

Introduction: The Uses of Irish-Australian Literature

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IN a famous – perhaps too famous – proclamation, the late historian Patrick O’Farrell (1933–2003) declared that the ‘distinctive Australian identity was not born in the bush, nor at Anzac Cove: these were merely situations for its expression. No; it was born in Irishness protesting against the extremes of Englishness’ (O’Farrell 12). There has been a tradition of thinking about the Irish in Australia as the grit in the oyster, a recalcitrant internal other that allows Australia to emerge as a national pearl distinct from Britain. Yet, arguably, the separatism-assimilation binary, and the presumptions about nation-building upon which it is built, has not received sufficient critical treatment in recent decades as theories of diaspora, settler colonialism and cultural encounter have developed. Historiography about the Irish in Australia, over which O’Farrell’s presence still dominates, has ebbed in recent years as the attention has turned to Indigenous histories and to the waves of migration that have occurred since the Second World War.¹ The fractious yet formative role of the Irish presence has tended to be papered over by terms like ‘Anglo-Celtic’ or ‘British’ Australia. Indeed, if Noel Ignatieff told the story of ‘how the Irish became white’ in the United States, perhaps in Australia the equivalent narrative is ‘how the Irish became British’, an identification which, as Elizabeth Malcolm recently pointed out, is remarkably ill-fitting: ‘Catholic Irish people do not usually consider themselves British and nor do most British people think of the Irish as British either. Australian usage of the category “British” to include the

¹More recent work, such as that of Elizabeth Malcolm and Dianne Hall, builds on this important historiographical seam, emphasising areas of contemporary critical concern including, race and gender, though significantly Malcolm has acknowledged that her recent book with Hall was partly motivated by the lack of impact of O’Farrell’s work in mainstream Australian historiography.

Catholic Irish is unusual' (Malcolm 201).

The Irish element, which O'Farrell's holds to be the 'galvanising force at the centre of the evolution of our national character', (10) could as easily be read otherwise: as that which reveals a key fissure in the supposedly unified white, Australian national identity. That unshakeable monolith, 'Anglo-Celtic Australia', has a troublesome, divisive past belied by that neat little hyphen. Literary studies, among other things, enables us to think about how national and other identities emerge and fructify. Yet there has been remarkably little sustained investigation of Irishness in Australian literature, despite its ubiquity. If Irish-Australian historiography has become less of a force since O'Farrell's time, then Irish-Australian literary studies usually have been an addendum to the historical work.²

With some honourable exceptions, it is striking how little work has been done on the remarkable Irish presence in Australian cultural production and particularly Australian literature. Even a cursory survey, as the essays collected here attest, demonstrates how pervasive markers of Irishness are in Australian literature both canonical and popular. Equally, while it is common to regard Australian culture and identity as in some, often unspecified, way 'Irish' in its formation, gestation and tropology – we might think of the figure of Ned Kelly, the tradition of the larrikin, or the colonial nationalists writing in the *Bulletin* at the end of the nineteenth century – this phenomenon has seldom been subjected to serious academic scrutiny. There is no 'Irish-Australian' literary subfield in the way there is for 'Irish-American' literature, to which there have been a number of monographs and special issues of journals devoted.³ Paul Giles's essay in this special issue attends to the triangular relation of Ireland, Australia and the United States, which opens up a fruitful line of comparison for the Irish literary diaspora.

Though far more Irish people went to the United States than to Australia, the proportion of those who came here was much greater. Up to a third of the earlier settlement of Australia was made up of Irish people and Australia, proportionally, has more people of Irish descent than any other country in the world, outside of Ireland. One would therefore expect the cultural traces in the development of the national literary imagination to be more dominant in

²There have been several collections of essays, often emerging from conferences such as those put on regularly by the Irish Studies Association of Australia and New Zealand, which are mainly historical in orientation with a smattering of literary articles. See, for example, the edited collections of Bull et al. and Kiernan, as well as the annual journal, *The Australasian Journal of Irish Studies*.

³Charles Fanning has been the leading scholar of Irish-American literature for some decades, though see also Sullivan. There have been two special issues of the venerable journal *MELUS* (Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States) devoted to Irish-American Literature, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Spring 1993) and Vol. 44, Issue 4 (Winter 2019).

