# Introduction

*Anna Pilz and Whitney Standlee*

In her foreword to this volume, Lia Mills recollects her own experiences in the 1990s of finding an Irish women's literary tradition where she once believed none existed and highlights the great excitement she felt – both as an academic and as an Irish female author – at this discovery. That the process of unearthing and acknowledging this neglected and imperative aspect of Ireland's literary landscape continues to be a work in progress three decades later is evidenced most visibly in prevailing popular conceptions of Irish literature. There is, for instance, a well-known poster of Irish writers that showcases, against a sepia background, the names, brief biographies, and photographs of twelve authors who are seen to stand as testament to the quality of Irish literature: J. M. Synge, Flann O'Brien, Oliver Goldsmith, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Beckett, W. B. Yeats, Brendan Behan, Oscar Wilde, Patrick Kavanagh, James Joyce, Sean O'Casey, and George Bernard Shaw. This specifically gendered accumulation of the country's literati is not altogether surprising: Irish writing has often been conceived in the popular imagination and conceptualised in academic scholarship as a male phenomenon. Although academic interest in redressing the gendered imbalance in literary history has gained conspicuous pace since the 1990s, Irish literary studies for many years lagged well behind its American and English counterparts in challenging such preconceptions.[1]

For the more general Irish (and international) reading public, the process of supplanting the image of an all-male literary contingent has been even slower. The relative obscurity of Irish literary women came prominently to the fore in the spring of 2015, when Martin Doyle, Assistant Literary Editor of the *Irish Times*, embarked on a project to put 'Irish women writers back in the picture'.[2] In the process, Doyle solicited articles from forty Irish writers, critics, and academics, collated the responses, and culminated the project by unveiling an alternative, female-only version of the poster. Framed

as 'a pastiche or palimpsest of the original to celebrate Ireland's long, rich and diverse tradition of woman writers', it was described as representing a 'sample of the best female Irish writers in the English language'. Speaking of the finished work, Doyle admitted that the results were purposefully biased 'towards the past in order to chart a tradition dating back centuries, not decades'.[3] In concept, therefore, this project offered a confrontational counter-narrative to what had been conceived, portrayed, and promoted as *the* Irish literary tradition.

Doyle's claim that the sample chosen substantiated the long history of women's writing is, however, open to question. In format, the 2015 version of the poster simply replaced the twelve original images with those of a group of females whose names and works were just as (or *almost* as) familiar as the men who preceded them: Maria Edgeworth, Lady Augusta Gregory, Edith Somerville and Violet Martin ('Martin Ross'), Kate O'Brien, Elizabeth Bowen, Molly Keane, Mary Lavin, Maeve Brennan, Edna O'Brien, Jennifer Johnston, Eavan Boland, and Anne Enright (see Fig. 0.1). Of these, the work of only four – Edgeworth, Gregory, Somerville, and Ross – predates the twentieth century, with three-quarters of the women represented having begun their careers in or after the late 1920s.[4] Instead of evidencing a long and varied tradition of women's writing, the *Irish Times* poster, like its predecessor, offered the reading public a selection of writers as noteworthy for the gaps in Irish literary history it revealed as the spaces it filled.

This volume is a project to fill in at least some of those gaps; to recognise and acknowledge that there have been far more women writers, with far more diverse identities, than popular manifestations of literary history have acknowledged. This book focuses on the political engagement, both direct and oblique, of texts written by Irish women during the pivotal historical period between 1878 and 1922. Over the course of these decades, Irish women entered the literary marketplace in conspicuously large numbers, a development in publishing that has tended to elude the academic gaze but did not escape the notice of a number of high-profile contemporary commentators. On being introduced to the Irish writer Hannah Lynch in the mid-1880s by his mother Speranza (herself a poet), for example, Oscar Wilde declared that 'young Irish geniuses' such as her were 'as plentiful as blackberries' at that time.[5] This abundance was made more publicly apparent in 1891, when the *Daily Graphic* remarked upon the degree to which Irish women were asserting their influence on the publishing industry: Irish fiction was, just then, 'practically in the hands of Irish women', the paper suggested.[6]

