Engendering Ireland

Engendering Ireland:

New Reflections on Modern History and Literature

Edited by

Rebecca Anne Barr,
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and Laura Kelly

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Rebecca Anne Barr
Sarah-Anne Buckley
Laura Kelly

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Rebecca Anne Barr is a lecturer in English at NUI Galway. Her research interests are in the literature of the long eighteenth century, masculinity, and twentieth-century poetry. Her current projects include a collection of essays on Ireland and masculinity (co-edited with Seán Brady and Jane McGaughey), and, with Justin Tonra (NUI Galway), an online edition of James Macpherson's *Ossian* poems.

Fiona Buckley is a lecturer in the Department of Government in University College, Cork (UCC). She has published widely on topics such as women's political representation in Ireland and women's executive leadership. With with Professor Yvonne Galligan of Queen's University, Belfast, Fiona guest-edited the 2013 special issue of *Irish Political Studies* (vol 28, no. 3), 'Politics and Gender on the Island of Ireland: The Quest for Political Agency'. Fiona is a founding member of the 5050 Group, a single-issue national advocacy group dedicated to achieving equal representation in Irish politics.

Sarah-Anne Buckley is a lecturer in history at NUI Galway. Her research interests include the history of childhood and child welfare, nineteenth- and twentieth-century Irish and British social history, gender history and welfare history. Her recent monograph *The Cruelty Man: Child Welfare, the NSPCC and the State in Ireland, 1889–1956* was published by Manchester University Press in November 2013. She has published chapters and articles on child neglect, incest, nurse children and children in care. Her current research is focused on youth and youth culture in twentieth-century Ireland.

Caitríona Clear lectures in modern European and Irish history, and oral history at NUI Galway. Her most recent book is entitled *Social Change and Everyday Life in Ireland, 1850–1922* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), and she is currently working on a book about Irish women's magazines in the 1950s and 1960s.

Evelyn Glynn is a visual artist and also works in the area of domestic violence. She completed MAs in fine art at Limerick School of Art & Design (2011) and community development at NUI Galway (1992). Her art practice explores hidden histories in relation to women's lives and experiences. Her research on the subject of Limerick's Good Shepherd Magdalene laundry is accessible through her website Breaking the Rule of Silence (www.magdalenelaundrylimerick.com), and includes a collation of oral histories, visual and written documentation, and her thesis 'Left holding the baby: remembering and forgetting the Magdalene laundry' (2009).

Laura Kelly is a lecturer in the history of health and medicine at the University of Strathclyde. She completed her PhD on the history of Irish women in medicine at the Department of History, NUI Galway in 2010, and was an Irish Research Council postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for the History of Medicine, University College, Dublin from 2012–14. She is the author of *Irish Women in Medicine, c.1880s–1920s: Origins, Experiences and Careers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012) and has published in *Women's History Review* and *Medical History* amongst other publications. Her current research focuses on medical student life and culture in Ireland *c.*1850–1950.

Gillian McClelland graduated from Queen's University, Belfast in 1995 with a BA (Hons) in social anthropology, and was awarded a PhD in history in 2000. Her PhD research on Fisherwick Presbyterian Working Women's Association, 1870–1914 centred on the social, political, religious and educational contribution to the culture of the city by this elite group of Belfast women. Her publications include *Pioneering Women: Riddel Hall and Queen's University Belfast* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2005) and a chapter entitled '*Speedwell* magazine: an insider view of Holywell Hospital, Antrim, 1959–1973' in Pauline M. Prior, ed., *Irish Asylums: Mental Health Care in Ireland from 1800* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2012). She teaches in the School of History and Anthropology, Queen's University, Belfast.

Claire McGing is a political geographer at the Department of Geography, National University of Ireland, Maynooth. Her research focuses mainly on the relationships between sex, gender and party politics on the island of Ireland. Recent publications include 'Towards a feminist electoral geography' in *Political Geography* (2014) and, with Fiona Buckley, Mack Mariani and Timothy White, 'Is local office a springboard for women to Dáil Éireann?' in the *Journal of Women, Politics and Polity* (forthcoming).

Mack Mariani is an associate professor of political science at Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio. He earned his BA at Canisius College (1991) and his MA (1992) and PhD (2006) at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University. He is co-author of *Diverging Parties* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003) and co-editor of the *Insider's Guide to Political Internships* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002). His work has been published in *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *Political Science Quarterly*, *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *Politics & Gender*, *Journal of Political Science Education*, *Comparative State Politics* and *Journal of Terrorism and Political Violence*.