Australia than in America, where Irish migrants account for a much smaller proportion of the overall population. Yet the Irish element has usually been folded into mainstream Australian literature, a reflection of a number of factors, not least the development of disciplinary structures in Australia, as Maggie Nolan outlines in her essay. At the same time, Australia, and Irish-Australia, tend to be of only tangential concern to international Irish studies, even as the emphasis on transnational, migration and diaspora studies accelerates within field studies globally. There are many explanations for that eschewal. The Irish influence in Australia may be proportionately greater, but numerically far more Irish migrants went to the United States. Irish studies has also, no doubt, been drawn in to the cultural power of the American academy and Irish-America (not Irish Australia) has long basked in the charisma of American global hegemony, from JFK to Jimmy McNulty in *The Wire*.

Yet Australian and transnational Irish studies have much to offer each other, particularly as in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, the Irish were Australia's largest and most significant ethnic minority. The majority of these were Catholic and working-class, and often anti-British. They arrived in Australia via transportation or poverty-fuelled immigration and were frequently uneducated and, at least in the early days of colonial settlement, usually illiterate. They were also subject to considerable prejudice, which lasted through most of the twentieth century. Federation provided distinct and significant opportunities for Irish advancement, and assimilation was a means for social mobility and respectability. The Irish benefited not only from the dispossession of Indigenous Australians but were also, as Hall and Malcolm contend, enthusiastic proponents of the White Australia policy, not least in their efforts to distinguish themselves from rival Chinese, with whom they competed for low-level occupations (79).

Becoming Australian, however, incurred significant losses in terms of Irish distinctiveness – culturally, linguistically and spiritually, which has shaped Australia's literary tradition in ways that have not been fully discerned. This process was complex and varied, but assertions of Irishness – especially in its political or separatist forms – could be fraught. Irish republican sentiment was a more sensitive matter in British Australia than in independent United States and although in both countries Irish immigrants were subject to discrimination and sectarianism, in Australia there was the extra suspicion of sedition and disloyalty. In some cases, Irish cultural markers were abandoned by upwardly mobile Irish Australians altogether. In others, Irishness was transmuted into a non-national Catholic identity or into quaint modes of alterity. Ronan McDonald's essay here investigates Vincent Buckley's autobiography *Cutting Green Hay* (1983), which reflects on how his parents' residual Irishness mutated to an

Australian context but at the cost of what Buckley regards as cultural enervation and dislocation. Here and elsewhere Irish identity became blurred into an Australian imaginary that distinguished itself from Britishness, but also forsook both radical Irish politics and the idea of Ireland as home. Yet, what could be more Australian and simultaneously more Irish than *Around the Boree Log and Other Verses* (1921) by ‘John O’Brien’ penname of Fr Patrick Hartigan, with its resonant note of comic doom, ‘“We’ll all be rooned”, said Hanrahan “before the year is out”’.

The Irish in Australia, as elsewhere in the Irish diaspora, had to forge their identity by accepting, asserting, remoulding or resisting the images and tropes of Irishness, flattering and degrading, which circulated transnationally. In Australia, as a settler-colony in formation, those tropes could be moulded into Australianness more easily than in more established settler colonies such as the United States. From the earliest colonial fiction, there had been Irish characters – the oppressed or the rebellious, often the drunk or the superstitious, or a combination of the above, as well as writers of influence, who could be identified as Irish Australian but were also quintessentially Australian. We might think in this context of C. J. Dennis (1876–1938), the laureate of the larrikin, and his creations Bill, Doreen and Ginger Mick. In this context, sentimentalised, nostalgic and generally unthreatening portrayals of the Irish as colourful and rebellious fed into myths of Australia, helped by ballad, song and story. As Val Noone notes in this issue, it would be a mistake to dismiss this oral tradition in Australia as lacking in importance or not worthy of scholarly attention. For Kevin Molloy, however, such genres prevented the realisation of an Irish-Australian realist tradition in spite of an Irish Australian community that sought out Irish themed literature, often from international markets. Yet even as they asserted their cultural differences, there were other forces – both within the community and outside of it – which either neglected stories of the Irish experience in Australia or transposed Irish tropes and stories into other dimensions of Australian national mythmaking. The story of the bushranger, while hardly as homely and unthreatening as the pessimistic Hanrahan, also often had a distinct Irish flavour. However, as Gelder and Weaver illustrate, the attempt to assimilate the bushranger and outlaw to transnational republican ideals created tensions that could not be resolved. But such literature served a wider ideological purpose in Australia. This familiar narrative (‘more sinned against than sinning’) has long been used to justify and ameliorate the settler colonial project – and the logic of dispossession that underpinned it – in wider national narratives. Paradoxically, because Irishness is so deeply imprinted into the Australian imaginary, it becomes difficult to distinguish it from Australianness itself.

