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Aims and Scope: Formerly *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text* (1997–2005), *Romantic Textualities: Literature and Print Culture, 1780–1840* is an online journal that is committed to foregrounding innovative Romantic-studies research into bibliography, book history, intertextuality, and textual studies. To this end, we publish material in a number of formats: among them, peer-reviewed articles, reports on individual/group research projects, bibliographical checklists, and biographical profiles of overlooked Romantic writers. As of Issue 15 (Winter 2005), *Romantic Textualities* also carries reviews of books that reflect the growing academic interest in the fields of book history, print culture, intertextuality, and cultural materialism, as they relate to Romantic studies.

EDWARD WALSH (1805–50)

An Author Study

Anne MacCarthy



I

THE CORK WRITER EDWARD WALSH was born in Derry in 1805: at the time of his birth, Walsh's father belonged to the North Cork Militia and was posted in Ireland. However, Walsh was reared in the Sliabh Luachra area on the Cork–Kerry border,¹ and it is possible that he was actually born in Sliabh Luachra, in Doire (the Gaelic name for Derry).² The very confusion as to his place of birth indicates the extent to which Ireland has forgotten this writer.

While Walsh was a schoolteacher by profession (first at Millstreet, then in Tourin, Co. Wateford), he also contributed to the *Nation*, a paper associated with the Young Irelanders who staged a failed revolution in Ireland in 1848. The poetry published by the *Nation* was nationalist and rebellious in tone, but also attempted to instil a new pride in its Anglophone readers in their Irish origins. According to Brian Cleeve, Walsh quarrelled with Thomas Davis, the leader of the Young Irelanders which was 'a very difficult thing to do'.³

Walsh's letters to John Daly, the publisher of his translations for *Reliques of Irish Jacobite Poetry*, demonstrate that he was an outspoken person who was not willing to acquiesce to anyone. They also evidence his confidence in his talents as a writer and a translator, and his conviction that he could write good English. At this time—the middle of the nineteenth century—the Irish were still learning to be proficient in the English language and Walsh was, in fact, bilingual. He ended his life as a teacher on the penal colony on Spike Island in Cork Harbour, where he met the Young Ireland revolutionary, John Mitchel, before the latter's deportation to Australia. Mitchel provides a description of the writer in his *Jail Journal*.⁴ Walsh's work as a teacher in a penal colony taxed his health, and he died in Cork on 6 August 1850 and his wife and young children were forced to emigrate to Australia where his descendants still live.

II

Walsh is best known for his poetry and the two collections of translations of Irish songs published in his life, all of which have been out of print until quite recently. Besides publishing a large number of poems in the *Nation* between 1843 and 1848, he also contributed to the *Cork Magazine*, *Dublin Journal of*

Temperance, Science and Literature, *Dublin Penny Journal*, *Irish Penny Journal* and the *Shamrock*—the first and the last being pointedly nationalist in orientation. Walsh also published short tales in newspapers: again, these have not been republished until recently, a fact that signals a notable gap in our understanding of the Irish prose tradition. There had not been a complete collection until 2005 when John J. Ó Ríordáin published *A Tragic Troubadour: Life and Collected Works of Folklorist, Poet and Translator Edward Walsh (1805–1850)*, in which poetry, prose, and letters are collected together for the first time, alongside a biographical account of the author. An indication of the lack of interest in Walsh is the fact that the author of this excellent example of scholarship was forced to publish it privately.⁵

The fact that he published in several magazines is evidence of some contemporary popularity. The nineteenth-century Irish nationalist and novelist Charles Kickham spoke of Walsh's being forgotten soon after his death,⁶ yet his *Reliques of Irish Jacobite Poetry* (1844) and *Irish Popular Songs* (1847) were reprinted in 1866 and 1883 respectively.⁷ A poem by Walsh, 'The Lady of Albany's Lament for Prince Charles', appeared in Henry Montgomery's *Specimens of the Early Native Poetry of Ireland* in 1846,⁸ while selections of his poetry and a 'notice' appeared in the third volume of Charles Read's well-known *Cabinet of Irish Literature* (4 vols, 1879–80), the most comprehensive anthology of Irish writing in the nineteenth century, in Charles MacCarthy Collins's *Celtic Irish Songs and Song Writers* (1885).⁹ Walsh appeared in Samuel Lover's *Poems of Ireland* (1858), and he is to be found as well in the first series of *Poetry and Legendary Ballads of the South of Ireland*, edited by John O'Mahony in 1894.¹⁰