Charlotte McIvor is a lecturer in drama and theatre studies, and the director of postgraduate studies in drama at NUI Galway. Her research specializations include intercultural performance at the intersection of migration, and critical race and gender studies. Her publications include *Staging Intercultural Ireland: Plays and Practitioner Perspectives* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2014) (co-edited with Matthew Spangler) and *Devised Performance in Irish Theatre: Histories and Contemporary Practice* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, forthcoming 2015) (co-edited with Siobhán O'Gorman). Her work has been published in *Modern Drama* and *Irish University Review* among other periodicals, and in multiple edited collections, including *'That Was Us': Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre and Performance* (ed. Fintan Walsh) (London: Oberon Books, 2013).

Mary Muldowney is the author of monographs, book chapters and journal articles based on oral history interviews, including *The Second World War and Irish Women. An Oral History* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007), which was based on her PhD from Trinity College, Dublin. She edited *100 Years Later: The Legacy of the 1913 Dublin Lockout* (Dublin: Seven Towers, 2013) with Ida Milne. She has also published widely on labour and working-class history. She is a founding member of the Oral History Network of Ireland, and founder and director of the Alternative Visions Oral History Group. Mary works as an adult-education consultant, specialising in the design and delivery of training courses for trade-union and community activists.

Declan O'Keeffe is head of communications in Clongowes Wood College, where he also teaches history, edits *The Clongownian* and is working on the Clongowes Bicentenary Project (1814–2014) as well as a history of the college. In 2009 Declan took a first-class honours in his MA

in contemporary Irish history (University College, Dublin) with a dissertation on Matthew Russell SJ and the *Irish Monthly*. He has continued to research the role and influence of Jesuit publications in Ireland and to examine the intellectual mission of the society and the process by which it was established, developed and propagated prior to the First World War. Declan's work has been published in *Studies* (summer 2010, autumn 2011, winter 2014/15), and he also contributed a chapter on Canon Patrick Sheehan and the *Irish Monthly* to Gabriel Doherty (ed.), *Revisiting Canon Sheehan of Doneraile, 1852–1913: Author, Activist, Priest* (Wells, Somerset: Smenos Press, 2014).

Eleanor O'Leary completed a BA (Hons) in media studies at the University of Ulster in 2002. She graduated from the University of Limerick in 2007 with a first-class-honours MA in history of the family. Eleanor was awarded a John and Pat Hume Scholarship in 2009 from An Foras Feasa at NUI Maynooth. She recently completed her PhD thesis at the Centre for Media Studies and An Foras Feasa at NUI Maynooth on the subject of 'Teenagers, popular culture and everyday life in 1950s Ireland'.

Laura Mernie Pomeroy is an Irish Research Council Government of Ireland postgraduate scholar in the School of English, UCC. She is researching and analysing the poetry and verse plays of Irish modernist poet Mary Devenport O'Neill (1879–1967), using Irish and international feminist literary history and criticism to illuminate the role played by a neglected but important woman writer in the culture and politics of the Irish Free State.

Katharina Walter is a lecturer at the Department of Translation Studies, Innsbruck University, Austria. She holds a PhD in English from NUI, Galway (2011), where she taught English and German, as well as German language and cultural studies from 2004 until 2012. She has published several articles about contemporary women's poetry and has co-edited (with Tina-Karen Pusse) *Precarious Parenthood: Doing Family in Literature and Film* (Berlin, Vienna and London: LIT Verlag, 2013), an interdisciplinary essay collection about representations of 'family' in literature and film. Her current research and teaching interests include Irish literature and its German translation, contemporary poetry, women's writing, gender Studies and migration studies.

Timothy J. White is a professor of political science at Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio. His study (with Fiona Buckley, Mack Mariani and Claire McGing) of the 2007 and 2011 elections, 'Is local office a springboard for women to Dáil Éireann?' is to be published in the *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*. In addition to his work on gender and politics, he recently edited *Lessons from the Northern Ireland Peace Process* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013) and published 'Materialism in Ireland and the loss of sovereignty: Ireland in the Celtic Tiger and after' in *Studi irlandesi*, 3 (2013).