The aim in this special issue, then, is not to add one more subgroup to the umbrella of diversity, or to give any comprehensive coverage of, let alone construct, a new field. We hope that the various essays included here will suggest fertile routes for further research, and we are attempting to raise as many questions as we answer. This special issue examines the literary dimensions Irish-Australian as a way of understanding one genealogy in the development of the Australian imaginary, alert to its discontinuities, anomalies and possibilities. The essays here include bibliographical, historical, comparative, theoretical and literary critical approaches and together make up a heterogeneous collection. That this special issue is entitled *The Uses of Irish-Australian Literature* befits our intention to trouble the category of Irish Australia, treating it as a discursive construct that can be put to the service of a whole range of nationalist or dissident purposes. That is not to say that our approach is orientated only towards hermeneutic suspicion or anti-essentialist fervour; Irish identity has been adopted and disowned, remembered and forgotten, in various ways and for diverse reasons, as Patrick Buckridge's study of the range of autobiographies written by individuals that could plausibly be designated Irish-Australian attests.

Similarly, this special issue does not aim to be a project of retrieval or recovery of forgotten voices. While some of our contributors do look at lesser-known or eccentric writers (Noone, Buckridge, Mead, for example), many of the writers considered here have been much studied or are, like Gerald Murnane (Byron, Giles), the subject of intense contemporary interest. A reader could conclude from this volume that the Irish dimension of Australian literature is 'hidden in plain sight'. Yet many of these essays ask, implicitly or explicitly, why what is so manifest has sometimes seemed so latent? To be clear, though, our emphasis is not orientated towards a 'contributory' let alone a celebratory model, in which diverse ethnic groups contribute and amalgamate to a stable nation. Rather, we are interested in understanding the range of critical, historical, discursive and institutional processes by which national literatures are generated, and the interpretations they enable. We are suggesting that alertness to Irishness as a sort of 'internal other', which is also and magically intrinsic and identical with white Australia, deepens our understanding of the play of difference and sameness in the national imaginary. Far from self-identical, the story of white Australia reveals itself as a product of division and discrimination, enmeshed in a history of separation and assimilation that is periodically forgotten or elided. Deeper understanding of those cultural processes, including the way in which Irishness can be variously derided, exoticised, and ignored, including by the Irish themselves, opens up possibilities for the broad field of Australian literary studies and how it understands the dynamics of cultural encounter and

absorption.

Some authors and critics, Vincent Buckley, Christopher Koch, Thomas Keeneally, have been heavily invested in modes of Irish identification. Others of Irish origin are eager to leave it behind in an effort to pin their colours to a new nation called Australia. There is a long genealogy of these Irish-Australian writers and intellectuals, a tradition that Noone, Molloy and Devlin-Glass all attempt to trace through a range of lenses in this special issue; figures such as Frank the Poet and Christopher Brennan, or even Protestants such as Joseph Furphy or Thea Astley, arguably merit the designation. Anne Jamison's article on Hannah Boyd, and the influence of her tumultuous Anglo-Irish background, extends this line of thinking, and positions it within the authoritative genre of the educational treatise. But Irishness in Australia is not only a matter of heredity, but also of influence and transnational connection. Jimmy Yan considers how Australian literary nationalists looked to the Irish literary revival as both model and inspiration and Irish cultural nationalism served as an exemplar for the emerging settler Australian national imaginary in the early twentieth century. Irishness also has the potential to unsettle that national imaginary, as Maggie Nolan's article on Irish-Aboriginal writing attests.

