

**Claire Connolly, ed., *Irish Literature in Transition, 1780-1830*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. 456. £89.99. ISBN: 9781108492980.**

*Irish Literature in Transition, 1780-1830*, edited by Claire Connolly, is part of an ambitious six-volume series that offers a dynamic re-evaluation of Irish literary history from 1700 to the present day. As Connolly argues in her introduction, and as the chapters that follow convincingly demonstrate, the period 1780 to 1830 is ‘the crucible of Irish writing in English’ (9). While political history informs the volume, emphasis is placed on ‘the intense and turbulent creative effort’ which led to ‘the emergence of modern Irish literature as a distinct cultural category’ (1), exploring the multifarious ways Irish writing intersected with transnational cultural, intellectual, and aesthetics debates of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Historicist approaches have too often dominated Irish studies, with texts divided between pre- and post-Irish rebellion, either looking forward to or reflecting back on the Act of Union of 1801. The contributions challenge the perceived limitations politics imposed on imaginative writing in Ireland in this period. Charting the ‘new maps’ Irish writers drew ‘between and across Enlightenment, antiquarian, and romantic modes’ (11), the volume is a timely intervention in the field of Irish and Romantic studies, showing the dynamic interconnections and cross-pollination between Irish and British, European, and transatlantic writing, and thus offers a rich and comprehensive re-evaluation of Irish literary history between 1780 and 1830.

The volume is to be commended for the impressive range of its contributions, which cover all aspects of literary culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, from fiction, poetry, and drama, to magazine culture, literary criticism, and musical performances, as well as lesser studied forms such as the popular fiction of the Minerva press. Divided into sections on ‘Origins’, ‘Transitions’, ‘Reputations’, and ‘Futures’, the chapters offer fresh readings of familiar figures such as Maria Edgeworth, Lady Morgan, and Charles Maturin, alongside compelling discussions of lesser-known writers such as Gerald Griffin, John and Michael Banim, and William Maginn. The chapters engage with issues that animate romantic critical debates today, such as the enduring and fertile relationship between print and manuscript cultures, as Harriet Kramer Linkin demonstrates in her persuasive reading of Mary Tighe’s poetry; the importance of metropolitan life to romanticism, as David O’Shaughnessy explores in relation to Irish theatre and urban culture; and myths of individual and solitary romantic creativity, addressed in Jane Moore’s discussion of Thomas Moore’s reputation as an effeminate poet of surface. Moore deftly positions Moore as a poet of sociability, whose very surface poetics carry the democratic impulse that animates his verse. Noting that ‘our notion of romanticism is wholly predicated on the poetics of artistic creation’ (349), Joep Leerssen argues for a comprehensive consideration of Irish romantic intellectual and cultural modes of production within a larger European context. Analysing the confluence of Enlightenment and romantic ideas in the Belfast periodical *The Microscope and Minute Observer* (1799-1800), Jennifer Orr highlights the role of popular print culture in uniting networks in Ireland and in shaping images of Ireland in Britain and America.

One of the strengths of the volume is its careful mapping of ‘the ongoing process of transition between and across linguistic, religious, and political divides’ (5) and its emphasis on networks. Lesa Ní Mhunghaile and Matthew Campbell’s chapters consider the ways in which linguistic and cultural contexts shaped Irish writing. Contacts between Irish and English languages, between Gaelic and Anglo-Irish cultures, and translations, ‘led to a two-way process of literary cross-pollination’ (38) that spurred new innovations in prose and verse. Norman Vance underlines the unity between Protestants and Catholics that the diffusion of classical tradition allowed. Similarly, Moore highlights the sociability of singing clubs, which fostered connections across religious and class divides.

Another urgent issue the volume engages with is the position of Irish writing within the context of empire. As Murray Pittock argues, archipelagic connections contributed to the emergence of a distinctive Irishness. Placing Irish literary history within this political context leads to the difficult yet necessary question of Ireland's position as a colonial subject alongside 'a new imperial identity and authority within the global sphere of empire' (362). Sonja Lawrenson persuasively shows the role of popular fiction as a 'proxy political arena' (360) that imagined Ireland's imperial status while considering the socio-political realities of British imperial expansion. Expanding on Ireland's global connections, Joseph Rezek examines understudied transatlantic influences, including the variety of Irish responses to slavery. Sarah Isdell's *The Vale of Louisiana* (1805), a trans-Caribbean gothic novel, obscures Irish and British connections to the slave trade, thus stressing the need to consider Irish writing in a global context.

*Irish Literature in Transition, 1780-1830* is an invaluable collection, of interest to all scholars of the Romantic period. Confirming the need to read beyond the nation, this volume's contributions successfully redraw the map of Irish literary history, offering innovative and invigorating new avenues of research.

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