Representations of Ireland

Margaret Kelleher (November 2015: 5,850 words; with notes 6,570).

I. Introduction

In 1883, the Bentley firm published *A Struggle for Fame*, the autobiographical novel by Irish-born Charlotte Riddell (née Cowan). The three-decker work features vivid pen-portraits of Newby, Tinsley, Bentley and other publishers, and details a young Irish woman's struggles for success in mid-century literary London, against contemporary views that 'Irish stories are quite gone out'.[1] More than once, its acerbic narrator diagnoses astutely the forces constraining women's literary fame: 'It was hard upon Glenarva that no human being ever believed she was the right person in the right place. Not when she was plodding amongst the London publishers – not when she was making a little money – not when she had gained a great reputation – not when the time came no one could deny she had achieved more than nine hundred and ninety-nine women out of a thousand ever do achieve – no, not even then did any friend, or relation, or stranger realize it was really Glenarva who had won success, and not some quite independent power associated with her in an unaccountable and uncanny sort of alliance.'[2]

The historical period covered by this volume begins and ends with key political and social events for Ireland: Catholic Emancipation in 1829 and the consolidation of the Irish Parliamentary Party and Home Rule Movement 1880-1882.[3] In terms of Irish literary periodization, situated between the end of Romanticism and prior to the development of the Irish literary revival, it represents a still neglected and undervalued period. Yet this is a period of particular significance for the history of Irish women's writings, in which the professionalization of female authorship was markedly advanced, and in which the generic forms produced by women, and the nature of the readership for women's writings, expanded in fascinating and influential ways.

The 1830s, according to some literary commentators, was the decade in which Irish fiction faced collapse under the burden of political crisis, and, in support of this view, critics commonly cite a letter written by Maria Edgeworth in 1834, the year in which *Helen*, her last

novel, was published. Writing from her home in Edgeworthstown to her brother Michael Pakenham Edgeworth in India, the novelist observed: 'It is impossible to draw Ireland as she now is in a book of fiction – realities are too strong, party passions too violent to bear to see, or care to look at their faces in the looking-glass. The people would only break the glass, and curse the fool who held the mirror up to nature – distorted nature, in a fever.'[4] While these remarks spell the end of Edgeworth's own writing career in fiction – with the exception of her short famine tale *Orlandino* (1848) – they greatly underestimate the tenacity of the genre among Irish women writers. Five years earlier, in an address 'to the reader' which prefaced her *Book of the Boudoir* (1829), Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan) delivered a more accurate prediction of the future for Irish writing: 'Among the multitudinous effects of catholic emancipation, I do not hesitate to predict a change in the character of Irish authorship.'[5]

In the decades following Catholic Emancipation not only was a much larger and more influential body of writing produced than is generally acknowledged, but also an expansion in publishing venues facilitated a greater diversity of genre; hence numerous Irish-born women ventured into the Victorian literary marketplace with their versions of the stock genres of the period, such as sensational novels, sentimental fiction, urban fiction and melodrama, in addition to the longer-established forms of the historical novel, travel narrative and peasant tale.[6] The socio-political conditions of post-emancipation Ireland diagnosed by Edgeworth thus had more productive literary results than she had envisaged and led in subsequent decades to a proliferation of what may be termed 'factual fictions': as novelists assumed or had forced upon them the challenge of Irish political subject matter, the line between fact and fiction proved difficult to draw.[7] This generic instability and weight of political content, once seen as markers of the 'inadequacy' of nineteenth-century Irish writing, have in recent decades been re-evaluated as the creative conditions of a distinctive and, in David Lloyd's term, 'anomalous' literary development.[8] Yet, disappointingly, the ensuing rehabilitation of Irish writing produced between the 1830s and1880s has drawn from an almost exclusively male authorial field and has centred on more elite generic forms, while popular categories such as sentimental fiction and sensation fiction, in which so many Irish nineteenth-century women writers obtained professional success, remain largely ignored.

The years 1830 to 1880 also mark a period in which differentiations of 'English' and 'Irish' writing are not easily made. Many Irish-born women moved to London or were entirely published in London; some entered the mainstream of English literature, without

complication, in terms of subject matter and form; others returned to Irish themes frequently, still others intermittently, in their careers. Of those who remained in Ireland, few could sustain themselves solely in the domestic market and sought a wider readership, yet such an orientation towards an English, or later an American, audience has too often, in a crude simplification, been viewed as a disqualification from the history of 'Irish' literature per se. Irish-born writers such as Charlotte Riddell and Frances Browne have thus been almost fully absorbed into a history of English writing or, in the case of Mary Anne Sadlier, that of North-American writing, with little or no attention to the significance of Ireland in their life and work; meanwhile a roll-call of Irish literary women jumps from Edgeworth to Somerville and Ross, omitting many writers of substance and interest in between.

