An Illustrious Past: Victorian Prosopography and Irish Women Writers

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Victorian Prosopography

In her 2004 work, *How to Make It as a Woman: Collective Biographical History from Victoria to the Present*, Alison Booth has illustrated the popularity, during the Victorian period, of collected life narratives of women writers: 'It is an old girl network that long precedes second-wave feminist commitments, and that exposes the limitations of the obligatory memorialization and recovery of "our" role models.'[1] The term 'prosopography' means literally the 'writing of masks', and has emerged as an accepted term for collective biography or multibiography: Lawrence Stone, writing in 1971, offers a useful definition of prosopography as 'the investigation of the common background characteristics of a group of actors in history by means of a collective study of their lives'.[2] Booth's work uncovers 930 examples of all-female collections published in English between 1830 and 1940 (not including biographical collections of male and female subjects) and suggests that 'in form and function, the hundreds of collections of female biographies might be the lost ancestors of late twentieth-century women's studies'.[3] Popular examples include works by Anna Jameson whose *Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical and Historical* (later published as *Shakespeare's Heroines*) first published in 1832, had numerous reprintings and editions in Britain and the United States throughout the nineteenth century.

This genre is, however, generally accorded very little literary value, female biographies and collections of multibiographies being especially neglected, or dismissed as ephemeral. Where such biographical collections are mentioned in literary and cultural studies, it is only in passing, with the occasional and brief quotation from their prefatory material. With the striking exception of Booth's monumental study, there has been little or no analysis of the contexts of women's prosopography, of the specific and diverse contents of such biographical works, or of the significance and reception-history of a genre which possesses many illuminating features. Given the interest in recent decades in canon-formation and 'cultural capital',[4] and the significance of the 'retrieval' of past writers as a literary-historical activity, this neglect is all the more regrettable.

One illuminating aspect of prosopographical writing is the relationship posited between narrator/editor and the biographical subject, sometimes idiosyncratically phrased but very often couched in tones of high seriousness which belie the ephemeral status accorded to the genre. Thus Elizabeth Owens Blackburne Casey, in the introduction to her two-volume collection *Illustrious Irishwomen: being memoirs of some of the most noted Irishwomen from the earliest ages to the present century*, published by London publisher Tinsley in 1877, writes:

> In her beauty and in her obscurity, Ireland has been called, and not inappropriately, 'the Cinderella of the Empire'. Her children, when opportunity offers, possess the capabilities of achieving much that is praiseworthy; for Nature has never been niggard of her physical and intellectual gifts to the Irish race; and to preserve in a collected form the names and achievements of some of the more gifted daughters of Erin, has been the silent patriotism of my life.[5]

Another significant relationship, usually more implicitly conveyed, is that between subject and audience/readership. Booth defines one aspect of that relationship as 'self-help' i.e. prosopographical or multibiographical works function as types of self-help manuals whereby readers identify models or exemplars from the past. A related dimension is that of cultural affiliation; as critic Leah Price has observed 'in the process of recognizing commonplaces' –

or in this case common role-models – 'readers learn to recognize themselves within a common culture.'[6] Prosopographical works also possess complex collective and collaborative dimensions, tracing women's collaborative work, mutual influences and cultural exchanges, and are occasionally themselves the product of literary collaborations; these are features, however, which our current critical tools, mostly deployed in the construction of individualised histories, are ill-equipped to evaluate.

Irish Women's Prosopography

Betraying perhaps some insecurity as to the perceived seriousness of her subject, Booth is anxious to argue that collections of women's lives serve as more than self-help manuals or eulogies, and appear 'to have been indispensable aids in the formation of nationhood as well as of social difference'.[7] However, Booth's interest in the formation of nationhood is completely Anglo-centred: the role of prosography in other Victorian contexts, whether American, Canadian and Irish, lies outside her field of interest. As subjects and authors of collective biographies, Irish women writers represent a significant presence in the nineteenth-century tradition; as the century progresses, this 'roll of fame' is constituted as distinctively 'Irish' in significant and revealing ways.

