

Edited by Alexander G. Gonzalez

Irish Women Writers

An A-to-Z Guide

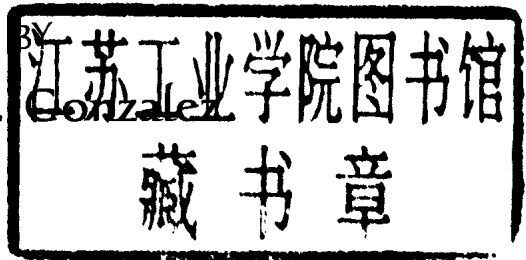


Irish Women Writers



An A-to-Z Guide

EDITED BY
Alexander G. Gonzalez



GREENWOOD PRESS

Westport, Connecticut • London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Irish women writers : an A-to-Z guide / edited by Alexander G. Gonzalez.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-313-32883-8 (alk. paper)

1. English literature—Irish authors—Bio-bibliography—Dictionaries. 2. English literature—Women authors—Bio-bibliography—Dictionaries. 3. Irish literature—Women authors—Bio-bibliography—Dictionaries. 4. Women and literature—Northern Ireland—Dictionaries. 5. English literature—Irish authors—Dictionaries. 6. English literature—Women authors—Dictionaries. 7. Irish literature—Women authors—Dictionaries. 8. Northern Ireland—In literature—Dictionaries. 9. Women and literature—Ireland—Dictionaries. 10. Ireland—In literature—Dictionaries. I. Gonzalez, Alexander G.

PR8733.I75 2006

820.9'9287'09417—dc22 2005018723

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

Copyright © 2006 by Alexander G. Gonzalez

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, by any process or technique, without the express written consent of the publisher.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2005018723

ISBN 0-313-32883-8

First published in 2006

Greenwood Press, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881

An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

www.greenwood.com

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48-1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For my loving wife, Michele



PREFACE

This book is intended to serve as a reference work for scholars studying Irish women writers, whether those scholars be entirely new to the field or experienced researchers simply moving on to study the work of authors new to them. Arranged alphabetically, the entries are written by contributors who are experts on their authors and who are fully up-to-date on the latest research available relevant to their entries. Each entry contains a brief biography, a concise, detailed discussion of the author's major works and themes, a review of the author's critical reception, and a bibliography of primary and secondary sources. Appended to the book is a selected bibliography that lists the most significant general secondary sources in the field.

The idea for this guide to Irish women writers evolved from my work editing *Modern Irish Writers* (1997). In that book's preface I listed writers who could not be included because of space limitations. Despite that book's inclusion of 22 women writers (out of 78 total), enough of those left out were women that I decided to edit a similar book dedicated entirely to women writers. Also compelling was the emergence of so many women writers over the past twenty years; I wanted to facilitate as much as possible the study of their work. And, of course, I was motivated by sheer admiration of the work of many of these writers. Unfortunately, I still have a list of writers I could not include, again purely because of space limitations.

I did not include Leland Bardwell, Eva Gore-Booth, and Maire Aine Nic Ghearailt because despite casting a wide net I simply could not find any scholar willing to write on them; I assigned the space allotted to them to other worthy writers. Also suggested to me but omitted, solely for the reason of having limited space, were Jane Barlow, Margaret Brew, Celia de Freine, George Egerton, Mary Laffan Hartley, Emily Hickey, Lady Caroline Lamb, Mary Manning, Gina Moxley, and Enda Wylie.

As always in a book of this scope and nature, I have many persons to thank. For her pioneering work on Irish women writers and her three essays written for this book I must thank Ann Weekes, whose seminal *Unveiling Treasures* (1993) is still a starting place for anyone wanting to explore the primary works of many little-known Irish women writers. Indeed, my own tome, with its emphasis on secondary sources, is intended to be, as far as is possible, a complement to Ann's.