FOREWORD

CAITRÍONA CLEAR

There are two kinds of academic conference. One is the narrowly themed, intensive, all-day workshop on a particular topic, with carefully invited speakers; another is the broadly themed jamboree, where universal acceptance of paper proposals necessitates multiple parallel sessions spread over several days. The first kind of conference is often elitist and boring for all but the specialist; the second, while it has a fighting chance of greater success, can become bogged down in session-hopping confusion and information overload. The conference upon which this volume is based struck the happiest of mediums between these two extremes. The quality, variety and coherence of the contributions spread over a number of days (avoiding parallel sessions) delivered a unified learning experience for all participants, and the lively discussions after every session spilled over into coffee and tea breaks (transcription of those discussions would fill another, very interesting volume). Scholars delivering their papers more often than not altered and adjusted what they had planned to say on the basis of what they had just heard. This is as it should be but, alas, so seldom is in academic conferences of any kind, where ego or anxiety often prevent any real engagement with the ideas of others. The word 'delightful' is sometimes seen as patronising, but it comes to mind most readily when describing those two days in the Moore Institute, NUI Galway, in 2012. And although her lecture does not appear in this book, Professor Myrtle Hill, author of a key textbook on Irish women's history and former director of the Women's Studies Centre at Queen's University, Belfast, gave a rousing and inspiring keynote address about her own academic journey to gender history and women's studies.

Every one of the articles in this volume adds to and challenges our knowledge of women and men in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Ireland in one way or another. Popular culture, poetry, drama, immigration, labour, education, institutions, emergent identities, sexuality and political performance jostle good-naturedly for space, but this is no free-for-all. The editors helpfully divide the contents into themes, but I discerned other connections: between inter-war Northern masculinity

(Barr) and recent immigrant masculinity (McIvor), for example, and between women as both producers (O'Keeffe) and consumers (O'Leary) of popular culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Looking at both the McClelland and Glynn articles prompted reflection on the outcomes of two different kinds of Irish female philanthropic activity. Pomeroy's exploration of the poetic consciousness of Mary Devenport O'Neill is an important precursor to Walter's discussion of the preoccupations of Paula Meehan and Mary O'Malley, among others. O'Leary's female consumers of the 1950s were or had been wage-earners at some stage, and maybe some of them were the female railway workers of the 1930s discussed by Muldowney. Women's electoral success in the last decade (White et al.) brings the book to one kind of conclusion, showing us where Irish women have 'ended up' as far as one very important kind of representation is concerned. Other readers will find other connections – nature as represented and understood by both Forrest Reid (Barr) and Devenport O'Neill, for example. It is sometimes said that there is no time in history more remote than the recent past. A late-nineteenth-century Jesuit actively encouraged and supported women (O'Keeffe), while twentieth-century labour leaders refused them equal pay (Muldowney). Forrest Reid's acceptance of his homosexuality in the 1920s and 1930s (Barr) seems more familiar to us today than the 1950s housewives delighted at getting a toaster for Christmas (O'Leary). Articles like this when presented alongside each other wake us up to the complex inter-relationships of gender and other forms of social identity in the past, and warn us against making lazy assumptions about anything.

The three editors belong to a generation of scholars that has come of age (academically speaking) in the certainty that gender is as valid a field of exploration as any other. But they do not take anything for granted. Specialists themselves in eighteenth-century literature (Barr), early-twentieth-century professional women (Kelly) and twentieth-century children and the state (Buckley), they know all about rigour and ruthlessness in the interrogation of primary sources. Excellent teachers all of them, they know the importance of good, clear communication. They bring these skills to bear upon the editing of this volume. All the articles in this book are accessible to a general audience, as academic works in the humanities should be. Yes, this book is a 'mixed bag', but in terms of the variety of the contents, not their quality. *Engendering Ireland* will be an important reference book for students of Irish history, literature and politics for a long time to come.

Notes

1 Myrtle Hill, *Women in Ireland: A Century of Change* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2003).

INTRODUCTION

REBECCA ANNE BARR,
SARAH-ANNE BUCKLEY AND LAURA KELLY

This collection of essays stems from a two-day conference held at the Moore Institute for Research in the Humanities and Social Studies, at NUI Galway in March 2012. The aim of the conference, which was funded by the Irish Research Council's 'New Ideas' scheme, was to bring together researchers working on gender in different fields in the humanities, and hopefully open new avenues for research. Recognising that there had not been a multidisciplinary conference on gender studies for several years in Ireland, the event was envisaged as a means of exploring new frameworks and approaches to gender studies whilst also galvanising current research by bringing together a mix of established scholars and early-career academics. The resulting conference programme was vibrant, with papers exploring a broad range of themes from the gendering of work, to parenting, women's movements, Irish culture, religion and literature. Scholars came from a variety of fields, including English literature, sociology and media studies. We believe, then, that this collection of essays gives a taste of the innovative and varied approaches to gender studies in Ireland. The collection is not confined to one discipline, nor does it interpret gender as a concept pertaining only to women's history and literature – for instance, Barr and McIvor's chapters highlight new research on masculinity in Irish literature and theatre. The structure of the book reflects its key three themes: the relevance of historical issues to contemporary debates on gender; gendered roles in the workplace; and gender and Irish literature, with chapters drawing on a range of methodologies from the humanities and social sciences.