II. 'Condition of Ireland' fiction

From the mid-1820s onwards, as critic Ina Ferris has shown, contemporary periodicals in England and Scotland had begun to define 'an Irish line of fiction'.[9] Over the course of the next decade, numerous volumes of Sketches, Stories, Tales, True Tales and Legends followed, which variously described, explained, scrutinised, critiqued and/or defended 'Irish character', 'the Irish peasantry', Ireland and 'Irish life'. Written for the most part by Irish-born authors, and generally with English or Scottish publishers, these volumes were marketed as 'real-life' representations, offering a strong social and anthropological quotient, while at a safe distance from political contention and easily digestible by their readers. Significantly, some of the earliest recognitions of this trend in Irish prose writing came from Scottish journals – *Blackwood's Magazine* or its liberal rival, *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* – in a continuation of the 'cross-pollination' between literary Ireland and Scotland of earlier decades.[10] For example, in the February 1833 issue of *Tait's*, Scottish author Christian Isobel Johnstone used the occasion of a review of the second series of William Carleton's *Traits* for a sceptical comment on the developing genre:

> It will go hard if the Irish do not beguile or flatter their fellow-subjects into some knowledge of Ireland at last. They had pleaded, argued, expostulated, yelled, shouted, clamoured, fought, burnt and slain, wept and sung to small purpose. Little was the permanent attention they were able to gain from the people of Great Britain, till the happy device was hit upon of throwing open the castle gates, and the cabin doors, and inviting the Scotch and English to enter, hear stories tragic and mirthful, and be amused.[11]

Three years later, Johnstone herself put contemporary official evidence to powerful effect in the pamphlet *True Tales of the Irish Peasantry, As Related by Themselves* (1836), which reproduced a large number of first-person testimonies, including those of evicted tenants, unemployed labourers and widows, selected from the reports of the Poor Law Commissioners and designed to prove the necessity of a Poor Law for Ireland.

A dismissal of these 'sketches' and 'tales' as merely light amusement fails to do justice however to their contemporary popularity, and to the role which they played in the years following Catholic emancipation during which the condition of the Irish poor, the continuing agrarian disturbances, and agitation for repeal of the Union moved in and out of the British public's view. An especially popular but now under-related Irish woman writer of this period is Anna Maria Fielding Hall (1800-1891) whose first published work, *Sketches of Irish Character*, appeared in 1829. Born in Dublin, Anna Maria Fielding was raised in Bannow, County Wexford by her mother's family until the age of fifteen when the family moved to London. In 1824 she married the Cork-born journalist and author Samuel Carter Hall (1800–89), who had moved to London at the age of twenty-one, and with whom she later collaborated on many Irish travel books, such as *Ireland, Its Scenery, Character*, etc. (1841–3), A *Week at Killarney* (1843) and *Handbooks for Ireland* (1853). Set in the village of Bannow, Hall's stories proved immediately popular among English readers; in 1831 a second series of *Sketches* followed, with numerous later editions. While the author was at pains to emphasise that her characters knew little 'and care less' about politics, the sketches themselves belie this assertion with frequent references to memories of the rebellion of 1798. In the fifth edition of *Sketches* published in 1854, Hall included an extensive account of the friendship between her Huguenot grandmother and a Roman Catholic priest during the rebellion.[12]

Anna Hall was an extremely prolific writer and her work featured in diverse Irish and English periodicals such as *Chambers's Journal*, *New Monthly Magazine*, the *Westminster Review* and the *Dublin Penny Journal.* On 16 April 1838, a dramatized version of her novella *Groves of Blarney* began a highly successful run at London's Adelphi Theatre. Of her nine novels, *The Whiteboy* (1845) is the darkest and most substantial: set in the context of agrarian agitation in 1822, it portrays the desperation of a generation with 'no hope beyond hunger, revolt and death'.[13]