For generously granting permission to quote from their poetry I must thank Eavan Boland and Biddy Jenkinson. For stepping in to write essays on short notice when the original contributors were either unwilling or unable to honor their commitments I must express great gratitude to Maryanne Felter, who picked up several authors in addition to her own original assignments, and also to Oona Frawley, Matthew Goodman, John

Han, Martin Kearney, Maureen Mulvihill, and Katherine Parr. For steering contributors my way I am grateful to Mary Rose Callaghan, Claire Cowart, Peter Dempsey, Paul Dolan, Mary Fitzgerald-Hoyt, Mark Hall, Cheryl Herr, Christina Hunt Mahony, Maureen Mulvihill, Shane Murphy, George O'Brien, Stephen Regan, Marilyn Richtarik, Ruth Sherry, Jim Smith, Sara Stenson, Paddy Sullivan, Kim Summers, Beverly Taylor, George Watson, and Stephen Watt.

I must thank also Mary Fitzgerald-Hoyt, not only for the quality of her original assignment and her willingness to take on another on short notice, but also for having written this book's inspiring introduction; her work for me absorbed a good deal of her sabbatical leave time—so a particular thank-you to her. For her friendship and encouragement all along I owe her a further debt of gratitude. In fact, a book such as this would not be possible without the help of many scholars, quite a few of whom I consider friends. Thank you.



CONTENTS

Preface	xi
Introduction by <i>Mary Fitzgerald-Hoyt</i>	1
Linda Anderson (1949–) by <i>Anthea Cordner</i>	9
Ivy Bannister (1951–) by <i>Maryanne Felter</i>	12
Mary Beckett (1926–) by <i>Virginia B. Mack</i>	14
Sara Berkeley (1967–) by <i>Claire McEwen</i>	17
Maeve Binchy (1940–) by <i>Rebecca Steinberger</i>	20
Caroline Blackwood (1931–1996) by <i>Coleen Comerford</i>	23
Eavan Boland (1944–) by <i>Patricia Hagen and Thomas Zelman</i>	26
Angela Bourke (1952–) by <i>Christie Fox</i>	35
Elizabeth Bowen (1899–1973) by <i>Christine Cusick</i>	39
Clare Boylan (1948–) by <i>John J. Han</i>	44
Elizabeth Brennan (1907–) by <i>Paul Marchbanks</i>	48
Frances Browne (1816–1879) by <i>Paul Marchbanks</i>	51
Mary Rose Callaghan (1944–) by <i>Maryanne Felter</i>	54
Moya Cannon (1956–) by <i>Christine Cusick</i>	57
Marina Carr (1964–) by <i>Gerald C. Wood</i>	61
Juanita Casey (1925–) by <i>Rebecca Steinberger</i>	67
Mary (Catherine Gunning Maguire) Colum (1884–1957) by <i>Paige Reynolds</i>	69
Julia M. Crottie (1853–1930?) by <i>Paul Marchbanks</i>	72
Geraldine Cummins (1890–1969) by <i>Shelia Odak</i>	75
Ita Daly (1945–) by <i>John J. Han</i>	79
Suzanne Day (1890–1964) by <i>Tom Keegan</i>	82
Teresa Deevy (1894–1963) by <i>Christie Fox</i>	84
Anne Devlin (1951–) by <i>Sara E. Stenson</i>	88
Eilis Dillon (1920–1994) by <i>Maryanne Felter</i>	94
Emma Donoghue (1969–) by <i>Maureen E. Mulvihill</i>	98