Many of the essays in this volume are directly relevant to contemporary discourses on gender and national identity in Ireland, and this is particularly the case in the first section. From remembering the Magdalene laundries, to the 'new Irish' man, renewed focus on the Irish female poet, and women's agency as consumers, each of the chapters in this section deals with ongoing debates about Ireland past and present.

They address a wide range of contemporary societal issues, including gender politics, institutionalization, women and work, and changing gender roles. Most critically, they broaden our knowledge of gender and Irish history by examining new avenues and proposing areas for further investigation. The section begins with an examination of 1950s Ireland through the prism of popular culture. Eleanor O'Leary's contribution, 'Desperate housewives', employs textual analyses to shed new light on female participation in society, the effects of modernity on the home and rising female expectations in the post-war era. Through a focus on the ESB's campaign to promote electricity in the 1950s, O'Leary illustrates the ways in which the promotion of household goods, electricity and farm advances were often addressed at females and homemakers, and how they in turn were at the forefront of demanding change and modernization. She suggests that Irish women in the period desired participation in consumer culture, and that this desire not only affected their choices but was a contributing factor to the social changes that occurred in Ireland over the following years. The chapter highlights how, as in the US, UK and other Western societies, dissatisfaction with the 1950s had an effect on the development of social movements and subsequent change in the 1960s and 1970s. O'Leary acknowledges an agency hitherto ignored – that of women as consumers, who represented one of the dominant groups behind the demand for improved standards of living and modernization. An essential component of this desire was an awareness of living standards available elsewhere. Censorship notwithstanding, women gained knowledge on hygiene, health and well-being from a variety of international publications – including newspapers and women's magazines – and from emigrant experiences and the radio. Acknowledging the disadvantages for Irish women when looking to their UK and US counterparts, they demonstrated agency and drive in obtaining and achieving the modern lifestyle/items they desired.

In 'Magdalene matters', Evelyn Glynn examines issues in relation to 'memory politics' and bearing witness in the history of Ireland's Magdalene laundries. A hugely emotive and significant topic, Glynn's chapter is based on a three-year art project, *Breaking the Rule of Silence: Remembering and Forgetting the Magdalene Laundry in Limerick*. The project itself was concerned with bearing witness in the case of the laundries by examining oral histories and site-specific visual strategies as a means of evoking the past. The role of the cultural institution Limerick School of Art & Design (LSAD) in remembering and forgetting the laundries is explored, and Glynn provides us with an original, nuanced and thought-provoking piece. Glynn calls on academics, cultural institutions

and society in general to remember the lives of the women in the laundries, 'to *re-call* the victims of history'. The chapter adds to both the interdisciplinary nature of the volume and to the scant history of the laundries in Ireland. It also acts as a guide to other researchers of topics where silences must be filled without adequate access to records – for example, in the case of the industrial schools, mother-and-baby homes, and similar institutions where men, women and children were incarcerated. Throughout, Glynn demonstrates how institutions such as LSAD should be central to the narrative but are more marked by silence. Yet as a result of work by advocacy groups and oral histories, this silence is challenged, as it is by this chapter and the extended project.

Moving to poetry, the importance of women's maternal roles in the Irish cultural tradition is explored in Katharina Walter's contribution. Walter examines the application of the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone, or Ceres and Proserpine, in the poetry of a range of contemporary Irish women poets such as Eavan Boland, Mary O'Malley, Paula Meehan, Caitríona O'Reilly and Leanne O'Sullivan. Walter illustrates how the myth of Demeter and Persephone has been utilized by these poets in order to address controversial issues relating to the mother–daughter relationship, and she investigates the implication of the myth for contemporary women poets in Ireland and more generally for women in modern Irish society. This is particularly relevant in the Irish context, where such perceptions of the maternal role have been perpetuated in Irish cultural nationalism and Catholicism. Through an intricate analysis of selected poems, Walter argues that the myth has given Irish female poets a means of channelling anxieties and difficulties in the mother–daughter relationship resulting from a cultural image of motherhood that has 'dissociated the maternal-role function from other aspects of a woman's identity, in particular her sexual identity'. Walter illustrates how the utilization of the myth in these works also shows the difficulties mothers may have experienced in releasing their sexually mature daughters and thereby coming to terms with their own loss of youth. The poetry analysed in the chapter highlights the ways in which Irish women continue to struggle with the legacies of cultural traditions.