Agrarian violence continued as a prevalent subject for 'condition-of- Ireland' fiction in the period immediately following Catholic emancipation. It provides the subject of Charlotte Tonna's first novel, *The Rockites* (1829), and of Harriet Martineau's *Ireland: A Tale* (1832), the ninth volume in her 'Illustrations of Political Economy' series. For Martineau, Whiteboy agitation illustrated the extent of English misgovernment of Ireland; for the more denunicatory Tonna, it was a 'poisonous excrescence formed upon the tree of her [Ireland's] national prosperity, and eaten into its heart's core'.[14] Tonna (1790–1846), born Charlotte Elizabeth Browne, lived in Kilkenny from 1819 to 1824 with her first husband, Captain Phelan, and while in Ireland began a series of religious tracts, published as the work of 'Charlotte Elizabeth', which were fiercely critical of contemporary Roman Catholicism. Her most successful novel, *Derry: A Tale of the Revolution* (1833), provided a fictional retelling of the siege of Derry (1689), heavily drawn from John Graham's 1823 history; lurid but also compelling in its depiction, the novel had reached its tenth edition by 1847 and was reprinted throughout the nineteenth century. In the 1840s, Tonna's writings also became highly popular in America, with a two-volume collection of her works published in 1844, and introduced by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Along with the Irish material, the collection included reprints of Tonna's industrial novel *Helen Fleetwood* (1841) and her *Personal Recollections* (1841), together with extensive selections from her poetic writing.

Known in her day as a social reformer as well as an evangelical writer, Tonna was also the author of *The Wrongs of Woman* (1843), a denunciation, through moral tales, of contemporary working conditions for English women and children. The subject of legal discrimination against women was powerfully explored by poet and novelist Caroline Norton whose notorious life-story (accused by her husband of an affair with Lord Melbourne and as a result separated from her children) provided a model for George Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways* (1885). Norton was a powerful campaigner for women's rights in works such as *The Wife and Woman's Reward* (1835), the controversial pamphlet *English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1854), and the quasi-autobiographical novel *Stuart of Dunleath* (1851). Other significant discourses on the 'woman question' include Anna Hall's *Tales of Woman's Trials* (1835), two with Irish settings, and Sydney Owenson's historical chronicle *Woman and her Master: a History of the Female Sex from the Earliest Period* (1840). The long publishing career of Owenson ('Lady Morgan') extended from *Wild Irish Girl* (1806) to *The Princess; or the Beguine* (1835) set in England and Belgium, her collection of essays *The Book without a Name* (1841) and memoir *Passages from my Autobiography* (1859), published

in the year of her death.

Travel literature about Ireland authored by women also proliferated from Dublin and London publishers in the 1830s and 1840s. Louth-born Selina Bunbury(1802–82), author of many acclaimed volumes based on her travels in Europe, published two Irish narratives in the 1830s: *Tales of My Country* (1833) and *Recollections of Ireland* (1839). In 1839 *Rambles in the South of Ireland during the Year 1838* by Lady Henrietta Georgiana Chatterton was published, its author the English-born wife of Sir William Chatterton of Castlemahon, County Cork. Chatterton explained to readers that her objective was to remove some of the prejudices which rendered many of her peers afraid either to travel or to reside in Ireland, and two volumes detailing the 'charming', 'pretty' and picturesque ensued; a second edition was required within two months of publication.

III. The Great Irish Famine, Land and Politics

In July 1847 the American traveller Asenath Nicholson, then on her second lengthy visit to Ireland, began a year-long journey around the famine-stricken districts in the west, north and south of Ireland; her ensuing account was first published in London in 1850 as part of her work *Lights and Shades of Ireland* and republished in New York the following year as *Annals of the Famine*. The strength of Nicholson's reporting, evident also in her pre-famine narrative *Ireland's Welcome to the Stranger* (1847), lies in her distinctive combination of social detail and pointed political analysis.[15] Other eye-witness reports of the Famine by women travellers include the diaries of Scottish-born Elizabeth Grant Smith, whose husband was aCounty Wicklow landowner and the correspondence of the now-aged Maria Edgeworth which featured lengthy exchanges on the topic of famine and economy with the political economist Richard Jones and philanthropic campaigns with her American contacts.

One of the first, and least known, literary depictions of the 1840s famine was Cork author Mary Anne Hoare's 'Sketch of Famine', first published in *Howitt's Journal*, the short-lived London radical weekly, on 24 April 1847. The quasi-fictional sketch details the recent arrival of the potato blight and the desperate strategies for survival employed by famine victims, in comparison with which, Hoare wrote, the horrors of Dante's Ugolino 'fade into nothingness'. In 1851 her *Shamrock Leaves*, a collection of tales and sketches gathered 'from the famine-stricken fields' of Ireland, was published in Dublin and London and explicitly addressed itself

to ‘our English brethren’, emphasising the extent of suffering in Ireland and the importance of private philanthropy.[16]