Mary Dorcey (1950–) by <i>John J. Han</i>	102
Ellen Mary Patrick Downing (1828–1869) by <i>Katherine Parr</i>	106
Maria Edgeworth (1767–1849) by <i>Claire Denelle Cowart</i>	109
Ruth Dudley Edwards (1944–) by <i>Shelia Odak</i>	117
Anne Enright (1962–) by <i>Sara E. Stenson</i>	120
Mary E. Frances (Mary Blundell) (1859–1930) by <i>Tom Keegan</i>	124
Miriam Gallagher (1940–) by <i>John L. Murphy</i>	127
Sarah Grand (1854–1943) by <i>Tina O'Toole</i>	131
Lady Gregory (née [Isabella] Augusta Persse) (1852–1932) by <i>Martin F. Kearney</i>	134
Anne Le Marquand Hartigan (1937–) by <i>Joseph Heininger</i>	140
Rita Ann Higgins (1955–) by <i>Rita Barnes</i>	145
Norah Hoult (1898–1984) by <i>Karen O'Brien</i>	151
Biddy Jenkinson (1949–) by <i>Maureen E. Mulvihill</i>	154
Jennifer Johnston (1930–) by <i>Shawn O'Hare</i>	158
Marie Jones (1955–) by <i>Patrick Lonergan</i>	164
Molly Keane (1904–1996) by <i>Ann Owens Weekes</i>	168
Eva Kelly (1830–1910) by <i>Katherine Parr</i>	172
Rita Kelly (1953–) by <i>Joseph Heininger</i>	175
Mary Lavin (1912–1996) by <i>Maryanne Felter</i>	179
Emily Lawless (1845–1913) by <i>Matthew J. Goodman</i>	185
Joan Lingard (1932–) by <i>Joseph Heininger</i>	190
Deirdre Madden (1960–) by <i>Shawn O'Hare</i>	193
Joy Martin (1937–) by <i>Susan Bazargan</i>	197
Medbh McGuckian (1950–) by <i>Sara E. Stenson</i>	200
Janet McNeill (1907–) by <i>Tom Keegan</i>	208
Paula Meehan (1955–) by <i>Sara E. Stenson</i>	211
Máire Mhac an tSaoi (1922–) by <i>Cóilín D. Owens</i>	216
Alice Milligan (1866–1953) by <i>Rita Barnes</i>	219
Susan L. Mitchell (1866–1926) by <i>Paul Marchbanks</i>	224
Lady Morgan (1776?–1859) by <i>John J. Han</i>	228
Val Mulkerne (1925–) by <i>Virginia B. Mack</i>	232
Iris Murdoch (1919–1999) by <i>Lisa Weihman</i>	236
Eilean Ni Chuilleanain (1942–) by <i>Sara E. Stenson</i>	241
Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill (1952–) by <i>Oona Frawley</i>	248
Éilís ní Dhuibhne (1954–) by <i>Beth Wightman</i>	256
Áine Ní Ghlinn (1955–) by <i>Coleen Comerford</i>	262
Máiréad Ní Ghráda (1896–1971) by <i>Coleen Comerford</i>	265
Edna O'Brien (1930–) by <i>Sandra Manoogian Pearce</i>	268

Kate O'Brien (1897–1974) by <i>Elizabeth Gilmartin</i>	276
Mary O'Donnell (1954–) by <i>Coleen Comerford</i>	280
Julia O'Faolain (1932–) by <i>Ann Owens Weekes</i>	283
Nuala O'Faolain (1940–) by <i>Mary Fitzgerald-Hoyt</i>	286
Mary O'Malley (1954–) by <i>Mary Fitzgerald-Hoyt</i>	290
Christina Reid (1942–) by <i>Patrick Lonergan</i>	294
Somerville and Ross (E.O.E. Somerville [1858–1949] and Violet Martin [1862–1915]) by <i>Ann Owens Weekes</i>	298
Eithne Strong (1923–1999) by <i>Joseph Heininger</i>	303
Mary Tighe (née Blachford) (1772–1810) by <i>Maureen E. Mulvihill</i> -	308
Katharine Tynan (1861–1931) by <i>Colette Epplé</i>	314
Lady Wilde (1821–1896) by <i>Katherine Parr</i>	319
Sheila Wingfield (1906–1992) by <i>Coleen Comerford</i>	323
Selected Bibliography	327
Index	333
About the Editor and Contributors	341



INTRODUCTION

Mary Fitzgerald-Hoyt

Of one thing I am certain: to make any kind of statement, pronouncement, or commentary that will adequately address the vast subject of Irish women writers is impossible. But as a means of introducing this important, ambitious, and so necessary volume, I shall focus on a poster, a quotation, and a personal habit.

Visitors to Irish and Irish American bookstores, pubs, and shops have no doubt seen the ubiquitous Irish Writers poster, which features the usual suspects: Yeats, O'Casey, Joyce, Kavanagh, and so on. And although there is no denying that the writers depicted have shaped, even defined, Irish literary history, all of the featured literary figures are male, as if the designer believed that no Irish woman ever expressed herself in writing. Indeed, the faces of several of these notable men have assumed iconic status, commodified into coffee mugs, T-shirts, and similar kitsch aimed at the foreign tourist; their homes have been transformed into museums. The tourist can "experience" a slice of literary Ireland without taking the trouble to read a book.