Existing academic studies tend to confirm these types of assessments, more often collaterally than overtly. Of the approximately 700 writers listed in Stephen J. Brown's *Ireland in Fiction* (1916), at least 200 are women,


Figure 0.1 Irish Writers Poster, *Irish Times* (7 March 2015).

the vast majority of whom authored texts in the four decades immediately prior to the volume's publication.[7] More recently, both John Wilson Foster and James H. Murphy, in their seminal studies of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Irish literature, have brought renewed attention to the contributions made by women writers to the literary landscape of the era. Murphy notes that of the 150 novels on which his study is based, male and female authors are represented in almost equal numbers and draws explicit attention to the 'prominence of women novelists, somewhat against the general trend which tended to favour men'.[8] Even a purposefully brief study that focuses primarily on canonical works of literature such as A. Norman Jeffares' *Pocket History of Irish Writers* (1997) – all of 170 pages – makes space for no fewer than thirty-one women writers, more than a third of whom were publishing their texts between the years 1878 and 1922. Of the twelve women of that period to whom Jeffares refers, ten – Katharine Tynan, Jane Barlow, Alice Milligan, Ethna Carbery, Dora Sigerson Shorter, Susan Mitchell, Eva Gore-Booth, Nora Hopper, Alice Furlong, and Mary Devenport-O'Neill – were involved in literary revivalism, all of them names that would have been intimately familiar to many readers in their day.

The sheer number of women who might have been included in these pages means that this is not – could not possibly be – a comprehensive volume. The following chapters, grounded in archival research and the exploration of periodical culture, offer compelling indications of the reasons for the proliferation of Irish women writers between the years 1878 and 1922. Each demonstrates that these authors had reasons to write which were not always, or not *only*, economic.

The period under investigation begins in the year in which the Intermediate Education Act was passed (1878). The social reforms set in motion by this Act (and later developments that extended them up to and including, of course, universal suffrage) allowed women to emerge in the public sphere on an unprecedented scale. This was a momentous period marked by extremes of debate and conflict around issues as varied as the University Question, the Woman Question, suffragism, the Land War, the Boer War, Revivalism, Parnellism, Home Rule, the Ulster Covenant, Orangeism, the temperance movement, the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, the First World War, the Easter Rising of 1916, the Anglo-Irish War of 1919–21, Partition and the formation of both the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland in 1921, and the advent of the Civil War in 1922. To suggest that these were the only political issues that mattered, though, is to minimise the imaginative achievements of women during these decades.

The contributors to this volume consider the ways in which Irish women, officially disenfranchised through much of the era, felt inclined

and at liberty to exercise their political influence through unofficial channels.[9] The chapters investigate their responses to, expressions of, and dialogue with a contemporary politics that included the topics of education, cosmopolitanism, language, Empire, economics, philanthropy, socialism, the marriage 'market', the publishing industry, readership(s), the commercial market, and employment. What emerges is an intricate study of how women writers used their work to advance their own private and public political concerns through astute manoeuvrings both in the expanding publishing industry and against the partisan expectations of an ever-growing readership.

## An Irish women of letters' banquet and a toast to the King

The complexity of the political landscape negotiated by women writers can be glimpsed in turn-of-the-twentieth-century alternatives to the modern *Irish Times* women writers' poster. An illustration published in the *Irish Independent* on 3 May 1910 affords, for instance, one intriguing correlative. Taking up most of a page in that day's paper was a composite of eleven photographs of some of the most famous Irish writers of the era, including Alice Stopford Green, Katherine Cecil Thurston, Alicia Adelaide Needham, Lady Gilbert (Rosa Mulholland), Edith Somerville, 'Martin Ross', Hon. Georgina O'Brien, Dr Annie Patterson, Mrs Power O'Donoghue, L. T. Meade, and Mary Costelloe (see Fig. 0.2).[10] The article that accompanied these pictures, headlined 'Lights of Literature', informed readers of a banquet, hosted by the Corinthian Club, which was about to be held at Dublin's Gresham Hotel in celebration of Irish women of letters.