The 1840s famine returned intermittently as a subject for fiction in the second half of the century, and these novels offer an early insight into the controversies concerning causation and significance that continue to characterize historical writing on the famine. Novelist Mary Anne (Madden) Sadlier (1820–1903) – who had emigrated from Cavan to Canada in 1844, where she married James Sadlier, the influential publisher – employed the famine as a backdrop to the evils of proselytism in her novel N*ew Lights; or, Life in Galway* (1853). In contrast, Limerick-born Elizabeth Hely Walshe (1835–68) focused in her famine novel *Golden Hills*, published by the London Religious Society, on the charitable work by a Protestant landowning family. The *Chronicles of Castle Cloyne* (1884), by Clare author Margaret Brew, is one of the most successful of such novels and presents two concurrent narratives, that of the landlord family, the Dillons of Castle Cloyne, and of their tenant Oonagh MacDermott, ‘to show how universal was the action of the Famine’ with effects on ‘peer and peasant, landlord and tenant, the home of the great, and the cabin of the lowly’.[17] In these later narratives, scenes of famine death, which characterized many early depictions, largely recede from view, supplanted by meditations on famine’s place in a developmental narrative of progress and modernisation. The agents of such renewal differ from novel to novel: a reinvigorated Catholic gentry in the work of Margaret Brew, or, in a plot increasingly common in Irish fiction after 1870 (Brew’s *Chronicles* and Annie Keary’s *Castle Daly* (1875) being among many examples), returning Irish emigrants. Yet the very recurrence of famine as a narrative subject in the years after 1850, together with the enthusiastic welcome expressed by English reviewers towards these novels as explanations of ‘the abiding Irish difficulty’, attest to the continuing potency of their subject in a period too often simplified as ‘silent’ with regard to the Great Famine.[18] Relatedly, the use of of sensational or sentimental tropes by these writers is also deserving of more critical attention; for example in an insightful re-examination of the work of Sadlier, many of whose novels dealt with immigrant themes, Marjorie Howes has shown how the prolific author employed the genre of didactic sentimental fiction that was ‘most popular in her day … and found herself rejecting or revising some of its most distinctive literary and ideological features’.[19]

Castle Daly: The Story of an Irish Home Thirty Years Ago (1875) by Annie Keary (1825–79), was first serialised in *Macmillan’s Magazin*e. In Keary’s novel the period of the Great Famine

and 1848 rebellion is presented as a crucial time of transition, between new systems of economic reform and an older, more feudal order fated to decline. The novel's dynamism comes from its lengthy, and well-sustained, dialogues between Irish and English characters, a structure that facilitates the close scrutiny of potentially abstract economic and social policies, as well as the acknowledgement of alternative perspective; the future, however, is clearly in the hands of the English reforming and modernising agent, John Thornley. English reviewers of the novel welcomed the story as an illumination of current political problems, and the novel also enjoyed a large degree of popularity in Irish intellectual circles. The *Irish Monthly* recorded in April 1886 that Keary's novel 'was singled out by so un- English an Irishman as Mr John O'Leary, in a lecture at Cork, as singularly and almost solely worthy of high praise out of the hosts of so-called Irish novels written of late' and the *Cabinet of Irish Literature* (1879–80), an influential 4-volume anthology, judged it the best Irish story of the current generation.[20] Yet its Yorkshire-born author had spent a total of two weeks in Ireland, and the novel was based largely on her readings in Irish history, together with the recollections of her Irish-born clergyman father.[21]

The topic of the 1860s Fenian campaigns makes a much rarer appearance in Irish fiction of the period with the important exception of Charlotte Grace O'Brien's *Light and Shade* (1878), a comprehensive treatment of the disparate elements within the Fenian movement whichrepeatedly insists on the authenticity of its sources. Its author was the daughter of 1848 veteran, William Smith O'Brien, and a pioneering and influential social reformer with regard to the conditions experienced by emigrants, particularly those of young women, travelling to Britain and America.

The land wars of 1879–81 and the later 'Plan of Campaign' agitation (1886–91), in contrast, received much more attention from Irish female novelists. Between 1880 and 1890, numerous 'land' novels appeared, in which contemporary facts and the conventions of fiction find, an often-uneasy combination. One of the first was *A Boycotted Household* (1881) by Letitia McClintock, published in London by the influential Smith and Elder publication house (also publishers of Matthew Arnold), and detailing the 'reign of terror' experienced by a landlord's family between late 1879 and early 1881, together with the boycotting of one of their tenants. Of the many contemporary such novels authored by women, of particular interest are Elizabeth Owens Blackburne Casey's *Hearts of Erin* (1882), Fannie Gallaher's *Thy Name is Truth* (1884), Rosa Mulholland's *Marcella Grace* (1886) and Emily Lawless's *Hurrish*

(1886), along with the 1888 novel *Plan of Campaign* by English novelist and historian Frances Mabel Robinson.