A couple of years ago, I noticed in the Trinity College book shop that an attempt had been made to redress this injustice of equating Irish literature with male writers: there was a poster titled Irish Women Writers. Yet admirable as it may have been to remind or even inform the populace that there *is* such a creature as an Irish woman writer, it perhaps unconsciously underlines the fundamental problem. The cultural assumptions lurking behind the soi-disant Irish Writers poster infiltrate its female counterpart. To state "writer" and assume "male" bespeaks privilege and arrogance; to qualify "writer" with "women" suggests at once defiance and apology, for surely Eavan Boland, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Somerville and Ross, Jennifer Johnston, and a host of other spectacular talents, as diverse as they are stylistically and culturally, deserve a place on any Irish Writers poster.

My promised quotation appears in Nuala O'Faolain's first volume of autobiography, *Are You Somebody* (1996). Having once been a friend and colleague of Seamus Deane, the Northern Irish critic, poet, and novelist who became the general editor of the original *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (1991), O'Faolain, a late-blooming feminist just discovering a personal sense of her own Irishness, was dismayed and wounded at the anthology's now-infamous exclusion and underrepresentation of women writers. When she questioned Deane in a television interview, she recalls that "he said words to the effect that he really hadn't noticed what he was doing" (104). O'Faolain concluded that he was "weary" and "baffled" and "didn't want an argument" (104).

The editors of volumes 4 and 5 of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (2002) acknowledged Deane's support and assistance in making those additional volumes pos-

sible, volumes that feature writing by and about women and whose organizing principles depart from traditional rubrics of chronological periods and literary schools or movements. Yet while it is heartening to know that people are capable of attempting to rectify injustices and reconsider past attitudes, it remains unnerving that such an eminent critic could have failed to notice the terrible inequity of such an exclusion of women writers. More to the point, something is radically wrong that the literary hierarchy morphed into such an omnipotent “boys’ club” to begin with. Fiction writer Anne Enright has flatly dismissed the entire *Field Day Anthology* enterprise, even expressing reluctance about being included in the new volumes. When interviewed by Caitriona Moloney about the Irish literary canon and the *Field Day* controversy, Enright retorted, “*The Field Day Anthology* got it so spectacularly wrong that anyone would know that they had no credibility; therefore it doesn’t matter” (*Irish Women Writers Speak Out*, 55).

The personal habit I suppose I might call the “index reflex.” It’s the impulse that overcomes me when I pick up a new book theorizing about Irish national identity or the complexities of Irish culture. The index often disappoints, for too often the examples drawn are chosen exclusively from male writers. How, one wonders, can a discussion of contemporary ideas of the Irish “nation” fail to consider Eavan Boland’s writing? How can interrogations of historiography and mythmaking ignore Julia O’Faolain’s *No Country for Young Men* (1980)? How can discussions of politics in Northern Irish life overlook the plays of Anne Devlin and Christina Reid?

Too often critics’ and anthologists’ vision has been clouded by the cataracts of entitlement and unimaginativeness. That reflex action of “WWJS”—not, What would Jesus say, but, What would *Joyce* say—or Yeats, or O’Casey, or Heaney—hobbles the ongoing discussion of what it means to be Irish, of how to define Irish literature.

Of course, the resistance to women writers reaches beyond the island of Ireland. Women writers worldwide have long been caught in the coils of an old contradiction. Writers transform the familiar with creative vision, but women’s familiar world has historically been devalued, the hearth and home to which they were relegated deemed intrinsically less important than the more public world of “masculine” pursuit, which has variously meant moneymaking, empire building, war waging, and the like. In another century and another nation, Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s eponymous Aurora Leigh, attempting to be both woman and poet in a resisting, sometimes hostile society, excoriated the superficial education and time-wasting busywork accorded to women in the Victorian age, both designed to render women “good” wives and mothers, angels in the house. At the same time, she asserted the validity of the quotidian world that women occupied as a fit subject for epic poetry, a genre stuck in the groove of antiquity. Generations later, Virginia Woolf revealed that behind the apparent shallowness of an upper-class woman’s party-giving lurked a terrifying vision of a world laid waste; in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) the minutiae of domestic life are rendered luminous, a brave attempt to beat back the void.