Exploring these ambiguities opens up new ways of understanding the intersections between race, class, ethnicity, religion and nation in the Australian literary field and sharpens our capacity to think about difference in nuanced ways. In this spirit, we now turn to the essays that comprise this special issue, and which demonstrate the range of possibilities that thinking about Irish-Australian literature enables. The opening article, by Maggie Nolan, 'Conceptualising Irish-Aboriginal Writing: Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*' offers one such possibility. Nolan sets the scene by exploring why Irish-Australian literature has not been a significant stream within Australian literary studies and what it might offer if it were. She argues that, since the colonial era, Irish difference had been both recalcitrant and assimilable but, in the wake of Federation in 1901, Australian literature was mobilised towards the production of a unified national tradition. Irishness served to differentiate Australianness from Britishness in a new white Australia, paradoxically becoming itself more British in the process. Nolan seeks to tease out the tensions within the resulting category of the 'Anglo-Celtic' tradition by analysing the representation of Irish Australians in Indigenous Australian writing, and reflecting on moments of solidarity between the Irish and Indigenous Australians. After looking briefly at representations of colonial relations between the Irish and Aboriginal Australians in Jack Davis' 1979 play *Kullark* and Eric Willmot's historical novel *Pemulwuy* (1989), Nolan offers a reading of a minor scene in Alexis Wright's Miles Franklin Literary Award-winning novel *Carpentaria*, published in 2006, as a way of exploring

such representations in the contemporary era. Nolan is not attempting to generate a new category for the field of Australian literary studies. Rather, her analysis follows a seam within the Australian literary tradition that imagines forms of allegiance that may complicate existing, binarised conceptions of the Australian literary field.

Paul Giles's essay 'Irish-Australian Literature: Ghosts, Genealogy, Tradition' moves to a transnational frame by theorising Irish-Australian literature not simply as a question of heritage or inherited identity, but rather of 'transposition and indirection', in which oblique cultural formations operate relationally. He considers how an Irish Catholic sensibility mutates into secular form in writers as diverse as Gerard Murnane and Bernard Smith, who both repudiate modes of abstraction, as if adopting a secularised form of 'angelism', a theology which 'scorned dualistic abstraction as incommensurate with a human state of corporeal incarnation'. Giles considers a wide range of writers both Irish identifying, such as Thomas Keneally, and those not usually considered this way, such as Ada Cambridge and Rosa Praed. He also deploys a comparative perspective, contrasting formations of Irishness in Australia with those of America. In John Boyle O'Reilly, the Fenian escapee from Western Australia who became a celebrated Boston journalist, he finds the clearest nineteenth-century triangulation between Ireland, Australia and America. O'Reilly's intellectual collaboration with Frederick Douglass in the 1880s opens up rich perspectives on racial politics across different continents and suggests how an 'Irish-Australian transnational dynamic helped to integrate Douglass's radical concepts of racial *métissage* within a wider global orbit'. Giles's wide-ranging analysis in which 'isomorphic resemblances' and 'shared intellectual affinities' mutually illuminate each other bristles with an awareness that the Irish-Australian dimension is not merely an 'ancillary aspect of Australian literature', but has 'the capacity to change the subject's contours more fundamentally'.

Jimmy H. Yan's "'Ourselves Alone"? Encounters between the Irish Literary Revival and Australian Settler-Modernisms, ca. 1913–1919' is also transnational in scope, recovering the intellectual networks and contact points between Irish cultural and political nationalism and the settler Australian national imaginary during the Irish revolutionary period. It looks at both the acceptance of and the resistance to certain modes and ideas in this circuitry and attends to the travel writings of key Australia literary figures visiting Ireland, including Vance Palmer, Louis Esson, Esmonde Higgins and Miles Franklin and their encounters with the likes of George Russell (*AE*), W. B. Yeats, Maud Gonne and Darrell Figgis. These literary connections offer a way to analyse the play of overdetermined meanings around Ireland in interwar Australia. Through some careful archival research, Yan challenges the 'nationally bounded tele-

ologies of Irishness-within-Australianess and Australia-via-Ireland' that have characterised historiography in this area, instead highlighting 'the heterogeneity of transnational difference' and the modes of Irishness that can serve the performance of settler selfhood.