One female writer in this period made a significant, and since neglected, contribution to the development of urban realism. In 1880, the *Cabinet of Irish Literature* hailed May Laffan (Hartley) as 'to some extent the precursor of a new school in Irish fiction'.[22] Her first novel, *Hogan MP* (1876), provides a sharply observed portrait of contemporary middle-class society in a manner that may have influenced later authors Kate O'Brien and James Joyce. Between 1876 and 1887, Laffan published four other novels and three volumes of short fiction. These include a pioneering depiction of Irish urban slums in the 1879 work 'Flitters, Tatters and the Counsellor' – a portrait of a day in the lives of three street children, – which ran to six editions in Ireland and England and at least two in America within the first year of publication, and was approvingly cited by John Ruskin and by W.B. Yeats. Of Laffan's depiction of Dublin merchant life and petty politics, Robert Lee Woolf, an early champion of her work, noted that 'the nineteenth century has at last caught up with Ireland and the spectacle is not pretty'.[23]

IV. Irish Women Novelists and the Literary Marketplace

During her lifetime, Antrim-born novelist Charlotte Riddell (1832–1906) was one of the most acclaimed writers in Britain of both sensation fiction and stories of the supernatural. Her longer ghost stories, such as 'Fairy Water' and 'The Haunted River', appeared in the highly popular Christmas annuals published by Routledge and by F. Enos Arnold. Riddell, heralded as 'Novelist of the City' because of her depictions of contemporary London business and trade, makes lively use of the strong materialist element underlying Gothic fiction: her heroes are usually lawyers' clerks and other humble functionaries who secure fortune as a result of their enduring otherworldly visitations. Irish settings are employed in a handful of her works, including her 1888 novel *Nun's Curse*, its marriage plot between Irish landowner and peasant girl an especially pessimistic 'allegory of union', and also in some later stories, most notably 'The Banshee's Warning', also entitled 'Hertford O'Donnell's Warning', which has been frequently republished in anthologies of ghost fiction.

These years also saw the emergence of many professional female writers who moved from Ireland to London to pursue literary careers. One example is Frances Browne

(1816–79), ‘the blind poetess of Donegal’ and author of highly successful children’s stories, as well as novels such as the autobiographical *My Share of the World* (1861) and *The Hidden Sin* (1866). Frances Cashel Hoey (1830–1908) moved to London in 1855 and was the author of numerous sensational novels, including *A House of Cards* (1868) and *A Golden Sorrow* (1872), in the mode of contemporaries Dickens and Wilkie Collins and which were highly popular in the 1870s and 1880s. Many of these women moved to London because of family financial difficulties: the death of her father prompted the young Charlotte Cowan (Riddell), to move to London in 1855; losses in income caused Annie Hector’s family to leave Dublin for London when she was nineteen; and the Huguenot family of May Crommelin (c.1850–c.1930), later an acclaimed writer of fiction and of travel narratives, moved from Down to London when she was a child because of the ‘land troubles’. Hector, Riddell, Crommelin and Margaret Hungerford were the four Irish-born writers featured in Helen Black’s 1893 *Notable Women Authors of the Day*, a popular series of entertaining biographical sketches and interviews.

The careers of these authors included many notable controversies regarding copyright and authorship, linked in no small part to the subsequent eclipse and critical neglect of their work. Though Julia Kavanagh (1824–77) is now more likely to be remembered for her biographical studies in such work as *English Women of Letters* (1863), her novels achieved considerable popularity in their day, evidenced in the many international editions of her work published by Tauchnitz in whose lists she regularly appeared along with Hector, Hoey and Riddell. Kavanagh was born in Thurles, County Tipperary and spent much of her early life in France, which provides the scene for many of her novels, including *Madeline* (1848) and *Nathalie* (1850), an engaging coming-of-age novel praised by Charlotte Brontë and said to have influenced her *Villette*. In 1857, Kavanagh’s reputation suffered when her father, Peter Morgan Kavanagh, falsely attributed his inferior novel *The Hobbies* to his daughter.
In 1886 Frances Hodgson Burnett, author of children’s stories such as *The Secret Garden*, began in the New York periodical St Nicholas a series entitled ‘Stories from the Lost Fairy Book, Retold by the Child Who Read Them’. The ‘lost’ book was immediately revealed to be Irish author Frances Browne’s well-known *Granny’s Wonderful Chair* and *Its Tales of Fairy Times* (1856), editions of which, despite Burnett’s claims to have searched unsuccessfully in both England and America, had appeared throughout the 1880s. In the case of Hoey, arguments regarding the ownership of copyright dogged her later career and her authorship of a number of novels more usually credited to the writer Edmund Yates remains a matter of

dispute.