Finally, W. B. Yeats included four poems by Walsh in his *Book of Irish Verse*: 'Mo Craoibhin Cnó', 'Mairgréad Ni Chealleadh', 'From the Cold Sod that's o'er you', and 'The Fairy Nurse' in 1895.¹¹ Yeats's anthology appeared in four editions up to 1920, so it is not really fair to say that in the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Irish world of letters Edward Walsh was entirely forgotten. In Yeats's anthology it is worth noticing that Walsh appears alongside such poets as Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Anglo-Irish writers in the strict sense of the term, as well as such writers as James Clarence Mangan, Thomas Moore, Samuel Ferguson, Thomas Davis, and Charles Kickham. Yeats places Walsh within a wider tradition of Irish writing in English, as opposed to one merely predicated on nationality, language, or religion. Kickham showed great enthusiasm for the writer and wrote the fullest account of Walsh's life available and I suggest that this fact, together with Kickham's popularity as a nationalist writer, has contributed to the widely accepted view of Walsh in Irish literary history as a patriotic poet.


In *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888), Yeats compares Walsh to Douglas Hyde and says of Hyde: 'I hope he may put some of his gatherings into ballads, for he is the last of our ballad-writers of the school of Walsh and Callanan—men whose work seems fragrant with turf smoke'.¹² In 'Irish

National Literature, I: From Callanan to Carleton', Yeats states his opinion that of the translators who followed J. J. Callanan, Edward Walsh, 'a village schoolmaster', was the best.¹³ In fact, Yeats adapted a translation by Walsh of a stanza from the song, 'Edmund of the Hill', which he gives in his essay 'Popular Ballad Poetry of Ireland'.

III

Walsh continued the poetic, musical tradition for which Sliabh Luachra was famous when still Irish-speaking and indeed for which it is renowned to this day. He preserved the legends and songs of the region and in his prose works accurately recorded the life and customs of its people during the early nineteenth century. His stories are very much in the style of William Carleton, but Walsh's national pride emerges from the fact that he never apologises for the behaviour of his characters. The writer's perspective is that of an educated Irishman describing the country people without portraying them as 'quaint folk'—the typical attitude towards the Irish peasantry at the time. The reader is presented with a strong sense of the independence of this area and its indomitable spirit. Walsh was writing of a time just before the Great Irish Famine of 1845–49, the stories being published in the 1830s and '40s: they deal with life in Duhallow and Sliabh Luachra, the Whiteboys, heroic legends, thus supplying an accurate and widely ranging account of Irish society before its radical transformation by the Famine. During the nineteenth century, the stress on a uniform Irish identity implicit in nationalism resulted in the disappearance of local differences; by contrast, Walsh participated in the construction of this national identity without ignoring the particularities of his locality, living as he did at a time when nationalist ideology was just beginning in Ireland.

The only two books Walsh published were two translated collections of Gaelic poetry, *Reliques of Irish Jacobite Poetry* in 1844 and *Irish Popular Songs* in 1847. These works evidence the translator's intimate knowledge of these popular songs, most of them from the eighteenth century, and his understanding of contemporary Irish language amongst the people of Munster. His translations reproduce the musicality of the originals, which later translators of these poems tend to ignore, while avoiding what may be called 'primitivism'—a tendency among later translators of Gaelic to provide what they deem to be a colloquial touch expected by readers of the poems. Walsh was one of the writers who can be considered a part of Irish Romanticism, something identified by Patrick Rafroidi in his *L'Irlande et le romantisme* (1972).¹⁴ It is a little-known phenomenon with similarities to movements in other countries—particularly in the recovery of native folklore, literature, and music, and in the emphasis on the search for a national identity which implied separation from the United Kingdom. Walsh played a key part in this recovery, which itself became the basis of the Irish literary identity at the end of the nineteenth and during the early twentieth centuries.