Kevin Molloy's essay 'Irishness as a Literary Condition: Australia and its Irish Reading and Writing Community' also delves into the archives to offer a broad context for the development of Irish-Australian literature in the colonial era, exploring the contested ways in which the Irish might represent themselves in the new worlds of both the colonies and the print medium. His article traces the foundations for literary representations of Irish Australia and finds evidence of the emergence of a small Irish community of readers from the mid-nineteenth century that sought out Irish writing. Print networks – publishers, booksellers, newspaper editors – ensured this community had access to Irish national literature and the increasingly influential literature of the Irish diaspora of the United States. Molloy is interested in understanding why this did not translate into a flourishing of representations of the Irish-Australian experience in the literary sphere in the twentieth century, in spite of their being a number of Irish booksellers with an entrepreneurial flair in the colonies, as well as writers of considerable promise. Molloy speculates that a nostalgia for elsewhere and the influence of the Irish Celtic Twilight may have contributed, as well as the lack of a secular liberal tradition in the face of an emerging Irish-Catholic subculture with all 'the constricting devotional trappings of the Irish condition'. For Molloy, Ruth Park's 1948 *The Harp in the South*, is an important exception to the rejection of the 'modernising impact of social realism' with its vibrant treatment of postwar Irish culture in Sydney.

While Molloy focuses on social realism as the genre for best representing the Irish-Australian condition, Val Noone looks more broadly for the Irish element in Australian writing. Noone has been working in the field of Irish-Australian studies for at least half a century and his article, 'Bibliographic Notes on Selected Irish-Australian writers', draws upon his vast collection of 'idiosyncratic files' to offer a survey of select Irish-Australian writing. Noone demonstrates both the 'ocean of Irish-Australian literature' that has been largely neglected in Australian literary studies, or elided under the title of 'Anglo-Celtic', and asserts the key role that Irish Australian literary forms played in the development of Australian literature. His article covers important anthologists and highlights the importance of Irish oral traditions that rely on diverse models of readership and community that are sometimes ignored in literary histories. As Noone notes, many Irish Australians in the colonial era were working men and women, frequently 'ignorant of book learning' and often dismissed as superstitious, pious or sentimental. Noone challenges these assumptions, while

also reminding us of the rich tradition of Irish-Australian writing in the Irish language.

Like Noone, Frances Devlin-Glass offers an invaluable bibliographic survey of the field. 'Defining the Field of Irish-Australian Literature: Challenges and Conundrums' ponders what might be at stake in addressing Irish-Australian literature as a discrete area of enquiry. She begins the challenging task of mapping what might be included, identifying Australian writers who are Irish by birth or descent, whether or not they draw on that heritage in their work. To this end, she trawls through both the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (1966-) and the online database *AusLit* (2002-), acknowledging the way an Irish background might be owned or disowned by a writer and why. Devlin-Glass includes a number of tables in which she presents and analyses this data, illustrating 'the richness of a lode which has not yet made a claim to separateness' and ponders how her preliminary research might shape a future field. Such a field will be 'contested, asymmetrical, inclusive, unfinished and never definitive, however, once made visible, will very likely complicate the *Anglo-Celt* collocation, revealing less homogeneity than has been assumed in mainstream and canonical versions of Australian literature'.

The second half of *The Uses of Australian Literature* turns from the general to the specific to explore how a sense of Irishness operates in particular genres, texts or writers, together offering important examples of the broad range of approaches and concerns that such perspectives enable. In 'Irish Republicanism and the Colonial Australian Bushranger Narrative', Ken Gelder and Rachael Weaver analyse representations of the colonial Irish-Australian bushranger and their investments in revolutionary republicanism. Examining a range of texts from the relatively obscure *Rebel Convicts* (1858) by R. H. Horne to Rosa Praed's *Outlaw and Lawmaker* (1893), via works by Ned Kelly and John Boyle O'Reilly, Gelder and Weaver reveal how the romanticisation of the outlaw operates in tension with the disruptive and subversive implications of republican politics. This can lead to both collisions and collusions with the settler colonial project. While tropes of Irish rebelliousness mutate into rugged ideals of Australian independence, the republican politics is typically refracted or repressed, such that when bushranging and Irish revolutionary politics coalesce, it almost always produces 'one of two outcomes for their central character type: de-radicalisation/rehabilitation, or death'.