Shifting focus from contemporary Irish poetry to theatre, Charlotte McIvor's chapter explores changing representations of masculinity, race, ethnicity and interculturalism in Irish theatre in a fantastic range of plays from 1994 to 2012. Contrasting neatly with Walter's contribution, which examines the persistence of gendered cultural traditions in contemporary Irish poetry, McIvor's chapter analyses how modern Irish theatre reflects important changes in Irish society in the Celtic Tiger era and beyond.

Through an exploration of plays by Donal O'Kelly, Eithne McGuinness, Roddy Doyle, Ken Harmon, Ronan Noone, Bisi Adigun, Paul Kennedy, Owen Kennedy and Polish Theatre Ireland's 2012 production of Radosław Paczocha's *Delta Phase*, McIvor examines how Irish playwrights have interpreted and engaged with important societal concerns emerging in this era, including increased social diversity as well as rising discrimination and racism. She demonstrates how male migrant characters in the plays compete for literal space and in several instances come into direct confrontation with Irish-born males, thereby reflecting tensions within Irish society. Unsurprisingly, despite there being equal or higher numbers of women migrants, male characters are over-represented in these plays, reflecting 'larger institutional issues in the Irish theatre where women's work, particularly as playwrights, is frequently less visible'. However, McIvor concludes that in the last two years, female migrant characters have been given a greater role in plays on the Irish stage, which suggests that the experience of being a female migrant or a minority ethnic member of Irish society is beginning to be recognized as an important facet in the development of Irish aesthetic interculturalism.

The next section interrogates the critical theme of gender in the workplace, an issue of significant contemporary concern. For example, a European Commission conference on gender equality in the workplace, held in Dublin in 2013, highlighted the continuing gender pay gap, the reconciliation of work and family life, and the issue of parental and maternity leave.[1] For instance, Irish women earn 13.9 per cent less than men, and though this is above the EU average (16.2 per cent), Ireland is still behind nine of the twenty-seven EU countries.[2] Irish women are also statistically inadequately represented in business, government and local and regional authorities.[3] The three chapters in this section illuminate the longer history of these issues, exploring the theme over a 150-year period from the 1850s to the 2000s. Gillian McClelland's chapter 'Margaret Byers (1832–1912) and women's work for women' builds on our understanding of women in higher education and the contribution of

[1] Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, *Gender Equality Programme of the Seventh Irish Presidency of the European Union Report* (Gender Equality Division, Department of Justice and Equality, 2013).

[2] Figures released by the European Commission to coincide with Equal Pay Day, 2013, cited on 'Gender pay gap', http://genderequality.ie/en/GE/Pages/GenderPayGap (accessed 10 July 2014).

[3] 'The EU and Irish women', European Commission website, http://ec.europa.eu/ireland/ireland_in_the_eu/impact_of_eu_on_irish_women/index_en.ht (accessed 10 July 2014).

Northern Irish middle-class women to philanthropy and the missionary movement in the nineteenth century. McClelland explores how women were recruited into public life through Byers' campaign within the Belfast Ladies' Collegiate School (later, Victoria College) and her congregation, thus legitimising middle-class women's entry into the professions and public life. Moreover, McClelland provides an insight into the development of the philosophical, political and cultural attitudes held by the middle-class Presbyterian elite in Ulster on the eve of the Home Rule crisis. Byers also campaigned for women to be given the municipal and national vote, and, through her role as principal of Victoria College, she helped to inspire and influence the first generation of enfranchised women. This study of Byers highlights the multitude of roles that middle-class women were adopting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Although Byers is mainly remembered for her role in opening up secondary and higher education to women, philanthropy was a crucial aspect of her work. Her membership of an elite Belfast Presbyterian congregation provided her with powerful male allies, while she was also a founding member of its Working Women's Association of like-minded, philanthropic, middle-class women. In Victoria College, Byers created an ethos of duty amongst her pupils to serve God and their 'less fortunate sisters'. At home this would be achieved through philanthropic work in orphanages, industrial schools, temperance associations and with ex-prisoners and 'fallen women', whilst abroad Byers was a proponent of missionary work in the Zenana missions.

