Irish romanticism, 1800-1830

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Abstract:

Ireland entered the period of Romanticism scorched by what Quaker writer Mary Leadbeater called the ‘ruthless fires’ of the 1798 rebellion.[1] Reacting against the threat of Ireland separating from Britain and becoming a client state of France, William Pitt’s government moved quickly to draw the neighbouring island more securely to its side. Ireland was in future to send its electoral representatives (considerably reduced in number) to Westminster; the uneasy constitutional compromise that was the Dublin parliament was concluded. Other legal anomalies were cleared up also. The Copyright Act of 1709 was extended to Ireland, all but killing off an Irish publishing industry that was reliant on markets for cheap reprints in Ireland, Britain, the American colonies and the West Indies.[2] More profoundly, the Union created a professional literary culture characterised by movement between and across the two islands. A chapter such as this one therefore has to account for an ‘Irish’ literature that developed both outside and inside Ireland: the vast majority of the writers discussed here either lived in Britain or published there, and London and Edinburgh play as important a part in the shaping of Irish Romanticism as Dublin, Belfast or Cork. Moreover, the experience of travel and cultural bi-location was itself to become an object of interest in the literature of the period.

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