A number of Irish-born women are among the most famous authors of prosopographical works, including Anna Jameson and Julia Kavanagh. Jameson's Irish connections are admittedly slight: born in Dublin in 1794, daughter of minature painter Denis Brownell Murphy, she and her family left Ireland when Anna was four. Outside of her status in English letters (which has grown in recent years), she is more famously enlisted in another national narrative – that of Canadian studies where her travel journal *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (1838) is seen as a foundational text.[8] Yet it is tempting to see her interest in biographical writing as having some personal origin, traceable in a series of childhood disruptions experienced by Anna and her sisters and detailed by her first biographer Gerardine Macpherson.[9] Jameson also belonged to a powerful network of women writers of the period, including Harriet Martineau (whose barbed obituary of Jameson in 1861 included 'Irish vehemence' among a number of unfavourable qualities[10]), Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The decade succeeding the publication of her popular *Characteristics of Women* saw the publication of many notable analyses of women's condition, both historical and contemporary, by writers associated with Ireland. These included Sydney Owenson's (Lady Morgan) historical study *Woman and her Master* (1840), described by historian Mary O'Dowd as 'constituting the first history of women by an Irish woman', of which two volumes were published from a planned multi-volume project.[11] Studies with a more contemporary focus on women's 'condition' include Anna Maria Hall's *Tales of Woman's Trials* (1835), Caroline Norton's *The Wife and Woman's Reward* (1835) and Charlotte Tonna's *The Wrongs of Woman* (1843), the last of these republished in 1845 as part of Tonna's collected works, with an introduction by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Between 1850 and 1862, Thurles-born author Julia Kavanagh produced four influential collections, *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).[12] Kavanagh, born in 1824, spent much of her early life in France, scene of her novels *Madeline* (1848) and *Nathalie* (1850), the latter a possible influence on Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*.[13] Her first work, comprising sketches of figures such as Madame de Maintenon, Madame de Pompadour, Madame ('the nun') Tencin, and Madame du Chatelet the mistress of Voltaire, positioned itself firmly as a historical study of female power:

> In times still recent, in a nation celebrated for its power and greatness, and in an age which gave to thought a vast and magnificent, even though perilous development, a series of most remarkable women exercised a power so extensive, and yet so complete, as to be unparalleled in the history of their sex…. This power was not always pure or

> good; it was often corrupt in its source, evil and fatal in its results; but it was power. Though the histories of the period have never fully or willingly acknowledged its existence, their silence cannot efface that which has been; and without that rule of woman, so reluctantly recognised, many of their pages of statesman's policy, court intrigue, civil strife, or foreign war, need never have been written.[14]

Kavanagh's later volumes of English and French women of letters have been seen by a number of critics as antecedents of recent feminist retrieval;[15] the self-characterisation of her work in terms of 'rescue' or 'retrieval' is strikingly familiar almost 150 years later and serves as a salutary reminder of the cycles of cultural 'forgetfulness':

> … partly because I felt that a woman may worthily employ such power as God has given her in rescuing from forgetfulness the labours and the names once honoured and celebrated of other women, I undertook this work. My object has been to show how far, for the last two centuries and more, women have contributed to the formation of the modern novel in the two great literatures of modern times – the French and the English.[16]

Both volumes's contents are confined to dead novelists (Madame de Genlis, Madame de Staël, Aphra Behn, Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen etc), a choice of genre and historical periodization which she defends stoutly:

> And the novel is not merely the great feature of modern literature, it is also the only branch in which women have acquired undisputed eminence. Here they owe nothing to indulgence or courtesy…. In this selection none but dead authors, or such as have already stood the test of time, are included. Living or recent writers are still our own. The dead, the now forgotten, and the once famous, they who delighted and often led the world of readers, but whose names are passing away from minds their works have ceased to charm, are, like sovereigns and conquerors in their graves, alone amenable to history.[17]