Ironically, because women were devalued, so was their work, and to write about domestic chores, childbearing and child rearing, the woman’s body, was too often deemed trivial, not the stuff of literature. For countless other women, literacy itself was a locked room, education deemed only for men. And as much as we might like to think of these attitudes as historical injustices, relics of the past, to do so is to be perilously ignorant of the lives of so many contemporary women oppressed by patriarchal civil and religious power structures, domestic abuse, and economic and sexual exploitation. Irish American writer Valerie Miner has been one of many to voice a cautionary note about

contemporary women's lives, noting current dangers: "There is a smugness among some men and women that we are enlightened and inclusive and we are neither" (Moloney and Thompson, 195).

When Eavan Boland, now regarded as a major poet who has transformed Irish literature and literary criticism, rendered her then-world of suburban homekeeping and child rearing into poetry, dared to write frankly about women's bodies and women's self-images, she was variously ignored and reviled. I once heard her attempts to foster other women's self-expression by conducting community writing workshops dismissed in a derisive, ad feminam attack by one of Ireland's leading literary critics—herself a woman. The inimitable imagination of Medbh McGuckian has produced a poetry that while often drawing inspiration from the traditional realms of women—home and garden—demands that its reader dismantle any traditional notions of reading and responding to literature. Yet this dazzling originality has often roused hostility, accusations of opacity, even incomprehensibility. WWJS, indeed!

And yet, there is much cause for hope. The political, economic, social, and cultural sea changes that have transformed Ireland in the last few decades have rippled into women's literature and how that literature is written, written about, and published. Irish women's literature is simply more *available* than it once was. An explosion of anthologies, critical studies, biographies, and interviews insists upon women's massive contribution to Irish literature. Not long ago, the visionary Attic Press was once one of the few publishing houses eager to promote literature by women, and among its fine offerings was Ailbhe Smyth's anthology of women's writing, *Wildish Things* (1989), which not only offered a diverse and innovative array of writers but also exploded traditional notions of Irish women and Irish literature. Attic also published Ann Owens Weekes's groundbreaking *Unveiling Treasures: The Attic Guide to the Published Works of Irish Women Literary Writers: Drama, Fiction, Poetry* (1993), an invaluable reference guide of biographical, critical, and bibliographical information.

Yet the Attic Press lacked both the clout and the war chest of larger publishing houses, and the gratification of having one's work published did not guarantee that that work gained the notice accorded to the writings of Irish male authors. Irish women writers remained—and often still are—under-reviewed; outrageous though it may be, some were treated as tainted because of their association with feminist presses; many found sympathetic audiences not at home in Ireland but on the Irish studies circuit in the United States, offering readings at academic conferences and for Irish literature programs at American colleges and universities.

Many readers' first exposure to Irish women writers had its genesis in reading works *about* them rather than *by* them, a strangely ironic twist on Eavan Boland's complaint that Irish women traditionally were written about rather than heard, transformed into mythical figures by male writers and not allowed to speak in their own voices. *Unveiling Treasures*, personal interviews, the occasional piece of literary criticism or biography, and even the academic conference paper were for many of us the introduction to Irish women writers, and for those of us living outside of Ireland, that intellectual seduction was an often frustrating event, for we discovered the difficulties of gaining access to the primary works; for those of us attempting to woo a new audience in our college and university classrooms, the fickleness of book distribution provided an often insurmountable obstacle, forcing us into the awkwardness of leaving works on library reserve or, in extremis, resorting to sheaves of photocopied poems and short stories. The occasional anthology, such as Smyth's above-mentioned *Wildish Things; Territories of the Voice*, a collection of contemporary Irish women's fiction (edited by

De Salvo, Hogan, and D'Arcy, 1989); or Daniel and Linda Casey's *Stories by Contemporary Irish Women* (1990), was an oasis. A. A. Kelly's *Pillars of the House: An Anthology of Verse by Irish Women from 1690 to the Present* (1988) opened a new window on Irish poetry. Wake Forest University Press provided beautifully produced editions of several Irish women poets—though not, alas, Eavan Boland. Novels and plays were often paradise unattainable.

