Lang.

**Liam P. Ó Murchú**, a Senior Lecturer in Modern Irish in National University of Ireland, Cork, studied Irish language, literature, and history in NUIC and Irish literature and linguistics in the School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. He has published textual and literary studies and has lectured on Merriman in the USA, France, Germany, and Japan.

**Kathleen M. Oliver** is Associate Professor of English at the University of Central Florida. Previous and forthcoming publications include *Samuel Richardson, Dress, and Discourse* (2008), as well as essays on Daniel Defoe, Sarah Fielding, Samuel Richardson, and Frances Sheridan.

**Patricia Palmer** teaches in the Department of English at King's College London. She is the author of *Language and Conquest in Early Modern Ireland* (2001), "Missing Bodies, Absent Bards: Spenser, Shakespeare and a Crisis in Criticism" (*English Literary Renaissance*, 2006), and "'An headless Ladie' and a 'horses loade of heades': Writing Atrocity in a Time of Conquest" (*Renaissance Quarterly*, 2007). She is currently writing on violence in sixteenth-century Ireland.

**Deana Rankin** is Lecturer in English and Drama at Royal Holloway, University of London and former Fellow of Girton College, University of Cambridge. She is author of *Between Spenser and Swift: English Writing in Seventeenth-Century Ireland* (2005), and of a number of articles on drama, history-writing, republicanism, and Irish writing in the early modern period. Formerly a theatre manager, she maintains close links with the Royal Shakespeare Company's education program.

**Richard Rankin Russell** is Associate Professor of English at Baylor University in Texas. His essays on Irish writers have appeared in *Éire-Ireland*, *Irish University Review*, *Twentieth-Century Literature*, and *Modern Drama*, and he has edited a collection of essays on Martin McDonagh (2007), and published a monograph on Bernard MacLaverty (2009).

**Ann Saddlemyer**, Professor Emeritus of English and Drama, University of Toronto, has published extensively on Irish theater and is the editor of Synge's plays and letters and Lady Gregory's plays, one of the general editors of the Cornell Yeats series, and co-editor of the Selected Irish Drama series. Her most recent publication is a biography of Mrs W.B. Yeats.

**Christine St Peter** is Professor of Women's Studies at the University of Victoria, Canada. She has published widely in the areas of Irish and Canadian women's writing. Two recent publications include *Changing Ireland: Strategies in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (2000) and *Opening the Field: Irish Women: Tests and Contexts* (2007).

**Gregory A. Schirmer** is Professor of English at the University of Mississippi. He is the author of *The Poetry of Austin Clarke* (1983), *William Trevor: A Study of his Fiction* (1990), and *Out of What Began: A History of Irish Poetry* (1998). He has also edited Austin Clarke's essays, the poems of J. J. Callanan, and an anthology of verse translation from the Irish.

**Frank Sewell** is Course Director of English at the University of Ulster, and also a writer and translator. His publications include *Modern Irish Poetry* (2000). His poems have appeared in numerous anthologies, including *The New North: Contemporary Poetry from Northern Ireland* (2008), edited by Chris Agee, and in many journals.

**Eluned Summers-Bremner** is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. She has published *Insomnia: A Cultural History* (2008) and *Ian McEwan: Sex, Death and History* (2009), and is currently working on *A History of Wandering* (Reaktion) along with other projects on trauma, affect, and reading, and the literature of World War II.

**Mary-Helen Thuente** is Professor of English at North Carolina State University. Her publications include *W. B. Yeats and Irish Folklore* (1981), *The Harp Re-strung: The United Irishmen and the Rise of Irish Literary Nationalism* (1994), and numerous essays and journal articles. Her current research focuses on the visual iconography of women and harps in the construction of Irish identity.

**Jeffery Vail** is Assistant Professor of Humanities at Boston University. He is the author of *The Literary Relationship of Lord Byron and Thomas Moore* (2001), and of numerous articles and reviews on Byron, Moore, and the British Romantics. He is currently preparing an edition of the collected letters of Thomas Moore.

**James Watt** teaches in the Department of English and Related Literature at the University of York. He is the author of *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre, and Cultural Conflict 1764–1832* (1999), and is currently completing a book provisionally titled “British Orientalisms, 1759–1835.”

**David Wheatley** lectures at the University of Hull and is the author of three collections of poetry with Gallery Press: *Thirst* (1997), *Misery Hill* (2000), and *Mocker* (2006). His work has been awarded the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature and the Vincent Buckley Poetry Prize, and he has edited the *Poems* (2003) of James Clarence Mangan for Gallery Press and Samuel Beckett’s *Selected Poems 1930–1989* (2009) for Faber & Faber.

**Julia M. Wright** is Canada Research Chair in European Studies at Dalhousie University. She is the author of *Blake, Nationalism, and the Politics of Alienation* (2004), *Ireland, India and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (2007), and over thirty articles and chapters; she is the editor of *The Missionary: An Indian Tale* by Sydney Owenson (2002), *Irish Literature, 1750–1900: An Anthology* (2008), and a special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* on nineteenth-century Ireland, and co-editor of four volumes and two special issues, most recently *Reading the Nation in English Literature: A Critical Reader* (2009).

**Sandra Wynands** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Zayed University, Dubai. She conducts research in the intersection of literature, philosophy, and religion. Her published works include articles on Leonard Cohen, Sam Shepard, Samuel Beckett, Zürich Dada, and Bob Dylan, as well as a book on iconicity in Beckett’s work. She is currently writing a new book on the (poetic) image in modernism and postmodernism.

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# 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 on the basis not of a canon in which authors constitute fixed literary coordinates, but rather 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.