(Five years prior to the publication of these biographical sketches, Kavanagh had herself been embroiled in a curious and damaging authorial controversy involving her father Morgan Peter Kavanagh, prompted by Morgan's wrongful attribution, aided by his publisher Newby, of co-authorship of his novel *The Hobbies* to his daughter.[18])

Irish women regularly appear as subjects within nineteenth-century collective biographies, the most frequent choices being writers Sydney Owenson, Maria Edgeworth and Lady Blessington.[19] Unsurprisingly though also quite reductively, Edgeworth is generally nominated by collections that emphasise moral exemplarity: for example, Charles Bruce's *The Book of Noble Englishwomen: Lives Made Illustrious by Heroism, Goodness, and Great Attainments* (1875), Sarah Hale's *Lessons from Women's Lives* (1867) and Anne Thackeray Ritchie's *A Book of Sibyls* (1883).[20] Owenson, on the other hand, is made to serve a discourse of exceptionality and the remarkable in collections such as William Henry Davenport Adams's *Celebrated Women Travellers* (1883) and his *Child-Life and Girlhood of Remarkable Women* (c. 1883), James Parton's *Daughters of Genius* (1885) which promised sketches of 'women eccentric and peculiar, from the most recent and authentic sources', and Frances Gerard's *Some Fair Hibernians* (1897). Less predictably she enters the roll-call of 'select memoirs of pious ladies in various ranks of public and priviate life' constructed by Rev. Thomas Timpson in his collection of *British Female Biography* (1846).

The construction of a specifically Irish female collective biography is relatively speaking quite late, the first example being Elizabeth Owens Blackburne Casey's two volumes of *Illustrious Irishwomen*, first published by Tinsley in London in 1877. Irish male prosography had a earlier genesis in J. Wills's six volume collection *Lives of Illustrious and Distinguished Irishmen* (1840-1847), succeeded in 1878 by Thomas Clarke Luby's *Lives and Times of Illustrious and Representative Irishmen*. By the end of the nineteenth century, Irish female prosopography was a well-established tradition evidenced by such works as Catherine Hamilton's *Women Writers: Their Works and Ways* (1892) and her later *Notable Irishwomen* (1904); Frances Gerard's *Some Celebrated Irish Beauties* (1895) and *Some Fair Hibernians*

(1897); and Katherine O'Keefe O'Mahoney's *Famous Irishwomen* (1907). By the early decades of the twentieth century, as Mary O'Dowd has noted, 'biographies of Irish women had often a more narrowly focused political or religious purpose and concentrated, in particular, on virtuous nationalism women', L.M. McCraith's *The Romance of Irish Heroines* (1913), Helena Concannon's *Women of 'Ninety-Eight* (1919) and her *Irish Nuns in Penal Days* (1931) being just some examples.[21]

Illustrious Irishwomen: The Case of Elizabeth Owens Blackburne (Casey)

Elizabeth Casey was born in 1848 in Slane, Co. Meath, 'daughter of Andrew Casey and his wife (née Mills)' and descendant of Richard Blackburne of Mulladillon House, Co. Meath.[22] Allibone's dictionary records that 'when about eleven years old she became blind, but her sight was restored by an operation at the age of eighteen; she then began a course of study, and at the examination for women at Trinity College, Dublin, took the first medal and a certificate'.[23] According to the biographical headnote supplied in the Read and O'Connor's *Cabinet of Irish Literature* (1879-1880), 'the late Sir William Wilde succeeded where another physician had failed, and Miss Casey had the happiness of recovering her sight'.[24] Read and O'Connor also mention that Casey had not received 'any regular education'and was largely self-instructed; together the circumstances of her life lead them to emphasise their subject's significance as exemplar 'of the strength of will and tenacity of purpose by which women have so often shown their ability to overcome apparently insurmountable obstacles'.[25]