Yet even in those hungry years, it is clear that Irish women writers were having an impact on the writing of Irish literary history. Academic books are time-consuming in their researching, writing, and production, and the fact that a number of fine critical works about Irish women writers emerged at the turn of the twentieth century suggests that those writers had ignited these scholars' imaginations years earlier. Ann Owens Weekes's *Irish Women Writers: An Uncharted Tradition* (1990) transformed the reading of Irish fiction by asserting women's contribution. Patricia Boyle Haberstroh's *Women Creating Women: Contemporary Irish Women Poets* (1996), a study of the Irish female poetic imagination, and *My Self, My Muse: Irish Women Poets Reflect on Life and Art* (2001), an anthology of poets' meditations on their own creative processes, have had a crucial part in redefining traditional notions of Irish poetry. Alexander G. Gonzalez, editor of the present volume, attempted in *Contemporary Irish Women Poets: Some Male Perspectives* to redress former prejudicial, wrongheaded critiques of Irish women poets. Collections of interviews, such as Rebecca E. Wilson and Gilleán S. Arjant's *Sleeping with Monsters: Conversations with Scottish and Irish Women Poets* (1990) and Caitriona Moloney and Helen Thompson's *Irish Women Writers Speak Out: Voices from the Field* (2003), have both provided women writers with the opportunity to illuminate their lives and artistry and introduced readers to underconsidered or even unfamiliar writers. Previously male-writer-dominated topics have been reexamined to include women writers in *The Comic Tradition in Irish Women Writers* (edited by Theresa O'Connor, 1996), C. L. Innes's *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society: 1880–1935* (1993), and *Border Crossings: Irish Women Writers and National Identities* (edited by Kathryn Kirkpatrick, 2000).

Other scholars have revised, even revolutionized our readings of familiar figures or illuminated the context in which we read the history that shaped women's lives. Ann Saddlemyer's important scholarship on Isabella Augusta Persse, Lady Gregory, and the Penguin edition of selected works of Lady Gregory, edited by Lucy McDiarmid and Maureen Waters, have foregrounded the achievement of a major figure too often treated patronizingly in studies of the male writers she encouraged and supported. Margaret MacCurtain, Margaret Ward, and a number of other fine historians have transformed the reading of Irish history by writing women's experiences into it; Angela Bourke's feminist interpretations of Irish folklore have provided a new lens through which to view the past.

The recent blossoming of works by and about Irish women is heartening; so much more needs to be said and done. In a world where critical studies of Seamus Heaney's poetry constitute their own cottage industry, as of this writing only one full-length study of Eavan Boland's work has been published. Ann Owens Weekes's work on Irish women's fiction, mentioned above, and Christine St. Peter's *Changing Ireland: Strategies in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (2000) have made vital inroads; luminaries such as Kate O'Brien, Edna O'Brien, and Jennifer Johnston deserve several critical studies all their own. Irish women dramatists merit more representation in anthologies, more space in critical studies of Irish drama.

Of course, that splendid motherlode of Irish women's writing, volumes 4 and 5 of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, subtitled *Irish Women's Writing and Traditions* (edited by Angela Bourke, Máirín Ní Dhoneadha, Siobhán Kilfeather, Maria Luddy, Margaret MacCurtain, Gerardine Meaney, Mary O'Dowd, and Clair Wills), is already transforming Irish literary history, not only because it reveals that women's writing in Ireland is neither a recent nor a monolithic enterprise, but also because it attempts to refashion how Irish literature is read, how it is defined. Not only is it a monumental work of scholarship, but it is also a triumphant imaginative achievement, challenging its readers to rethink their assumptions about Irish literature. In the two newest volumes of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* the traditional rejection of women's experience in the domestic sphere as fit topic for literature is replaced with an embracing of that experience through sections on sexuality, childbirth, the rituals of grieving, yet a refusal to define those experiences narrowly: sexuality is not limited to heterosexuality; maternity is also examined through infanticide. Writings on diverse expressions of spirituality are included, as are women's traditionally overlooked place in the public spheres of politics, education, philanthropy, and scientific inquiry. The arbitrary business of literary periodization is abandoned in favor of thematic connections across centuries. The very definition of "literature" is stretched and challenged by the interdisciplinarity of both the editors and the texts they have selected and by the inclusion of works that elude easy categorization.