Philip Mead's article 'Antipodal Ireland and Tasmanian Underworlds: John Mitchel and William Moore Ferrar' also engages with Australian literary representations of radical Irish politics turning to the unlikely geo-imaginary of the Tasmanian central highlands to explore the disruptive force of Irish national-

ism in the mid-nineteenth century. Young Irishman John Mitchel's well-known *Jail Journal* represented the highlands in romantic terms, as a sublime location removed from and above the violence and injustice of the British penal colony it overlooked. The Anglo-Irish immigrant writer William Moore Ferrar, who arrived in Van Diemen's Land as a free settler in 1843, reproduced this duality in his re-imagining of the Tasmanian landscape in his 1896 novel *Artabanzanus: The Demon of the Great Lake: An Allegorical Romance of Tasmania: Arranged from the Diary of the Late Oliver Ubertus*. In *Artabanzanus*, the duality plays out as a deceptive surface covering a hellish underworld and in this allegorical romance, Mead intriguingly finds not only anxieties about Irish Home Rule, but also about the racialised geoinformal of the antipodal colonial enterprise itself. As Mead demonstrates, for Ferrar, 'Home Rule represents the hellish threat of misrule, led by a diabolical figure who also embodies the memory of Van Diemen's Land's violent, dispossessive past'.

While Mead's article reveals how polar the politics of Irish-Australians could be, Patrick Buckridge's study of the genre of autobiography reveals a whole gamut of Irish Australian allegiances. 'Writing the Irish-Australian Self: Life-Writers and Irish Stereotypes, 1870-2000' sets out to challenge the 'conflict model' of Irish Australia, the separatist emphasis that Buckridge claims dominates Irish Australian historiography with its focus on the Irish as a refractory element in Australian settlement. He discerns a nuanced range of identifications in Irish Australian autobiography and memoir, in which Australians of Irish origins seek to assimilate into Australian society at least as much as to differentiate themselves from it. Buckridge examines a wide range of life-writing from early colonial times to the late twentieth century, including 'bushrangers, bishops, barmaids, poets, novelists, academics and politicians'. He finds that those of Irish origin variously deploy, reject, adapt or ignore the Irish aspect of their identity and that the relation between 'the two components of the Irish-Australian selves they narrate' may be 'virtually seamless or heavily conflicted or a work-in-progress'.

Anne Jamison's essay, 'Irish Protestant Colonialism and Educational Ideology in Australia: Hannah Boyd's *Letters on Education* (1848)' is more oblique in its challenge to conflictual models of identity formation. Jamison considers the genre of educational treatises with a particular focus on Hannah Villiers Boyd's influential *Letters on Education; Addressed to a Friend in the Bush of Australia*, a practical guide to home education for rural Australian mothers, published in 1848. Long considered an important cultural text on women's contributions to moral and educational reform in the colonial context, this essay expands these contexts, paying close attention to the text's engagement with Irish writers and political figures, such as Maria Edgeworth. As Jami-

son demonstrates, Boyd's tumultuous familial background and the wider socio-cultural Irish context modulates the text's approach to education in significant ways. In attempting to maintain the Irish Protestant social order, Jamison shows how Boyd appealed to the unlikely figure of Scheherazade as the embodiment of a form of female empowerment that does not disrupt the social order. Jamison argues that Boyd's 'incongruous alliance with the heroine of the Arabian Nights thus draws Scheherezade into the textual community of evangelical and Enlightenment thinkers in *Letters on Education*'. For Jamison, 'Irish Protestant social and cultural ideologies are not simply a backdrop to Boyd's text, but an influential force that determines Boyd's approach to education in nineteenth-century Australia'. Jamison's essay thus contributes to our broader project by revealing the significance of the Irish intersections in shaping the literary and educational ideologies underpinning *Letters on Education*.