It is difficult to understand why there is no edition of Walsh's works available. Although a minor writer, Irish literature in English does not have such a long tradition as to be able to do without him and other nineteenth-century writers. An important part of the Irish literary tradition is impoverished by not reading the works of writers such as Walsh: if we are not fully aware of the authors who first began to compose in English in Ireland, we will be unable to understand fully, not only Walsh's contemporaries, but later generations of Irish writers. His prose writing is of enormous significance to the Irish prose tradition and it is also difficult to understand why commentators often remark on the paucity of prose in nineteenth-century Ireland when tales such as these lie forgotten. One of the reasons may be that the Irish canon now ignores a writer whose work played an important role in the translation of the native Irish culture into English because its literary identity is more cosmopolitan. This shows us that the Irish canon is still being established, preferring to overlook some of the past, as its identity is still fragile. A stronger sense of autonomy, as we find in English or French literature, leads to the preservation of the work of minor writers, sometimes of less worth than Walsh. It is significant that the only interest in publishing his work remains at a local level only, in the Sliabh Luachra area which still has a sense of cultural independence in the Irish state and the maturity to want to preserve its cultural tradition.¹⁵ 

NOTES

1. See Jack Lane and Brendan Clifford, *A North Cork Anthology: 250 Years of Writings from the Region of Millstreet, Duhallow, Slieve Luachra and Thereabouts* (Millstreet: Aubane Historical Society, 1993), p. 164.
2. I would like to thank Dr Bernard O'Donoghue, a poet also from the Sliabh Luachra area, for this information.
3. Brian Cleeve, *Dictionary of Irish Writers: Fiction* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1967), p. 137.
4. John Mitchel, *Jail Journal; or, Five Years in British Prisons* (1876), rptd with an introduction by John Kelly (Poole and New York: Woodstock Books, 1996), p. 30.
5. John J. Ó Riordáin, *A Tragic Troubadour: Life and Collected Works of Folklorist, Poet and Translator Edward Walsh (1805–1850)* (Limerick: Privately Printed, 2005).
6. See Charles Kickham, *The Valley near Slievenamon: A Kickham Anthology*, edited by James Maher (Kilkenny: Kilkenny People, 1942).
7. Edward Walsh, *Reliques of Irish Jacobite Poetry with Biographical Sketches of the Authors. Interlinear Literal Translations, and Historical Illustrative Notes by John Daly* (Dublin: Samuel J. Machen, 1844); *Irish Popular Songs; with English Metrical Translations, and Introductory Remarks and Notes* (Dublin: James McGlashan; and London: William S. Orr and Co., 1847).
8. Henry R. Montgomery, *Specimens of the Early Native Poetry of Ireland* (Dublin: McGlashan, 1846).

9. Charles Read, *Cabinet of Irish Literature*, 4 vols (London: Blackie & Son, 1879–80); Charles MacCarthy Collins, *Celtic Irish Songs and Song Writers* (London: J. Cornish & Sons, 1885).
10. Samuel Lover, *Poems of Ireland* (London: Ward, Lock, 1858); John O'Mahony (ed.), *Poetry and Legendary Ballads of the South of Ireland*, 1st ser. (Cork: Guy & Co., 1894).
11. William Butler Yeats (ed.), *A Book of Irish Verse* (London: Methuen, 1895).
12. William Butler Yeats (ed.), *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (London: Walter Scott, 1888), p. xvi.
13. William Butler Yeats, 'Popular Ballad Poetry of Ireland', in *Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats—Vol. 1: Articles and Reviews*, edited by John P. Frayne, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 362.
14. Patrick Raftroidi, *L'Irlande et le romantisme* (Paris : Éditions universitaires, 1972); translated as *Irish Literature in English: The Romantic Period*, 2 vols (Gerrards Cross, Bucks: Colin Smythe, 1980).
15. Fuller details about Walsh and nineteenth-century Irish poetry can be found in the present author's *James Clarence Mangan, Edward Walsh and Nineteenth-Century Irish Literature in English* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000) and 'Edward Walsh and Nineteenth-Century Translation', in *Writing Irishness in Nineteenth-Century British Culture*, edited by Neil McCaw (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 81–97. Also, see Robert Welch's *History of Verse Translation from the Irish 1789–1897* (Gerrards Cross, Bucks: Colin Smythe; Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1988).

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