Essential and gripping debates about Irish identity and Irish historiography have burgeoned in recent years, debates with such open-ended gerunds as "inventing Ireland," "writing Ireland," and the like, suggesting process rather than product, fluidity rather than immobility. In their various ways, Declan Kiberd, John Wilson Foster, Eavan Boland, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, the founders of Field Day, the writers and actors involved in Charabanc, and a host of others have called for, as Declan Kiberd has argued, an abandonment of "binary thinking" and a more flexible definition of Irishness, acknowledging that to say "Irish" and mean "Nationalist," to say "Irish" and mean "Catholic," to say "Irish writer" and mean "man," simply will not do anymore. The founders of Field Day, seeing their Northern Irish home under siege literally and figuratively, called for a "Fifth Province" of the imagination as a way of extricating Northern Ireland from the religious bigotry, political violence, and cultural stagnation corroding it.

"Revision," "imagination," and "redefinition" have become the shibboleths of discussions that embrace such far-reaching issues as the future of Northern Ireland, the writing of Irish history, and the transformation of a national self-image marked by victimhood into a forward-looking, progressive identity. One would think that women would be a natural part of this process and discussion. What better way to revise the past than to amplify the voices of those who were shouted down in its official written version? What better way to redefine Irish identity than to include those who were excluded from the original definition? What better way to address the much-discussed "silences" of the past than to acknowledge, as the recent volumes of *The Field Day Anthology* attest, that perhaps silence was not the overarching issue but rather the failure of the men in charge to turn up the volume enough to hear the women speaking?

To attempt to redefine or rewrite Ireland while neglecting the contributions of women is as wrongheaded as attempting to paint a portrait with the artist keeping one eye closed and one arm tied behind his or her back. To go back to my three opening examples, what a triumph it would be if posters and anthologies no longer had to be

revised to make up for the overlooking of women. What a day it would be if editors of anthologies would find it unimaginable *not* to think of including women's writing as more than a token sample. What a pleasure it would be to begin critical books at the beginning, not needing to check the index first because it would be unthinkable not to find women's names there.

Becoming aware of Irish women's literature was for many of us a transformative event, akin to one's discovery of feminism or postcolonial literature. Once those doors are opened, there is no going back. Previously loved books become problematic, even distasteful, when viewed through these new lenses. Read alongside Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), the former female triumphalism of *Jane Eyre* (1847) is tarnished. Yet these moments of metamorphosis may be exhilarating as well. Perhaps it was discovering the stunning short stories in *Territories of the Voice* or the bold originality of the writers anthologized in *Wildish Things*; perhaps it was hearing Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill read her exuberant poetry in the Irish language she inhabits rather than speaks; perhaps it was identifying with the lonely young poet searching for a voice while sitting at her kitchen table, a young woman whom Eavan Boland describes as herself. That first splash of cold water in the face that revealed that women in Irish literature not only were Molly Bloom or Deirdre of the Sorrows or that mythic figure that Yeats made of Maud Gonne, but were, as Boland has asserted, the *authors* rather than merely the *subjects* of Irish literature.

Ann Owens Weekes recalls in her introduction to *Unveiling Treasures* that growing up in Ireland she developed a passion for reading, but that that passion was strangely unsatisfying: "Yet enjoyment was often tinged with a sense of unease I could not articulate, an Irish Catholic enchanted by the experiences of British Protestants, an Irish girl excluded from a world of and for Irish men; I was not 'at home' in fiction" (6). Weekes's own defining moment as a reader arrived with her adolescent discovery of Mary Lavin's fiction: "I knew that something extraordinary had occurred in my world" (6). When she went on years later to write *Unveiling Treasures*, Weekes in effect both shared and enhanced that moment of discovery, for the entries contained in her work offered a glimpse into the lives and works of an array of writers, the short entries occasioned by space constraints tempting the reader to look further, to seek out the works listed in the bibliography, to discover the writing behind the teasing biographical information and critical commentary.

Alexander G. Gonzalez's present volume both fills a void and provides an occasion for rejoicing. *Unveiling Treasures* first appeared over a decade ago, and massive changes, from the controversial economic explosion known as the Celtic Tiger, to the legalization of divorce, changed policies regarding reproductive rights, the fraught but guardedly hopeful evolution of the Good Friday Agreement, and the presidencies of Mary Robinson and Mary McAleese, have been accompanied by transformative new works by familiar writers and a torrent of new talents. Readers wanting to keep current with those who long ago earned their place on the Irish Writers poster will find entries on Edgeworth, Somerville and Ross, Lady Gregory, O'Brien, Johnston, and others whose exclusion from discussions of Irish literature, written by women or men, would be unthinkable; the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, English-language writers and Irish-language writers, poets, fiction writers, dramatists, critics, and memoirists are included. And there is room here, too, for the discovery of a previously unknown or unread author.