Unlike many of her contemporaries, Margaret Hungerford, known as 'The Duchess' (c. 1854-97) achieved a wide audience without leaving her County Cork home; of her thirty works of fiction, mainly sentimental fiction, the most famous was *Molly Bawn* (1878) which had large sales in England, America and Australia. In an 1893 interview Hungerford explained that 'first sheets of the novels in hand are bought from her for American publications, months before there is any chance of their being completed'.[24] Yet, for the most part, these careers – along with the careers of male writers such as Edmund Downey, Richard Dowling and Justin McCarthy – fit more or less the pattern described by Rosa Mulholland in her article, 'Wanted an Irish Novelist', published in the *Irish Monthly* in 1891: 'the noticeable fact that writers who produce one good Irish novel, giving promise of store to come, almost invariably cease to be Irish at that point, and afterwards cast the tributary stream of their powers into the universal river of English fiction'. And as Mulholland sardonically concluded, 'Yet how can we quarrel with any of these bright spirits if they prefer to live their lives pleasantly and in affluent circumstances in the busy, working, paying world of London, rather than content themselves with the ideally uncomfortable conditions of him who elects to chew the cud of sweet and bitter Irish fancies, with his feet in an Irish bog and his head in a rainbow?'[25]

V. Poetry and the *Nation*

The 1840s newspaper *The Nation*, founded in 1842 by Thomas Davis, Charles Gavan Duffy and John Blake Dillon, provided a key forum for mid nineteenth-century female poets and writers such as Olivia Knight and Elizabeth Willoughby (Treacy) Varian, and most influentially 'Speranza ', 'Mary ' and 'Eva ', who were known as the 'Three Graces of the Young Ireland movement. '[26] The best known of these, 'Speranza ' was Jane Francesa Elgee (1821-96), the daughter of a Dublin solicitor, who in 1851 married William Wilde and in 1854 gave birth to her second son, Oscar. Her writing career began with the publication of her first poem in the 21 February issue of the *Nation*, under the pseudonym 'Speranza ', the Italian word for 'hope '. She published a number of poems there between 1846 and 1848, and in July 1848 her defiant prose piece 'Jacta Alea Est ' ('The Die is Cast ') famously led to the temporary closure of the paper; on its republication on 1 September 1849, the paper's editors chose to display prominently a 'Speranza ' poem.

'Mary ' was the penname of Ellen Mary Patrick Downing (1829-1869), daughter of the resident medical officer at the Cork Fever Hospital.[27] Influenced by the writings of Davis and Denis Florence MacCarthy, she published her first poem in the *Nation* in May 1845 and published some forty poems there by February 1848, when she left to write for the more radical *United Irishman*. She was engaged for a short period of time to Young Irelander Joseph Brennan; and the conventional account in nationalist historiography describes how she stopped writing after his exile and soon after died of heartbreak. However Downing continued to live – and write – for some twenty years after Brennan's exile: in 1849 she began a novitiate as a Presentation nun, which was discontinued in 1851 due to ill health; she continued to live as a Dominican Tertiary lay sister until her death. In 1874 a selection of her religious poems was published in a volume entitled *Voices from the Heart.*

The third these poets 'Eva ' was born Mary Eva Kelly (c. 1825 -1910) in Headford, Co. Galway in a family of landed gentry who were mostly Unionist in sympathies.[28] She published a number of poems in the *Nation* under a variety of pseudonyms before choosing 'Eva ' which she first used for her 'Lament for Thomas Davis ', published when she was only twenty. Following the 1848 rebellion, her fiancé Kevin Izod O'Doherty was transported to Van Diemen's Land and the couple, married on his release in 1854, then settled in Australia. By January 1861 'Eva' was a salaried contributor to the Sydney newspaper *Freeman's Journal* and published some 51 poems there in that year alone; a number of her surviving poems such as 'Queensland' and 'Ad Astra' engage interestingly with the developing national image of Australian identity. Individual poems continued to be anthologized in Ireland and the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; a collection of her poems was published in San Francisco in 1877, with a new edition published in Ireland in 1909.