Our final two essays deal with significant authors that expand our understanding of the complex uses of Irishness in Australia's ambivalent and unresolved settler colonial literary tradition. Mark Byron's 'Displaced Homelands in Gerald Murnane's *Inland*' locates the fiction of Murnane in the tradition of the Catholic novel, French, British, American and Irish-Australian. Byron explains how this counter-tradition deviates from the traditional *bildungsroman* or the liberal individualism of the English novel showing how the characters remain 'unknowable', yet whose 'memory and perception mimic the moments of grace and epiphany displaced from Catholic orthodoxy'. These considerations open into an extended reading of Murnane's later novel *Inland*, which begins in the great Eurasian steppe, connecting this landscape with the North American prairie and the grasslands of Melbourne County, rendered in ecological detail but also haunted by histories of dispossession and conquest. These 'apotropaic landscapes' displace and refract the narrator's memories of his upbringing and thereby, in a strikingly original manner, 'illuminate the meridians of the Irish-Australian Catholic diaspora'.

Ronan McDonald's article 'Vincent Buckley, Colonialism and the Problem of Irish-Australian Identity' concludes this special issue with an analysis of ideas of Irish-Australia in the work of the poet-critic Vincent Buckley (1925–88). Buckley was a prominent public intellectual, political activist, memoirist and Melbourne University professor, who reflected and theorised deeply on the condition of Irishness in Australia. He deploys Irishness in various ways to illuminate the perplexities of Australian settler identity, in which Irishness is both alien and, paradoxically, constitutive. Buckley spent extended periods in Ireland in later life, his 'source country' or 'imagination's home', often casting a cold and critical eye on social and cultural life there. McDonald looks at these perspectives, Irish-Australia and contemporary Ireland, comparatively, through

readings of Buckley's published and unpublished autobiographical works, critical writings and some of his later poetry. Buckley is drawn to Ireland's literary tradition, above all the poetry and example of W. B. Yeats. He intuits that he cannot replicate Yeats's invention of a national imaginary, unifying settler and native, nor can he access Aboriginal mythopoeic resources, which is one of the reasons he turns to the Irish tradition. Whether in Ireland or Australia, Buckley diagnoses a socio-cultural legacy of British colonialism: in Australia's case settler-colonial, in Ireland's post-colonial. This essay seeks to highlight some of the tensions and refracted aspects of Buckley's reflections in which Irish colonial victimhood resonates with Indigenous dispossession, but in which the Irish are also complicit in the settlement of Australia.

As this brief introduction demonstrates, there is no single approach to how one might explore the Irish element and its impacts in the Australian literary tradition. Indeed, not all our contributors would agree on how best to think through the place of Irishness in Australia. We do hope, however, that this introduction gives a sense of the stakes involved and the heterogeneous opportunities this research affords. We conceive of Irish-Australian literature as a site of possibility that might contribute both to Australian literary studies and diasporic Irish studies. We are grateful to all the authors for their thoughtful and generous contributions to this wider project and to the editors of *Australian Literary Studies*, Julieanne Lamond and Tanya Dalziell, for giving this project an intellectual home. We also acknowledge with appreciation the thoroughness, rigour and professionalism of the many anonymous peer reviewers. Thanks too to the journal's manager, Kathryne Ford, for her enthusiastic support, and to the copy-editing team at *ALS*. The seeds for this special issue were planted in a symposium held in Melbourne's Celtic Club in November 2019, entitled 'What is Irish-Australian Literature?'. We would like to thank the Australian Centre and the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne and the Celtic Club for hosting this fruitful event. We began planning this special issue just before Covid hit, and it is set to emerge as many of us in Australia are coming out of long lockdown. Commissioning and editing this special issue has been a journey of intellectual enrichment during a period of protracted confinement. We hope that it has an afterlife that prompts further reflection and research both in Australian and Irish studies and the role of diaspora and cultural encounter in the literary imagination.

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