Moving into the inter-war period, Mary Muldowney's chapter investigates the theme of gendered roles in the workplace in her exploration of the treatment of women workers in the Irish railway industry with regard to pension provision. The railways were an important source of employment in the 1930s in Ireland, but little attention has yet been paid to the experiences of female workers in this sphere of employment. Although women workers were in the minority in this industry, Muldowney's examination of the discussions surrounding pension provision for women workers illuminates significant inequalities regarding women's work whilst also highlighting the persistence of Victorian attitudes regarding suitable roles for women. The chapter provides a fresh view of the gendered thinking that underpinned the framing of such legislation as the Conditions of Employment Act, 1936 and the introduction of non-contributory pensions for widows. Muldowney argues that the terms and conditions of female workers' employment were fundamentally shaped by assumptions about women's social roles that were underpinned by class and gender. Irish social policy, in common with that in the US and Britain,

was based on the perception that female workers were weaker and in need of greater regulatory protection than their male counterparts. At the same time, women workers were paid less for the same work, and were expected to leave paid employment at an early age and be provided for by their husbands. Fundamentally, the discussions regarding pension provision for women workers of the Great Southern Railway were underpinned by an assumption that women's social role centred on marriage and the domestic sphere.

Shifting the focus to the noughties, White, Buckley, McGing and Mariani in their chapter address a number of issues pertinent to female political participation, most prominently the holding of local office. They highlight the shocking fact that women's participation in the Dáil has never moved above sixteen per cent since the foundation of the Irish Free State, distinguishing Ireland negatively in international comparisons. The chapter utilizes the lens of political localism to explain why the percentage of women in Parliament has remained low over the past two decades, focusing particularly on the period from 2007 to 2013. The chapter addresses the reasons behind the lack of female representation, the importance of female participation in local politics, and the future for women's representation in Irish politics. The introduction of gender quotas in 2012 is considered a significant moment even though it is acknowledged to be only one of a myriad of reforms required to attract women to politics and to retain them. In the context of new perspectives on gender, it observes an historic phenomenon in a recent context, demonstrating that female participation has been hampered by a multitude of historic factors, many of which are yet to change. The 2014 local elections in Ireland are testament to this unchanging issue. Although these elections saw a marked improvement in terms of female representation in Irish politics, with 194 successful female candidates elected (20.6 per cent of the total elected) in contrast with 147 in 2009, women councillors still only account for 20 per cent of local councillors. This is below the EU average of 32 per cent for female representation in local politics.[4]

The final section of the collection examines the theme of gender in Irish literature. Declan O'Keeffe's essay on Matthew Russell's promotion of female writers in the literary journal *Irish Monthly* grants an insight into the ways in which late Victorian periodical culture promoted women's literary endeavours in Ireland. The significance of Irish literature that directly preceded the Irish Literary Revival is only now being fully understood, and O'Keeffe's work uncovers the level of women writers'

[4] Adrian Kavanagh, Fiona Buckley and Claire McGing, 'Women still account for just one in five local councillors', *Irish Examiner*, 30 May 2014.

participation in cultural production at the turn of the century. The polite, moral literary performances that *Irish Monthly* strove to disseminate testified to Catholic political aspirations within the Union and represented an attempt to counter anti-Irish representations in the English media. Russell's spearheading of women writers included many now recognized as worthy of study in their own right. By contextualising writers such as Eva Gore-Booth, Dora Sigerson and others within a wider network of women publishing in Ireland, this essay draws attention to the dominant narrative of women's writing in Ireland. While O'Keeffe's essay illuminates the formative influence of Russell and the ecumenical range of his periodical, it also draws attention to the ongoing necessity of recuperating the periodical culture of the time in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of the actual conditions of women's work. Drawing on a range of resources, including material from the Irish Jesuit Archive, O'Keeffe's essay shows how Russell supported the literary work of many women writers. But it also reminds us of how such encouragement was predicated on women writers conforming to conservative political and religious ideals. However, as Frances Wynn's correspondence with Russell suggests, women writers could use friendship ties to promote their work. O'Keeffe's essay reminds us of the significance of periodical culture and collaborative networks as well as of rediscovering neglected writers in order to revise our understanding of gender's role in literature.