Detailed engagement with the works of these female poets has been sparse in Irish literary studies, with attention paid to their lives mostly in the context of their more famous male relatives. A further limiting factor has been the enduring critical condescension to the more popular poetic forms of ballad, lament and religious verse; thus while the poetry by the women of the *Nation* played a strong role in mid-century politicization, with a continuing circulation of their work in late-century diasporic circles, they are now largely omitted from studies of Irish poetry under the Union where the lyric poem remains the paramount object of study.[29] Once again, the critical categories of 'minor literature' and cultural hybridity, which

have proved hospitable to the recovery of many less well-known male poets, fail to accommodate popular writings by women writers or to comprehend their influence. Leah Price's reminder that it is 'in the process of recognizing commonplaces that readers learn to recognise themselves within a common culture ' points to a potential alternative literary history for these writers, focused less on an aesthetic of distinctiveness and rupture and more on communal reception and intergenerational dissemination.[30] Further inclusions in such a history would include the poetry of Ellen O'Leary (1831-89), sister of Fenian John O'Leary, and Fanny Parnell (1848-1882), sister of Charles Stuart Parnell), their early works published in the Fenian *Irish People* (1863-1865) and later works in the *Boston Pilot*, the most influential Irish newspaper in late ninteenth-century America. Parnell was known as the 'patriot poet' with her best-known poem 'Hold the Harvest' described by Michael Davitt as 'the Marseillaise of the Irish peasant.' Her post-humously published 'Post-Mortem', also titled 'After Death', which appeared in the *Nation* on 12 August 1882 shortly after her sudden death in the United States (aged only 33), was much anthologised in Ireland and America in later decades

V. ***Illustrious Irishwomen*** **and Victorian Prosopography**

In her 2004 work, *How to Make It as a Woman: Collective Biographical History from Victoria to the Present*, Alison Booth uncovered 930 examples of all-female collections published in English between 1830 and 1940 and suggested that 'in form and function, the hundreds of collections of female biographies might be the lost ancestors of late twentieth-century women's studies'.[31] The relations between women's prospography and constructions of nationhood was, however, outside of Booth's area of interest and the differing role of collective biographical history in Irish, Canadian, American, Indian and British contexts remains unexplored. As subjects and authors of collective biographies, Irish women writers represent a significant presence in the nineteenth-century tradition and, as the century progressed, this 'roll of fame' was constituted as distinctively 'Irish' in revealing ways. Early prosographical works by Irish women writers include those of Sydney Owenson (*Woman and Her Master,* 1840) and four collections by Thurles-born author Julia Kavanagh: *Woman in France during the Eighteenth Century* (1850), *Women of Christianity, Exemplary for Acts of Piety and Charity* (1852), *French Women of Letters* (1862) and *English Women of Letters* (1862).

The first instance of a specifically Irish female collective biography is Elizabeth Owens Blackburne Casey's fascinating *Illustrious Irishwomen*, published in two volumes by Tinsley in London in 1877. The first volume contains entries on twenty historical and mythical women, divided into three sections: 'Early Irish Period' (including Queen Macha, Méave, and Saint Brigit), 'Medieval Period' (including pirate-queen 'Grainne O'Mailly'), and 'Famous Actresses' (including Margaret 'Peg' Woffington, Kitty Clive, Dorothy Jordan and Catherine Hayes). Volume 2 is mostly devoted to 'literary women', offering fifteen biographical sketches of writers such as Charlotte Brooke, Mary Tighe, Maria Edgeworth, Felicia Hemans, Sydney Lady Morgan, Countess of Blessington, Helen Selina Countess of Dufferin and Lady Stirling-Maxwell (Caroline Norton). A final section on 'Miscellaneous' completes the volume, comprising 'the Lady Freemason', 'the Beautiful Gunnings', 'the Ladies of Llangollen', Lady Louisa Conolly and Sarah Curran. Casey's source material was extensively researched, ranging over manuscripts and documents from the Royal Irish Academy, Trinity College and the British Museum Library, and is itemised over four pages as part of a postscript to the collection. Her evaluations of literary writers often contain a ringing edge, for example in her concluding verdict on the work of Maria Edgeworth: 'Miss Edgeworth is worthy of the highest admiration of the soberer kind. She does not inspire enthusiasm; and she would have been even more useful – as she would have been infinitely more attractive – had she thought and written less about utility'.[32]

The fate of Casey's own career provides a striking reminder, by way of close, of the political perils for some Irish writers in this period. Born in Co. Meath in 1848, by 1880 she was at the height of her career as a successful novelist and writer based in London, working under the *nom de plume* 'E.Owens Blackburne'. Her 1882 novel, *The Heart of Erin*, subtitled *An Irish Story of Today*, presented itself as a vehicle for better understanding between England and Ireland and castigated contemporary newspapers for their ignorance and misrepresentation of Irish news. However in a review which appeared on 20 May 1882, two weeks after the notorious Phoenix Park murders of the British Chief Secretary of Ireland and his under secretary , the *Athenaeum* sharply criticized Casey as 'a thoroughgoing partisan of the Land League'; this proved to be her last published novel and she died in penury in Dublin in 1894.

