

The Rogue Narrative and Irish Fiction, 1660–1790 by Joe Lines
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Review by Jarlath Killeen, Trinity College Dublin

There was a time when Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*, first published in 1800, was considered the "first truly Irish novel." Back in 1988, when the critic James Cahalan made this claim, the words "first," "Irish," and "novel" may all have appeared relatively stable. Since then, however, Irish literary history has undergone a complete transformation, and along with the pluralization of concepts of national identity, our understanding of what actually constitutes a novel has been complicated and nuanced almost beyond recognition. The first appearance of that troublesome entity the "Irish novel," has been continually pushed back, and the scholarly work of uncovering and recovering fugitive material from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has been enormously successful. Rolf and Magda Loeber's *A Guide to Irish Fiction, 1650–1900* (2006) provided Irish Studies scholars with dozens of novels (and "novels") published in Ireland and by Irish writers long before Edgeworth's influential text, stretching back to 1651, with the appearance of Roger Boyle's *Parthenissa*.

In his new book, Joe Lines re-examines the emergence of the novel in Ireland from the mid-seventeenth century and argues for the importance of what he calls the "rogue narrative" to developments in fiction in that period, challenging previous dismissals of early crime fiction as lacking in originality and being of marginal interest to literary scholars. This study considers a range of fictional and semi-fictional texts and draws attention to an impressive variety of writers from the almost forgotten Richard Head (the author of *The English Rogue* [1665], "the first known work of fiction to be set in Ireland" [66]) and David Fitzgerald, to the marginally better-known William Chaigneau and Charles Johnston, all of whom drew on the rogue narrative and made an important contribution to developments in prose fiction right up to the crucial decade of the 1790s, when the "national tale came into its own" (176). Along the way, the reader is introduced to famous real-life highwaymen and criminals like James Freney, James MacLaine, and (an improbably Irishified) Jonathan Wild(e), who rub shoulders with the likes of Betty Ireland, Jack Connor, and Anthony Varnish. With Lines's contribution to the project of expanding ideas about early Irish fiction, it is clear that even more attention will need to be paid to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century material that blurs the boundaries between fiction, history, biography, and autobiography.

Lines makes the case that the image of Ireland as a zone of criminality (partly created by the 1641 rebellion and the blood-soaked paranoiac

pamphlets and histories generated by that catastrophe) made it a particularly fruitful place for the writing and publishing of criminal biographies and “ramble novels” involving criminal characters. The book considers the ways in which these rogue narratives both confirm and challenge stereotypes of the Irish as protean, slippery figures.

While Lines’s robust engagement with the over-hasty dismissal of these texts by previous scholars is certainly welcome, his insistence that they are far more ideologically complicated and ambiguous than a surface reading might suggest stretches credibility. Scholars and critics have, of course, to make original and challenging arguments about the material they tackle. However, there are times that Lines pushes this argument too far, frequently insisting that these rogue narratives can be read as critiques of anti-Irish stereotypes. There is a sense here that Lines is reading very much against the grain of these texts.

In a commendable desire to encourage his readers to take the risk and read some of these forgotten books, Lines grants aesthetic as well as ideological complexity where (perhaps) there isn’t any. Oddly, though, when it comes to the text that many scholars of eighteenth-century Irish writing will have read, William Chaigneau’s *The History of Jack Connor* (1752), Lines takes its claims to be morally didactic more seriously than can be sustained. In a long and often compelling chapter on “ramble fiction,” Lines argues that *Jack Connor* “draws an opposition between the Irish gentleman and figures such as the highwayman” (104). While Jack is lured into Jacobite criminality through meeting with versions of French libertinism, Lines insists that the protagonist is eventually rescued by the “values of education and virtue” imparted to him by the Church of Ireland gentlemen he encountered in his youth who provided models of Protestant masculinity that he should emulate (109).

However, it is surely significant that despite his thorough education in Irish Protestant patriotism by the likes of Lord Truegood, Jack repeatedly fails to live up to the ideals or follow the moral guidelines laid down by these paragons of moral reliability. Jack is consistent only in ignoring the many moral instructions he was taught as a boy and as a young man. If Jack can learn the right lessons at school and internalize the sense that he is always being watched, then he should be a better man for it when he grows up. Moreover, the novel of which he is a hero suggests strongly that if Jack’s native country can follow his example, it too can make significant strides toward adult authority. What Chaigneau’s plot actually shows, though, is that such instructional surveillance schemes always fail. Even at school, temptations intrude. In the deep of the night, Nanette, the attractive niece of his teacher, sneaks out of her own room to climb into Jack’s bed, and despite years of moral education he cannot resist her. By

the time Jack is discovered with Nanette, he has cultivated a habit of secrecy, and discerning the difference between Jack's performance of adult morality and his secret heart is tricky. He may be a great deal closer to the likes of Captain Freney than Chaigneau would have wanted, and the novel more like a chapbook than expected.

While the reader might disagree with some of the conclusions offered in this book, Lines is to be commended for bringing into focus such criminally neglected texts—many of them exciting, page-turning narratives populated by attractively subversive rogues—and for adding to the mixture of forms, genres, modes, and types that went into the emergence of the novel in Ireland.

Jarlath Killeen is a lecturer in Victorian Literature at the School of English, Trinity College Dublin.

Godwin and the Book: Imagining Media, 1783–1836

by J. Louise McCray

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Review by Nicholas Williams, Indiana University Bloomington

When placed beside the usual ways of describing William Godwin—father of philosophical anarchism, believer in the perfectibility of humanity, proponent of radical sincerity, developer of the novel of political paranoia—J. Louise McCray's goal of presenting him "in his overlooked capacity as media critic" (2) can initially seem discordant. While Godwin did set himself up as a bookseller and publisher with his second wife after the heady days of the 1790s, his primary concerns might seem distant from the media landscape of the time. McCray, though, taps into a deeper sense of media—as "mediation"—which describes not only the vehicles for conveying ideas (books, here, for the most part), but also a developing sense of the precarious journey of ideas, across space and time, from mind to mind, or from the physical world to any individual mind. For Godwin, and for others in his time and in the preceding decades, mediation involved feelings of both anxiety and hope. The hope lay in the powers of communication to lead to the truth, a hope that fuels Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) with its investments in independent thought and unfettered discussion. McCray cites Godwin's frequent invocation of the notion that "once apprehended, truth was irresistible to every mind" (11), an idea echoed in one of William Blake's contemporaneous Proverbs of Hell: "Truth can never be told so as to be understood, and not be believed" (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*). The anxiety, of course, springs from