Detailed reports about the event were publicised widely in leading newspapers in the days that followed, and these often drew attention to those women who had been invited but failed to attend. The *Irish Independent* was among the papers which noted that an 'interesting souvenir of the function was distributed' – one that contained photographs and autographs of those who 'found it impossible to be present'. Among their number were Katharine Tynan, L. T. Meade, Eva Gore-Booth, and Lady Gregory, all of them among the most well-known Irish writers of either sex at that time.[11] The absence of so large and high-profile a contingent is curious, and we might conjecture that those who stayed away did so due to some precognition or foreknowledge of the political factionalism that came to mark the event. Whatever the reasons, press reports suggest it turned out to be a politically divisive affair.

Alice Stopford Green, a historian and nationalist, delivered the evening's opening keynote on the subject of historical impartiality by querying


Figure 0.2 'Lights of Literature', *Irish Independent* (3 May 1910).

the very possibility of either political neutrality or parity in relation to Ireland: 'I suppose we may accept it that the words partial and impartial in Irish affairs have a recognised technical meaning. Impartial means a strong bias to Imperial and English interests; partial signifies a special regard for the special interests of Ireland (laughter).' Discussing negative English attitudes towards every race and class in Ireland, she moved on to suggest that the Irish *en masse* had been constructed by their British rulers as a people incapable of governing themselves and touched on a variety of political arguments – including the promotion of cosmopolitan over nationalist interests, which she believed had served to divert the attention of the Irish people away from the welfare of their country. Any Empire desiring loyal citizens, she concluded, must allow its peoples to come into the fold of imperialism willingly: 'with the spirit of freemen, and bring their language [and history] with them'.[12] The tenor of these opening remarks is broadly nationalist but also ameliorative, and, combined with the touch of humour that evidently inflected the speech, Stopford Green's rhetorical strategies suggest she was promoting a broader and more inclusive version of politics to and for Ireland than was allowed for by prevailing nationalist and unionist binaries.

The setting and the predispositions of the hosting organisation, however, provided a much narrower political framework. The presence of the Lord Chief Justice and the Lord Lieutenant, both of whom gave the concluding speeches on the night, indicated official British government sanction (at least of the Gladstonian Liberal variety) of the event. The Lord Chief Justice's speech was particularly telling in terms of evoking a sense of the Corinthians' political purpose in hosting the banquet: the (apparently nationalist) 'demon of political and sectarian dissension', he stated, would find 'no foothold' in the club. The evening closed with a toast to the King, and thus was punctuated on a note of loyalist bias that appears, with hindsight, to have been designed to defuse any hint of anti-loyalist sentiment (such as Stopford Green's) which might have arisen over the course of the evening.[13]

A correspondent writing in the *Freeman's Journal* noted as much by suggesting that 'for gatherings such as that of the Corinthian Club an Irish Nationalist is supposed to be non-existent, just as in former times a Catholic had no existence in the eyes of the English law'.[14] This commentator speculated that a propagandist ploy was at work in the staging and running of the Irish women writers' banquet: that, by promoting political harmony in a discordant setting, the Corinthians and the government officials who represented them were attempting to occlude the complexity of political divisions among those present. The event and the reporting on it affords us a microcosmic view of the fraught political moment into

which Irish women writers were thrust, and indicates that – both on this particular evening and in their careers more broadly – they were expected to contend with and confront a political landscape which left little room for political interests outside of or in between nationalism and unionism.