In "That the Science of Cartography Is Limited" (1994), Eavan Boland argued the limitations of printed maps, their inability to convey the flesh and vegetation, the suf-

fering and silence, of a landscape. Her speaker laments the absence of the so-called famine roads on the map, those ill-conceived, abortive public-works projects spawned by a British Victorian belief that providing free relief to the starving Irish would corrupt their characters and imperil their immortal souls. As the poem argues, both those who died building the roads and the roads themselves, unfinished and abandoned, have no existence on the map.

Women have long had such a shadowy half-life on the Irish map and in the Irish literary anthology. For all that remains to be done, this reference work and the work of the many scholars illuminating the lives and writing of Irish women are evidence of change. The writer Kate O'Riordan commented in an interview that even though she was born in England and after spending her childhood in Ireland returned to England to live, her publishers prefer to categorize her as an "Irish woman-writer"—because they can consequently sell more books (Moloney and Thompson, 208)! Of course, there's irony to be had, if we want to go there. But on the occasion of this marvelous new reference book, perhaps it is preferable to focus on the fact that those readers who do discover new names in *Irish Women Writers: An A-to-Z Guide* will not experience that old frustration of the unavailable text. Internet book services, expanding opportunities for publication, and, yes, the dubious pleasure of the "Irish woman writer" designation having achieved a certain cachet, have guaranteed that the map is not vacant, the anthology is expanding, and perhaps someday, the poster will no longer be lopsided.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Boland, Eavan. "That the Science of Cartography Is Limited." In *In a Time of Violence*. New York: Norton, 1994, 7–8.
- Bourke, Angela, Máirin Ní Dhonneadha, Siobhan Kilfeather, Maria Luddy, Margaret MacCurtain, Gerardine Meaney, Mary O'Dowd, and Clair Wills, eds. *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*. Vols. 4 and 5, *Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*. Cork: Cork University Press, 2002.
- Casey, Daniel J., and Linda M. Casey, eds. *Stories by Contemporary Irish Women*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990.
- De Salvo, Louise, Katherine Hogan, and Kathleen D'Arcy, eds. *Territories of the Voice: Contemporary Stories by Irish Women Writers*. Boston: Beacon, 1989.
- Gonzalez, Alexander G., ed. *Contemporary Irish Women Poets: Some Male Perspectives*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999.
- Haberstroh, Patricia Boyle, ed. *My Self, My Muse: Irish Women Poets Reflect on Life and Art*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001.
- . *Women Creating Women: Contemporary Irish Women Poets*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996.
- Innes, C. L. *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society: 1880–1935*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.
- Kelly, A. A. *Pillars of the House: An Anthology of Verse by Irish Women from 1690 to the Present*. Dublin: Wolfhound, 1988.
- Kiberd, Declan. *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of a Modern Nation*. London: Cape, 1995.
- Kirkpatrick, Kathryn, ed. *Border Crossings: Irish Women Writers and National Identities*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000.
- Moloney, Caitriona, and Helen Thompson, eds. *Irish Women Writers Speak Out: Voices from the Field*. With a foreword by Ann Owens Weekes. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003.
- O'Connor, Theresa, ed. *The Comic Tradition in Irish Women Writers*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996.

8 Irish Women Writers

- O'Faolain, Nuala. *Are You Somebody?: The Accidental Memoir of a Dublin Woman*. New York: Holt, 1996.
- Smyth, Ailbhe, ed. *Wildish Things: An Anthology of New Irish Women's Writing*. Dublin: Attic, 1989.
- St. Peter, Christine. *Changing Ireland: Strategies in Contemporary Women's Fiction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.
- Weekes, Ann Owens. *Irish Women Writers: An Uncharted Tradition*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1990.
- . *Unveiling Treasures: The Attic Guide to the Published Works of Irish Women Literary Writers: Drama, Fiction, Poetry*. Dublin: Attic, 1993.
- Wilson, Rebecca E., and Gillean Somerville-Arjat, eds. *Sleeping with Monsters: Conversations with Scottish and Irish Women Poets*. Dublin: Wolfhound, 1990.