Casey's first writings appeared in Irish periodicals including *The Nation* which serialised in the early 1870s her novel *In at the Death*, later entitled *A Woman Scorned*; this was one of the first uses of the *nom de plume* 'E. Owens Blackburne' which she employed for the rest of her career. In 1873 Casey moved to London where she pursued what eventually proved to be a quite successful career as journalist, novelist and author of short stories. Her novel *Molly Carew* is partly an autobiographical study of the obstacles she faced in the London scene, comparable with the contemporary novel *Struggle for Fame* (1883) by Irish-born novelist Charlotte Riddell, or Julia Kavanagh's earlier *Rachel Gray* (1856). As an Irish-born professional writer working in London, Casey belonged to a dynamic but now largely neglected generation of such writers – male and female – who achieved prominent positions in journalism and literary production. These included Riddell, May Crommelin, Annie Hector ('Mrs Alexander'), Justin McCarthy, Richard Dowling, Charles Anderson Read and T.P. O'Connor. The handsome four-volume *Cabinet of Irish Literature*, completed by O'Connor and Read's widow following the death of the 36 year old Read in 1878, is itself a striking embodiment of the cultural confidence and self-assertion of this generation of writers.[26]

Casey was the author of at least eight novels and a collection of stories: in her obituary published in the *Times* on 9 April 1894, she was described as having a 'distinct vein of originality' in many of her stories, while the *Athenaeum* which, as will be explored later was an influential reviewer of her work, announced the death of 'Miss Owens Blackburne, the writer of several clever novels'.[27] Read and O'Connor praise her for her depictions of 'Irish peasant life', noting that 'many of the scenes she paints remind one of Carleton', and also highlight her skill in weaving plots as well as her 'great power in imagining picturesque and dramatic delineations'.[28]

In 1877 Tinsley published E. Owens Blackburne's two-volume prosopographical work *Illustrious Irishwomen,* subtitled 'being memoirs of some of the most noted Irishowomen from the earliest ages to the present century', and dedicated 'by special permission to Her Grace, the Duchess of Marlborough'. The first volume contains entries on twenty women, divided into three sections: 'Early Irish Period' (including Queen Macha, Méave, and Saint Brigit), 'Medieval Period' (including the Countess of Desmond, 'the fair Geraldine' and '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 Duffering 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. In the preface to the volumes, Casey writes that she is 'painfully aware of the many deficiencies to be found in these volumes' but begs the indulgence of her public 'on the plea that this is the *first* time a work of this kind – dealing solely with memoirs of Irishwomen – has been attempted'. The criteria for inclusion of specific women is later explained in terms of 'how and what they have contributed to the history of their country – whether politically, socially, or intellectually' (p. 3) and Casey also explains how the advice of those 'more qualified to judge' had dissuaded her from her first intention to include notices of some living Irishwomen.

The list of contents for Volume 1 in particular may appear whimisical to today's readers, and in her chapters on Macha and Méave, for example, Casey acknowledges that 'it is absolutely impossible to tear them from the framework of romantic legend in which they are set' (p. 5). The biographical sketches make for easy reading in terms of narrative style and pace and sometimes light reading in terms of content; however they also frequently portray Casey's eye for practical detail, and in consequence carry more material substance. To give one instance, her account of the legendary meeting between Grace O'Malley and Queen Elizabeth is accompanied by a long footnote on skilled needlework in Ireland and on the status of embroideress in ancient Ireland in which quotations from 'the ancient Brehon Laws of Erinn' are used to support Casey's emphasis on the 'remarkable instance of protection to skilled industry so many ages ago' (pp. 98-9). Her evaluations of literary writers also contain a notable sardonic edge, for example in her concluding verdict on the work of Maria Edgeworth in volume 2 of the collection: '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' (p. 92).