## Advancing the cause of liberty

During the period under consideration, Irish women made only gradual (and sometimes short-lived) gains in their access to official political channels with their admission to the local government franchise and the association of some female political associations (such as the Primrose League, the Women's Liberal Federation, and the Ladies' Land League) with mainstream parties from the 1880s and 1890s.[15] Yet women's political interests regularly transcended factionalist politics. To fully comprehend the richness and complexity of women's texts, therefore, a more wide-ranging definition of the term 'politics' is required: one that abandons the tendency to prioritise nationalist or unionist agendas to include a more Aristotelian conception of politics that engages in the process of 'obtaining the ends of civil society as perfectly as possible'.[16]

The subtitle of this volume paraphrases a passage from the constitution of the nationalist women's organisation Cumann na mBan (The Irishwomen's Council) which professes its mission to 'advance the cause of Irish liberty'. The term 'Irish' has been deliberately omitted from our subtitle as a signal of intent to liberate the idea of freedom from the concept of Irish nationhood and, in the process, to open up political agendas that include educational reform, the family, commercialism, language, religion, suffrage, and cosmopolitanism.[17] As Heidi Hansson has noted, 'Women writers have been censured as being uncommitted to the important questions of the day, while in fact they were engaged with creating a different literary-political scene that included women's private experience.'[18] As women, these writers were distanced from the official political process and the cronyism that often accompanied it and were, as a result, better able to recognise, and more at liberty to highlight, the difficulties of straightforward definitions or easy divisions between Irish people and the various factions with which they were aligned. When Katharine Tynan portrayed one of her characters overhearing the cries of 'Votes for Women and Loose Shoes!' on a London street, for example, she pointed to both the suffrage and rational dress movements in which she herself was interested.[19] While the political significance of the campaign for women's suffrage both then and since has been widely acknowledged, the similarly controversial rational dress movement has been all but forgotten in the intervening

years. Yet it was founded on the belief that women's constricted clothing not only reflected but intensified their social and professional limitations. Adherents such as Tynan therefore argued against any type of dress that impeded women's physical movements or tended to injure their health. In placing these two issues in close narrative proximity to one another, Tynan offered (and continues to offer) readers both a glimpse of the blurring of the boundaries between public and private that marked women's lives and some indication of the diversity of political issues in which women were invested. Other female authors, like M. E. Francis, were likewise writing that certain concerns, including those as serious as the white slave trade, had 'suffered from the fact of having been labelled from the beginning "a woman's question" ', suggesting in the process that men, and an all-male government, paid little or no attention to those issues that impacted primarily on women.[20]

Unwilling to alienate potential readers, women writers often professed a lack of interest in or tangential association to the politics of national government. Katherine Cecil Thurston once confessed in an interview 'that from her childhood she [had] been interested in politics, but at the same time she [was] of the opinion that a woman ought not to take the prominent place in party politics which some members of the gentler sex at times arrogate to themselves'.[21] Yet even here, in a statement that acts as a form of *apologia* for overstepping the boundaries of womanhood, the process of acknowledging a certain antagonism towards women's contribution to party politics does not negate the potential to engage in politics of another kind. Thurston's contemporary, Emily Lawless, meanwhile pointed to the close relationship between cultural revivalism and partisan politics when she stated that she was 'not *anti-Gaelic* at all so long as it is only Gaelic *enthuse* and does not include politics', indicating in the process an awareness of the threat to her own landowning class that Revivalist movements might pose.[22] This chimes with Lady Augusta Gregory's statement that she was 'not working for Home Rule', but 'preparing for it'.[23] Such proclamations suggest a desire – ultimately unsuccessful – to create clear differences between the realms of culture and politics at a time when such distinctions were unsustainable. In many cases, the personnel associated with cultural organisations including the Abbey Theatre, the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, or the Gaelic League immersed themselves in both cultural and political milieus, allowing for a constant exchange and melding of ideas in which women could and did participate.