---

[1] Charlotte Riddell, *A Struggle for Fame* (1883: Dublin: Tramp Press, 2014), p. 48. See Margaret Kelleher, 'Charlotte Riddell's *A Struggle for Fame*: The Field of Women's Literary Production,' *Colby Quarterly* 36.2 (2000), pp. 116-131.

[2] Riddell, *A Struggle for Fame*, p. 185.
[3] Parts of this chapter are drawn from research conducted for my chapter on Irish fiction and drama, 1830 to 1890, in the *Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, eds. Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), pp. 449-499, and my contribution on Irish women's writings, 1845 to 1890, to the *Field Day of Anthology of Irish Writing: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, vol. 5, eds. Angela Bourke et al., (Cork: Field Day Publications, 2002), pp. 924-975.
[4] Maria Edgeworth to Michael Pakenham Edgeworth, 19 February 1834; reproduced in Frances Edgeworth, *A Memoir of Maria Edgeworth*, 3 vols. (privately printed, 1867), iii, pp. 87–8.
[5] Lady Morgan (Sydney Owenson), *The Book of the Boudoir*, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1829), i, p. vii.
[6] Rolf and Magda Loeber's *A Guide to Irish Fiction, 1650-1900* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006) provides an invaluable bibliographical resource; for an electronic edition, see http://www.lgif.ie.
[7] See Lennard Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (1986; Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1991), pp. 212-3.
[8] See David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1993), pp. 125–62 and Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verso, 1995), pp. 145–225.
[9] Ina Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 131.
[10] See Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 17.
[11] *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* 2, 11 (February 1833), p. 554.
[12] Maureen Keane, *Mrs S. C. Hall: A Literary Biography* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1997), pp. 4–5.
[13] Anna Maria Hall, *The Whiteboy*, 2 vols. (1845; reprinted New York: Garland Press, 1979), ii, p. 8.
[14] Charlotte Tonna, *The Rockites* (London: Nisbet, 1829), pp. 1–2.
[15] See the biography of Asenath Nicholson*, Compassionate Stranger*, by Maureen O'Rourke Murphy (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2015).
[16] See Margaret Kelleher, *The Feminization of Famine: Expressions of the Inexpressible?* (Cork and Durham, NC: Cork University Press and Duke University Press, 1997), ch. 2.
[17] Margaret Brew, *The Chronicles of Castle Cloyne*, 3 vols. (1884; reprinted New York: Garland Press, 1979), i, p. viii.
[18] A selection of famine accounts from Irish and British fiction (1847-1920), is provided in *Recollecting Hunger: An Anthology*, edited by Marguérite Corporaal, Christopher Cusack and Lindsay Janssen (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2012).
[19] Marjorie Howes, 'Discipline, Sentiment and the Irish-American Public: Mary Ann Sadlier's Popular Fiction', *Éire-Ireland* vol. 40, nos 1 and 2 (2005), pp. 140-169, p.169. A listing of Sadlier's work is provided in *Loebers, Guide to Irish Fiction*, pp. 1155-1163.
[20] *Irish Monthly* 14 (1886), p. 201.
[21] See Eliza Keary, *Memoir of Annie Keary* (London: Macmillan, 1882).
[22] Charles Read and T. P. O'Connor, eds. *The Cabinet of Irish Literature*, 4 vols. (London and Glasgow: Blackie, 1879–80), iv, p. 296.
[23] Robert Lee Woolf, introduction to new edition of May Laffan (Hartley), *Flitters, Tatters and the Counsellor and Other Sketches* (1881; New York: Garland Press, 1989), p. vii.
[24] See Helen Black, *Notable Women Authors of the Day* (Glasgow: Bryce, 1893), p. 113.
[25] Rosa Mulholland, 'Wanted an Irish Novelist', *Irish Monthly* 19 (July 1891), pp. 369-70.
[26] Brigitte Anton, 'Women of the *Nation*', *History Ireland* 1.3 (Autumn 1993), pp. 34-7.
[27] These and other biographical details are drawn from Anne Ulry Colman's invaluable *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Irish Women Poets* (Galway: Kenny's Bookshop, 1996).
[28] Colman, *Dictionary*, p. 130.

[29] Exceptions include Antoinette Quinn's section on women and literary nationalism, 1845-1916, in *Field Day Anthology*, vol. 5, pp. 895-923, and Matthew Campbell's discussion of the *Nation* female poets in *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, vol. 1, pp. 518-21.
[30] Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 104.
[31] Alison Booth, *How to Make It as a Woman: Collective Biographical History from Victoria to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), **p. 3.**
[32] Elizabeth Owens Blackburne (Casey), *Illustrious Irishwomen: being memoirs of some of the most noted Irishwomen from the earliest ages to the present century* 2 vols (London: Tinsley, 1877), vol. 2, p. 92.