

available in England unfavourably to that at home. London was reckoned to be at least six times larger than Dublin. Its trade generated specialisation as yet unknown in Dublin. However, the streets of Dublin were better lit. Furthermore, Oxford colleges were smaller than Dublin University.

The reports were almost certainly intended for an uncle in Dublin, Sir Thomas Molyneux, a leading physician. The correspondence is predicated on shared interests and knowledge. Samuel Molyneux assumed, for example, that his uncle would know the engravings of the Raphael Cartoons and the gardens at Hampton Court. He despatches to Dublin recent engravings of Blenheim and Heythrop House. In Cambridge, he is impressed by Wren's library for Trinity College, 'as beautiful a shell and disposition for a library as could be'. What can only be guessed is how far the opinions expressed in the letters were shared and deferred to by those still in Ireland. Sir Thomas Molyneux's son, visiting Paris during the 1730s, showed a passionate and informed taste for engravings. Given the extensive contacts within and beyond Ireland of his kindred, this connoisseurship might be regarded as a hereditary attribute.

At the elevated level of the prosperous Molyneuxs and their affinities, lives were organised according to the values and styles in vogue in metropolitan England and across fashionable continental Europe. What can only be speculated is whether Samuel Molyneux's up-to-the-minute accounts affected, even altered, how friends and acquaintances in Ireland built and furnished their houses and landscaped their grounds. What is apparent from the letters is that the young traveller, no doubt quick to learn on tour, arrived already well-equipped with manners and knowledge. The apparent ease with which he was welcomed and accepted into polite society had precedents with others from Ireland, including his own father when travelling during the 1680s, but cannot be assumed to have been universal among émigrés from Ireland. A reversal of the usual stereotype is Molyneux's praise of the hospitality and courtesy that he encountered in England. Only among crotchety Jacobites did the young Molyneux's sententious Whiggism provoke criticism, even placing him under suspicion of being a spy. The latter allegation is not altogether dismissed, since the reasons why this Irish Protestant was taken up by the Marlboroughs are unknown, as also his mission to, and subsequent employment at, the electoral court in Hanover. The welcome availability of the letters in this helpful edition prompts many questions, notably concerning the interactions between Ireland, England and continental Europe.

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A CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE IRISH NOVEL, 1790–1829. By Claire Connolly. Pp xi, 269. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2011. £55.

Writing in 1913, Lady Gregory complained that the problem with Maria Edgeworth was her distant, 'bird's eye view' of an Irish landscape starved of close representation. Claire Connolly's book aims to challenge this opinion and prove instead that Edgeworth and her companion novelists of the Romantic period were fully attentive to a material and political landscape; to the facts, and not simply the *idea*, of the Ireland in which they lived. To this end, Connolly rejects quantitative 'survey' tactics in favour of intimate textual interpretation, an initiative guaranteed to warm the hearts of those readers who, exhausted by a decade of valiant archival cataloguing in Irish literary studies, are in broad agreement with her opening salvo – that 'we are richer in data than in the means to deal with it' (p. 18). Wisely, she aims to intervene between the high road of theoretical overview and the low pathways of forensic data-basing in order to return to what looks, at times, like an appealingly old-fashioned new historicist engagement with the genre. Parallel tactics see her politely sidestep several recent

theorists of the subject in favour of two early mentors, the critics Seamus Deane and Thomas Flanagan, recruited here to endorse her defence of a vital and materially-engaged Irish Romantic fictional canon against later detractors such as Yeats and Corkery.

This book's project is simply to read, therefore, in context, and there is no doubt that Connolly is a superb interpretative reader. The individual thematic studies are frequently dazzling in what they fashion from the novel's encounter with Romantic Ireland; its immersion in the local and domestic as well as the ideological. Her opening chapter covers the Union through its paradoxical treatment in texts such as Lady Morgan's *Florence Macarthy* and Charles Maturin's *Women*, which render the 1801 Act as both spectacle – a scenic extravaganza – and absence, a deathly void, exposed by the fiction of the period, in Dublin's political and public life. Similar deft manoeuvring between materialism and symbolism motivates her second chapter, on the novel's relationship to Irish cartography. Wordsworth, who visited Ireland in 1829, was rather disappointed with the country itself yet enchanted by its depiction in maps, a distinction drawn out into an impressive account of various touristic, picturesque and symbolic representations of the nation featured by writers ranging from Edgeworth to Gerald Griffin. In the same context Connolly identifies in Sarah Curran's 1801 embroidered map of the country (used as the book's cover illustration) a poignant reminder of a gendered topography playing through national narratives, Curran's status as 'exemplary Irish girlfriend' (p. 82) merging with her silenced, subjected position on the larger map.

This discussion segues naturally into a chapter entitled 'Love and Marriage', in which Connolly seeks to rescue novelistic treatments of the landscape of emotion and feeling in the Irish novel from the blunt instrument of allegory, and from dogmatic readings of marital for colonial relations. It is in this section that we perhaps miss a more systematic cross reference to English and Scottish eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century traditions of novelistic romance, connections which Connolly tends to underplay, I think, but which would add further weight to her critique, particularly given her sensitivity to what she earlier terms the 'transnational flow' of publishing history in this period (p. 6). Indeed, the benefits of re-engaging British literary discourses are more than evident in the subsequent essay – an informed and long overdue treatment of religion in Irish fiction – in which Edgeworth's relationship to the *Edinburgh Review* spearheads Connolly's assessment of the novel's role in mediating a culture caught between the competing drives of Catholic Emancipation and Church of Ireland proselytism.

This elegant study is expertly positioned between literary and historical enquiry, but is there a point at which disciplinary schisms emerge? If so, that point is Connolly's critical vocabulary. The lexicon she evolves is necessarily elastic in addressing the Irish novel's relationship to historical events and processes. Irish novels are thus, never simply *about* a subject – they 'speak to' their historical moment (p. 115); they 'thicken and intensify' its imagery (p. 106); the genre is defined by its 'porosity' to the political (p. 1). Such linguistic finessing is entirely appropriate given that her intention is to lift the body of Romantic fiction away from the pull of political allegory on one hand, the plodding reflectionism of the 'national tale' tradition on the other. It sometimes hints at over-cautious readings, nonetheless, and historians may plead for a harder deterministic currency. They may plead too – and this time perhaps with some justification – for a more generous and defined conclusion to the book. Connolly offers a fascinating final chapter on the rituals and superstitions of death in the Irish Romantic novel, with insights based largely on an inspiring re-reading of the Banims, but this seems an abrupt end to her thesis. In a book which so brilliantly redefines Irish cultural territory *before* 1829, the question of 'afterwards' looms large, and her guidance on the literary continuities which led to a post-Emancipation picaresque or the fictions of the Land War would have been both authoritative and welcome.

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