Events in Ireland from the mid nineteenth century played their part in bringing women writers into prominence. The post-Famine socio-economic changes from the 1850s onwards, accompanied by alterations in agrarian

practices, created drastically altered circumstances for many women. The reduction in domestic industries and the shift from tillage to pastoral farming resulted in decreased demand for farm labour detrimental to employment opportunities for women. In this regard, Irish women were significantly more disadvantaged than their British counterparts, with the numbers of women employed in Ireland having dropped from 641,000 in 1881 to approximately 430,000 by 1901.[24] Unsurprisingly, these circumstances contributed to the processes that saw Irish women dominate the outflow of migrants to America from the 1880s onwards and during the 1890s outnumber their male counterparts to Great Britain.[25] Social trends account for the relatively young profile of those who migrated: between 1855 and 1914, 44 per cent of those leaving Ireland were between twenty and twenty-four years of age; the average age for women leaving the country was twenty-one.[26]

The preoccupations of Irish women writers of the late nineteenth century reflect the changes they witnessed, experienced, and confronted. Although issues of migration, land ownership, and marriage prospects affected the agrarian and working classes most profoundly, with increasing class tensions and the adoption of social practices which had the effect of pitting sibling against sibling and female against female, Irish women, regardless of class, often found their ambitions and options curtailed. The volume's opening two chapters by Patrick Maume and James H. Murphy reflect and illustrate women's coming to terms with the shifting politics of a rapidly changing socio-economic environment. Writing about Charlotte Riddell and Rosa Mulholland respectively, Maume and Murphy focus their analyses on themes of land management, inter-class relations, and marriage prospects. Their narrative preoccupations with women's struggle to achieve economic stability refract these authors' own experiences of attempting to remain commercially viable during a period of transformation in the fortunes not only of Irish women but also, as these chapters demonstrate, of women in the publishing industry.

For ambitious women, a lack of access to marriage and employment meant seeking out alternatives for their own subsistence. The most dramatic and positive impact on the lives of women in this regard came through a new level of access to formal schooling. In Britain, a women's educational reform movement began in earnest in the 1840s and gained momentum in the decades that followed. By the 1860s, the Schools Inquiry Commission was being pressured by women's rights campaigners into conducting an investigation into girls' schools, and the resulting report, published in 1867–68, was both scathing in its condemnation and impossible to ignore. Girls, it concluded, were not being 'taught intelligently or in any scientific manner'.[27] When the organised women's movement became increasingly

prominent over the course of the 1870s, so too did the demands for access to equal and higher educational provision for females.

In Ireland, meanwhile, the Intermediate Education Act (1878) provided for the partial funding of secondary education. A crucial point in the reform of education, it granted all Irish women, irrespective of religious or political affiliation, the right to sit for public competitive examinations. But certain gendered and class-based inequities remained. Of those presenting for the intermediate examinations in Ireland at the turn of the century, only 15 to 25 per cent were girls, and, as Ciaran O'Neill has argued, the system remained elitist despite the reforms that had been introduced.[28] Yet the improvements in women's literacy over the course of the century were striking: by 1911, census records confirmed that 97.8 per cent of Irish women could read and write, compared with 26.8 per cent in 1841.[29] Likewise, the numbers of women enrolled in the arts-degree programme of the Royal University, Dublin, were slowly increasing: whereas there were only nine women on such programmes in 1884, enrolment climbed to thirty-three by 1893 and to sixty-one in 1900.[30] Along with the growing professionalisation of women's lives that accompanied education came a degree of female literary agency and a tendency for women to use their texts as a means of blurring the spheres of the public and private, the political and the cultural.

