



# Irish Novels 1890-1940: New Bearings in Culture and Fiction

*John Wilson Foster*

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Studies of Irish fiction are still scanty in contrast to studies of Irish poetry and drama. Attempting to fill a large critical vacancy, *Irish Novels 1890-1940* is a comprehensive survey of popular and minor fiction (mainly novels) published between 1890 and 1922, a crucial period in Irish cultural and political history. Since the bulk of these sixty-odd writers have never been written about, certainly beyond brief mentions, the book opens up for further exploration a literary landscape, hitherto neglected, perhaps even unsuspected. This new landscape should alter the familiar perspectives on Irish literature of the period, first of all by adding genre fiction (science fiction, detective novels, ghost stories, New Woman fiction, and Great War novels) to the Irish syllabus, secondly by demonstrating the immense contribution of women writers to popular and mainstream Irish fiction.

Among the popular and prolific female writers discussed are Mrs J.H. Riddell, B.M. Croker, M.E. Francis, Sarah Grand, Katharine Tynan, Ella MacMahon, Katherine Cecil Thurston, W.M. Letts, and Hannah Lynch. Indeed, a critical inference of the survey is that if there is a discernible tradition of the Irish novel, it is largely a female tradition. A substantial postscript surveys novels by Irish women between 1922 and 1940 and relates them to the work of their female antecedents. This ground-breaking survey should also alter the familiar perspectives on the Ireland of 1890-1922. Many of the popular works were problem-novels and hence throw light on contemporary thinking and debate on the "Irish Question." After the Irish Literary Revival and creation of the Free State, much popular and mainstream fiction became a lost archive, neglected evidence, indeed, of a lost Ireland.

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