Similarly, Laura Pomeroy's essay reconsiders the landscape poetry of Mary Devenport O'Neill (1879–1967) as part of a reassessment of this neglected woman writer. Despite Devenport's acclaim during her own lifetime, Pomeroy notes her exclusion from literary histories of early twentieth-century Irish poetry. Devenport, whose work appeared in magazines throughout the 1930s and 1940s, published only one collected volume, yet she was at the heart of the intellectual culture of Dublin in the early years of the Free State. Whilst acknowledging Devenport's interest in themes of the Celtic Revival, Pomeroy traces the ways in which her representations of nature disrupt gender binaries, and illuminate latent tensions of class and power. Noting the poet's artistic training in rendering vegetal and botanic subjects, Pomeroy's chapter analyses Devenport's poetry through an 'ecofeminist' lens, thereby expanding the limited critical discourse that has until recently framed discussions of her work. Providing a sample of work, Pomeroy argues that Devenport's representations of landscape and nature may use the traditional topoi of the Celtic Revival but that her modernist treatment of these subjects 'unravels relationships between dominance and subservience' otherwise 'obscured within

apparently innocuous gender constructions'. By contrasting Devenport's work with that of Yeats, Pomeroy demonstrates the disembodied masculinism of his work in contrast with the female poet's affirmation of temporal cycles and embodiment. Pomeroy shows how Devenport's work resists relegating women to the status of object by asserting a conception of nature as a shared, human materiality. Rather than making 'woman' the 'passive and voiceless embodiment of nature' or nation, Pomeroy reads Devenport's work as asserting a subversive individuality that carves out a radically modern voice.

In the final essay of the collection, it is sexuality rather than gender that disrupts categories of national literature. In her study of Northern Irish author Forrest Reid, Rebecca Anne Barr notes the destabilising effects of queer identity upon the representation of landscape. Reid's Ulster Protestant identity as well as his pederastic propensities has rendered him marginal in accounts of Irish literature, despite his spearheading the early work of W.B. Yeats. Barr argues that Reid's 'queer Ulster pastoral' is part of a deliberate evasion of the dominant categories of national, religious and sexual identities in early twentieth-century Ireland. Despite friendships with figures associated with Ireland's Literary Revival, such as Æ and Pádraic Colum, and with English novelist E.M. Forster, Reid's life writing testifies to a kind of internal artistic exile. Tracing Reid's representation of Oscar Wilde and his adoption of 'Greek' beauty in his writing, Barr situates Reid as standing apart from the increasingly martial and militarist models of Ulster masculinity. Writing during the turbulence of partition and the Second World War, Reid's descriptions of an idealized Ulster landscape not merely encode homosexual desires but also articulate a personal sense of difference, as Reid modulates the English tradition of pastoral novel exemplified by Forster's *Maurice* (1971) with his commitment to a specifically Irish, Yeatsian nature. While Forster's nature can provide a utopian asylum, Reid is more tentative and melancholy in his pastoral – its status as aesthetic construct is achieved against the atavistic resurgence of Irish history. Reconsidering the distinctively *Irish* element in Reid's works uncovers a more complex and contested sense of national and literary identity in Ulster: the need to attend to influences other than the political or national in order to recover the nuances of literary history.

This collection showcases cutting-edge research from early-career scholars while also indicating new avenues and directions for future research. While each of these ten chapters offers a fresh perspective on familiar themes in Irish gender studies, they also illustrate how the field remains a rich area of study with much scope for future research.

Significantly, each of these chapters illustrates the importance and relevance of gender studies to contemporary debates in Irish society.

I.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES, HISTORICAL DEBATES

CHAPTER ONE

DESPERATE HOUSEWIVES: SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE DESIRE FOR MODERN LIFESTYLES IN 1950S IRELAND

ELEANOR O'LEARY

Ireland in the 1950s has consistently been associated with unrelenting economic depression, high levels of emigration and cultural isolation. As a result, the 1950s have been positioned in the nation's cultural memory as the darkest period of the twentieth century. Re-examining the period through the prism of popular culture allows for some revision of these perceptions by illuminating some of the spaces alongside the grand narratives of political culture and economic history with the qualities of everyday life and lived experience. Such critiques of everyday life also create links and contexts for the examination of wider social issues; for instance, as this study suggests, there are clear correlations between Irish women's desires for more modern, affluent lifestyles and with the dynamics of emigration, social development and the chronically low marriage rate in mid-twentieth-century Ireland. A wide range of published volumes are available that consider the socio-economic situation in Ireland in the middle of the twentieth century.[1] Without negating or denying some