The debates that arose around the subject of female education brought to the fore a concern for the well-being of adolescents of both sexes and an attendant upsurge in literature for the young in which the prerogatives, advantages, and detriments of education were explored and tested. The chapters in this volume by Heidi Hansson and Whitney Standlee deal with the subject of children's education as it is portrayed in the juvenile works of Emily Lawless and L. T. Meade respectively. Hansson's analysis identifies the points of tension between Lawless's critique of regulated education and a recognition of its necessity in developing a type of citizen capable of dealing with the effects of an increasingly modernised and conflict-ridden Irish society. Standlee meanwhile distinguishes a more optimistic strain of thought concerning girls' schooling in Meade's texts, in which education offers the opportunity for females to form powerful intrasexual alliances.

Katherine Cecil Thurston's 1908 novel *The Fly on the Wheel* reflected the preoccupations of her society by explicitly linking a new form of fluidity in Irish class and social relations to women and their altering educational priorities:

> A century ago the rich Irish trader, the manufacturer, even the lawyer or doctor – unless by chance he could produce a pedigree – held little place in the social scheme; but to-day his granddaughters flaunt it with the best in the world of sport and the vaster world of education. True, the entry to these pastures is through a gate that still stands barely ajar and hangs upon rusty hinges, but

> there is incentive in the thought of a forced passage. . . . for this, the mother of a large family stints and saves to educate her daughters abroad.[31]

Rather than exalting nationalism, ruralism, and Revivalism, many Irish women writers such as Thurston used their texts to analyse and dissect the discontents of a newly educated middle-class Irish female population. It comes as little surprise that there is a cosmopolitan and international component to Irish women's literature at this juncture. Ambitious Irish women who wanted or needed to earn a living through their writing required access to the major publishing houses, the vast majority of which were located in London.

The Ulster writer Beatrice Grimshaw was one woman who pursued her literary ambitions in various environments, both urban and rural, outside of Ireland. Grimshaw was an astute negotiator of the publishing market, and, as Jane Mahony and Eve Patten confirm in Chapter 5 (which analyses her commercial success) found ample outlets for her travel writing. Whereas Grimshaw can be placed in the midst of a whole range of Irish women writers who used the city and its networks as a springboard for career mobility and to develop transnational profiles, other women writers also explored distinctively cosmopolitan sensibilities in their texts. Ciaran O'Neill and Mai Yatani compellingly demonstrate in Chapter 6 the magnetic pull that the urban exerted on a number of Irish women, who, in writings that reflected their own experiences of the city, constructed a range of counter-Revivalist narratives.

While all the authors here wrote as individuals, they also occasionally claimed allegiance to a particular group or cause. These types of writers *represent* particular political ideas on the one hand and were interpreted as *representative of* particular political ideas on the other. The two do not, however, necessarily go hand in hand. As cultural nationalism gained pace in the aftermath of Charles Stewart Parnell's death in 1891, the discussions surrounding what constituted a national literature for Ireland came to prominence. Writing about Ireland thereafter came to be seen as writing on behalf of Ireland, with attendant consequences. Alongside the diversification of society along religious, socio-economic, gender, and political lines came the question of who had the 'right' to write for the nation.

The project of the Irish Literary Revivalists, spearheaded by W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory, was viewed by some as producing the type of writing which, to borrow Yeats's phrase, was 'for Ireland's not for England's use'.[32] Their Anglo-Irish Protestant backgrounds, however, rendered them unsuitable in the eyes of a different segment of Irish society, as evidenced by D. P. Moran, who proclaimed in the *Leader* that 'Irish Ireland is Catholic Ireland. Catholic Ireland is Irish Ireland.'[33] Some prominent

Revivalists were thus trapped in a purgatory of simultaneous insider and outsider status by the standards of a sizeable majority of their contemporary readership (and theatre audiences). Such interpretations, however, failed to take into consideration that there might be multiple gradations of politics that included positions in between or outside of nationalist/unionist, Irish/English, and Catholic/Protestant binaries. Margaret Kelleher persuasively argues in her chapter on aspects of bilingualism in the work of Somerville and Ross for 'more dynamic models of linguistic change in Irish cultural studies': ones which can account for more complex negotiations between varying ideological positions. In the subsequent chapter, Anna Pilz considers these types of negotiations by focusing on the relationship between Lady Gregory and her audience(s) in relation to *fin-de-siècle* Jacobite thought. By analysing the favourable response to Gregory's play *The White Cockade*, she illustrates that questions of representation were more nuanced than have previously been acknowledged and that elitism rather than denominational allegiances impeded a more widespread success for the Abbey.