Casey's source material is of significant interest, and is itemised over four pages as part of a postscript to the collection. This historical research is well deployed in her studies of Irish actresses such as Peg Woffington, which include extracts from broadsides in TCD and playbills in the British Library. The portraits of Kitty Clive (1711-1785) and Dorothy Jordan (1762-1816) provide a fascinating account of provincial theatre in Waterford in the eighteenth century; similarly the chapter on 'Miss O'Neill' (1791-1872), later Lady Wrixon Beecher, details private theatricals in Kilkenny in the early nineteenth century, and the chapter on Catherine Hayes (1828-1861) is quite informative on Limerick theatre. Casey herself notes somewhat modestly that the volumes 'represent the result of some years of reading' and expresses particular thanks to Richard Garnett 'the courteous superintendent of the Reading Room of the British Museum; and his obliging assistants' (preface). Her key sources include manuscripts and documents from the Royal Irish Academy, Trinity College and the British Museum Library, Sir William Wilde's catalogue of the Royal Irish Academy, *Annals of the Four Master*, Wills's *Lives of Celebrated Irishmen*, D. F. MacCarthy's *Poets and Dramatists of Ireland*, Allibone's *Biographical Dictionary*, Poole's *Index to Periodical Literature* – illustrating not only the importance of primary source material but also of the contemporary significance of new bibliographical sources and 'finding aids' such as Wilde's catalogue, Allibone's dictionary and the Poole index.[29]

The contemporary reviews of *Illustrious Irishwomen* are especially illuminating, not only in relation to the status of prosopographical collections at the time but more tellingly as to how a collection of sketches of Irishwomen could be seen to fit into current political narratives of British and Irish relations. A very negative review was offered by Dutton Cook, in the

Academy of 10 November 1877, which began: 'Of the personages whose lives are related in this book it must be said that several are not "Irishwomen" and that few are really "illustrious".'[30] As it progresses, the review tellingly wavers between a dismissal of the collection as amusing but ephemeral, and the acknowledgement of a more significant 'national' project:

> The book is of small literary value, and a degree of discomfiture will probably attend 'the silent patriotism', as it is called, of the author's efforts 'to preserve in a collected form the names and achievements of some of the most gifted daughters of Erin'. It is fair to say, however, that *Illustrious Irishwomen* is amusing reading enough, being largely composed of extracts from familiar biographies and books of anecdote.

In particular Cook is at pains to reject arguments for an Irish distinctiveness:

> The plan of the book is perhaps too catholic to display national characteristics to advantage, or to permit much exhibition of what is known as 'raciness of the soil'. The so-called Irishwomen here assembled do not really differ from Englishwomen; there is little in their experiences and proceedings that is distinctly typical of life and manners in the sister kingdom.

On the other hand, the *Athenaeum* of 10 November 1877 dedicated a substantial and largely positive four-column review to the collection.[31] In praising the author for her 'gallery of portraits' as 'remarkably graphic, consisting the slight elaboration bestowed upon any of them, sufficiently accurate in lineament for all purposes of popular enjoyment, and set in a framework of appreciate but not obtrusive criticism' the reviewer showed more than some understanding of the negotiations involved in the writing of collective biography. That no previous collection of the lives of illustrious Irishwomen existed was declared 'remarkable' and the studies of Irish women writers and actresses were warmly welcomed. Later in the review, Casey's 'expansive' definition of Irish ancestry (specifically, Queen Méave or Medbh as ancestor to Queen Mab) elicits a more teasing and not unfamiliar comment: 'Of course, we know that every one more or less – every one of any importance at least – was originally of Irish extraction, but we had thought that "the fairies' midwife" might at least be spared us.' A more serious context for the review, however, existed in the contemporary notoriety of the Irish Parliamentary Party who, in the months since July 1877, were at the height of their obstructionist policy, having forced an all night sitting on 31 July on the South African Bill.[32] This political background lends an additional force to the review's stance on the patriotic significance of Casey's project:

> Miss Blackburne is to be congratulated on the honourable realization of so honourable an ambition; her countrymen are to be congratulated on her 'silent patriotism' having at length found a fitting channel for utterance… She has thus shown in how attractive a direction Irish patriotism may develop itself when choosing the appropriate means – a lesson which was worth teaching.[33]