[1] For further reading on this topic, consult works by the following authors: on politics: Gabriel Doherty and Dermot Keogh, eds, *De Valera's Irelands* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2003); Brian Girvin and Garry Murphy, eds, *The Lemass Era: Politics and Society in the Ireland of Seán Lemass* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2005); on economics and social change: J.J. Lee, ed., *Ireland 1945–70* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1979); Liam Kennedy, *The Modern Industrialisation of Ireland, 1940–1988* (Dublin: Economic and Social History Society of Ireland, 1989); Kieran A. Kennedy, ed., *From Famine to Feast: Economic and Social Change in Ireland, 1847–1997* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1998); Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland* (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997); Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic*

of the harsh realities of the decade or nullifying previous representations of its sociocultural difficulties, space remains to explore other aspects of the post-war period in Ireland that may lead to a more complete historiography of the 1950s. This chapter draws together aspects of popular and material culture, and relates some of the particular discourses circulating around domestic technologies to wider social issues. Textual-analysis methods are utilized to examine the ways in which the promotion of household goods, electricity and farm advances were often addressed to females and homemakers. The evidence presented in this chapter strongly suggests that Irish women in the 1950s desired to participate in consumer culture and attain the trappings of modern urban lifestyles. It is furthermore argued that this desire was a contributing factor to social change in mid-twentieth-century Ireland.

On the home front

National optimism early in the decade that a post-war economic boom was imminent had dramatically waned by the mid-1950s when no improvement in living standards had arrived and new austerity budgets were introduced. An extensive emergency import duty that levied up to sixty per cent on some goods was introduced by Minister Gerald Sweetman in March 1956 (Giblin Kennedy and McHugh 1988, 61). Items that were affected by the new levy included motor cars, personal clothing, citrus fruits, periodicals, newspapers and many household electrical

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Church (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998); Brian Fallon, *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture 1930–1960* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1999); Henry Patterson, *Ireland Since 1939* (New York: Penguin, 2002); Tom Garvin, *Preventing the Future: Why was Ireland Poor for so Long?* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 2004); Dermot Keogh, Finbarr O'Shea and Carmel Quinlan, eds, *Ireland in the 1950s: The Lost Decade* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2004); Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900–2000* (London: Profile Books, 2004); Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (London: Profile Books, 2009); Rosemary Cullen Owens, *A Social History of Women in Ireland 1870-1970* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 2005); on emigration and demography: Pauric Travers, 'Emigration and gender: the case of Ireland, 1922–1960', in Mary O'Dowd and Sabine Wichert, eds. *Chattel, Servant or Citizen: Women's Status in Church, State and Society* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queens University Belfast, 1995); Enda Delaney, *Demography, State and Society: Irish Migration to Britain 1921–1971* (Quebec: Liverpool University Press, 2000); Delaney, *Irish Emigration Since 1921* (Dublin: Economic and Social History Society of Ireland, 2002).

goods.[2] Rising levels of individual and collective dissatisfaction at both the cost and standard of living began to undermine national consensus. Brian Fallon argues that a 'new restless, modernising spirit' could be found behind the ostensible status-quo of 1950s Ireland (Fallon 2004, 46). At the centre of much of this dissatisfaction was an awareness of the greater affluence and higher standards of living available elsewhere. Information on wages, work practices and social opportunities abroad was communicated by returned migrants and through other social and kinship networks to the families, friends and communities who remained in Ireland (Delaney 2004, 84). Popular culture provided another important source of information on the modern lifestyles and levels of comfort available in other places and nations. As such, this chapter will utilize media and popular-culture texts to critique female responses to living conditions in Ireland in the 1950s, and to highlight their contribution to social change through their desire for modern lifestyles and resistance to traditional employment and marriage patterns.

The documentary series *Twentieth Century*, produced by CBS in the 1950s and 1960s, focused for one episode on Ireland with a programme entitled 'The tear and the smile' (Ellis and McLane 2005, 185). The documentary set out to examine social and cultural change in Ireland as the 1950s drew to a close. As part of the programme, the women's editor of the *Irish Times*, Barbara Dickenson, was interviewed by the presenter Walter Cronkite. He asked her to comment on whether Ireland remained predominately a man's country.[3] In reply, she stated:

> I don't suppose this country is any more a man's country than yours is a woman's country. Irish women do envy their American counterparts for their washing machines, spin dryers, constant hot water, kitchens, bathrooms – they are coming here but you have to have money. More women on a lower income in the States have those things. (ibid.)

This answer reveals a strong awareness of the availability of modern appliances and technologies. It also relates the desire of Irish women to gain access to these new devices and their frustration at being prevented from doing so because of a lack of finance. Her belief that these types of advancements were freely available to women on lower incomes in the US was almost certainly garnered from popular-culture documents. Helen Byrne's ethnographic study of female film audiences in the 1940s and 1950s in Waterford city reveals that the cinema was an important site for the circulation of consumer discourses, and that it raised the material

[2] *Irish Times*, 14 Mar. 1956.
[3] *The Tear and the Smile (1961), Irish Film Archives, AA450.*