Existing ideas concerning the boundaries and limits of Irish factionalism could also be challenged by the effects of an increasingly mobile society. Moving away from the family home has always offered unique challenges to women, but making the move to England, which was necessitated by the careers of many Irish writers, could carry with it additional challenges to familial and national loyalties. For some of these women, migration to England led to a questioning of their existing political values; for others, a reinforcement of them. These extremes made their way into women's texts and are placed under scrutiny in the chapters written by Kieron Winterson and Naomi Doak. Winterson interprets Katharine Tynan's altering political views as an extension and reflection of her changing political and personal contexts, and Doak delves into the life and works of the Ulster writer F. E. Crichton to demonstrate the ways in which familial loyalties informed and strengthened Crichton's unionism following her expatriation to England.

The period in the teens and early twenties that encompassed the Easter Rising, the enfranchisement of a significant number of Irish women, and the Irish Civil War is a much-charted history that requires no further elucidation here, but the chapters written by Aurelia Annat and Lauren Arrington remind us that there were more than two sides to the debates that surrounded all of these events. These two closing chapters challenge preconceptions that there was a continuum of political thought even among those women who were closely associated with cultural revivalism and political nationalism. As Senia Pašeta asserts in her study of Irish nationalist women, 'the "Irish Revolution" of the early twentieth century

contained within it multiple demands for liberation'.[34] In chapters that verify such contentions, Annat and Arrington offer important reconsiderations of the ways in which Ella Young, Eva Gore-Booth, and Constance Markievicz pursued literary endeavours which were more accurate reflections of their personal imperatives than homogenised mainstream movements could encompass.

## Then and now

The chapters assembled in this volume offer compelling evidence that the study of Irish women's literary works within their historical, socio-economic, and political contexts is vital to gaining a fuller understanding of the literary history of Ireland. What we can glimpse clearly in these pages is the sense of the political immediacy of these women's texts, and the fame and popularity enjoyed by so many of them attests to the widespread appeal of that immediacy. In analysing what and why these women wrote, and how their texts were received, all of our contributors offer striking challenges to preconceived ideas about women's involvement in the public sphere, and in the process raise new questions about the connections between then and now.

By viewing these women's texts more closely and by placing them more thoroughly in their relevant historical contexts, we can see that their era and ours have many things in common. Women writing around the turn of the twentieth century were struggling through times of economic and social crisis, writing amid contentious and tense political moments, advocating and contemplating rights of access to education and opportunities for equality, and battling in a highly competitive literary marketplace. Which Irish woman writer in our own time – post-Celtic Tiger, post the referendum on marriage equality, in the midst of discussions of statistics on women in leadership roles, and in an age where Irish literary women are again in the vanguard of publishing – could not but find things in common with those Irish women writers of a century ago? How many Irish literary women being lauded and showered with awards today might, like them, be relegated in importance a century from now because the moment for their messages is deemed to have passed? By recognising the many connections between their past and our present, and by acknowledging that there is indeed a long established and important legacy of women's writing in Ireland, we can also begin to acknowledge the dynamic ways in which women have used and can continue to use literature to advance the cause of liberty, in all its complex and challenging forms.

## Notes

1 Arguably, the debates surrounding the publication of the three-volume *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* in 1990 with its paucity of Irish women writers prompted and inspired subsequent projects of rediscovery and re-evaluation. See, for instance, Patricia Coughlan and Tina O'Toole (eds), *Irish Literature: Feminist Perspectives* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2008); Elke D'hoker, Raphaël Ingelbien, and Hedwig Schwall (eds), *Irish Women Writers: New Critical Perspectives* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011); Alexander G. Gonzalez, *Irish Women Writers: An A-to-Z Guide* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2005); Patricia Boyle Haberstroh and Christine St Peter (eds), *Opening the Field: Irish Women, Texts and Contexts* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2007); Heidi Hansson (ed.), *New Contexts: Re-framing Nineteenth-Century Irish Women's Prose* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2008); Heather Ingman, *Irish Women's Fiction: From Edgeworth to Enright* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2013); C. L. Innes, *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society, 1880–1935* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1993); Lisbet Kickham, *Protestant Women Novelists and Irish Society, 1879–1922* (Helgonabacken: Lund University, 2004); Kathryn Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Border Crossings: Irish Women Writers and National Identities* (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 2000); Theresa O'Connor (ed.), *The Comic Tradition in Irish Women Writers* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 1996); Ann Owens Weekes, *Irish Women Writers: An Uncharted Tradition* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1990).

2 Martin Doyle, 'Putting Irish Women Writers Back in the Picture', *Irish Times* (23 February 2015). Available at www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/putting-irish-women-writers-back-in-the-picture-1.2113897. Accessed 27 April 2015. The poster was included in the edition of 7 March 2015. Note that this was not the first such attempt. In 1999, Mary Shine produced an Irish Women Writers poster. Available at www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/i-loved-your-irish-women-writers-poster-here-s-one-i-made-earlier-1.2135621. Accessed 27 April 2015.

3 Martin Doyle, 'Portraits of the Artists as Women', *Irish Times* (7 March 2015). Available at www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/portraits-of-the-artists-as-women-1.2129106. Accessed 18 April 2015.

4 Even in the articles written by academics and literary experts, only seven writers with works that predate the 1920s emerge.

5 Katharine Tynan, *Twenty-Five Years: Reminiscences* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1913), p. 150.

6 'Irish Fiction', *Daily Graphic* (5 October 1891). Quoted in Gifford Lewis (ed.), *The Selected Letters of Somerville and Ross* (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), p. 178.

7 Stephen J. Brown, SJ, *Ireland in Fiction: A Guide to Irish Novels, Tales, Romances, and Folk-lore* (Dublin and London: Maunsel & Co., 1916).

8 James H. Murphy, *Irish Novelists and the Victorian Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 18.

9 Partial enfranchisement for British women over the age of thirty who met defined standards for property ownership was achieved in 1918. The franchise was extended to those Irish women between twenty-one and twenty-nine years of age by the Irish Free State government in 1923. Voting rights on a parity with men were not granted to their counterparts in the United Kingdom until 1928.

10 'Lights of Literature', *Irish Independent* (3 May 1910), p. 7.

11 'Famous Irish Women', *Irish Independent* (4 May 1910), p. 5.

12 'Famous Irish Women'.

13 'Famous Irish Women'.

14 'Impartial', 'To the Editor of the Freeman's Journal', *Freeman's Journal* (6 March 1910), p. 5.

15 A bill was issued in 1892 enabling women to be elected as Poor Law guardians in Ireland and thus allowing them access to the official arena of local politics. In 1898, the Local Government Act granted Irish women local franchise.
16 John Ogilvie (ed.), *The Imperial Dictionary: English, Technological and Scientific*, 2 vols. (Glasgow, London, and Edinburgh: Blackie & Son, 1859), vol. II, p. 416.
17 See R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600–1972* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), p. 485.
18 Heidi Hansson, 'Introduction: Out of Context', in Heidi Hansson (ed.), *New Contexts: Re-framing Nineteenth-Century Irish Women's Prose* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2008), pp. 1–15, at p. 4.
19 Katharine Tynan, *Heart o' Gold; or, The Little Princess: A Story for Girls* (London: S. W. Partridge, 1912), p. 240.
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