The Later Life of E. Owens Blackburne (Casey)

In 1882 Casey published what is arguably her best novel *The Heart of Erin*, an intricately plotted novel about the land agitation and agrarian violence of the period.[34] Subtitled 'An Irish story of today', it includes long extracts from contemporary journalistic accounts and political speeches, connected, not unskilfully, to a conventional sentimental plot structure of perceived illegitimacy and eventual legitimisation.[35] The controversial topic of violent agitation is negotiated with particular care: violence, Casey is at pains to emphasise, is neither necessary nor fundamental to the movement for land reform. Writing of the no-rent manifesto proclaimed in late 1881, she concedes its damage to 'good and lenient landlords' but underlines its support by 'honest farmers' who 'in all sincerity believed by so doing they were helping towards a state of things which would tend to reform the present system of land tenure in Ireland'.[36] Casey also quotes at length from Bishop Nulty's famous essay on the

Land Question, 'Back to the Land', published in April 1881 in which the Meath bishop had argued that 'no institution, whatever may have been its standing or popularity, is entitled to exceptional tenderness and forbearance if it can be shown to be intrinsically unjust or cruel'.[37] However, in its intended function as a vehicle for the English public's better understanding of Ireland, the novel was far from successful, as the following review from the *Athenaeum* testifies:

> Miss Blackburne in her latest book writes as a thoroughgoing partisan of the Land League; and it is impossible to help thinking that her zeal for the cause and obvious haste in the production of her story have to some extent spoilt it as a work of art… It is, perhaps, being thankful for small mercies, but we note with some pleasure that our author regards the murder of bailiffs as 'foolish' and the incitement thereto by agitators as 'unwise'.[38]

The *Athenaeum* review was published just two weeks after the Phoenix Park murders of 6 May and thus its charge of partisanship was especially damning; *The Heart of Erin* proved to be the last new work published by Casey. The archives of the Royal Literary Fund, a charitable fund for the relief of impoverished authors, give some glimpses into the hardship she encountered in later years. As part of her application for assistance in 1887, her letters to the fund detail her earlier successes as a writer, earning between 120 and 160 pounds a year at the peak of her career.[39] Casey's application was supported by the prominent literary figure Samuel Carter Hall, and she received 40 pounds. However, Hall later rescinded his reference and Walter Besant also warned the fund against supporting Casey, claiming 'I have learnt that she is a great drunkard and that they took away her ticket for the Reading Room at the Museum … and she really was once a fairly good writer'. She reapplied in 1892, unsuccessfully, and the last pieces of correspondence include an enquiry on her behalf from St George's Union infirmary in London. She died in poverty in Dublin in 1894, at the age of forty-six. The London *Times* published the following obituary:

> Miss E. Owens Blackburne, the well-known Irish authoress, died at her residence, Drumcondra, Dublin, on Friday the 6th last [1894]. Deceased, whose real name was Elizabeth Casey, had in some respects a remarkable career… There was a distinct vein of originality in many of these stories… It is stated that the death of Miss Owens Blackburne was caused by severe burns, due to the accidental upsetting of a lamp at her residence.[40]

Conclusion

Casey's *Illustrious Irishwomen* proved an influential text for later works of prosopography and for diverse readers; the copy of the volumes held in the National Library in Dublin, for example, carries the bookplate of one 'Carrie Chapman Catt, National American Woman Suffrage Association, November 1938'.[41] In volume V of the *Field Day Anthology*, historian Mary O'Dowd writes that 'despite its imitative style and the lack of formal historical training on the part of its author, the scholarly achievement of *Illustrious Irishwomen* should not be underestimated'; she also highlights the value of Blackburne's use of private papers and her inclusion of women from very different political and religious backgrounds. In judging the significance of this work and the genre to which it belongs, one could argue that research on women's writing includes a remarkable, and at times overwhelming, degree of attention to life narratives, to the biographical and the multibiographical. Furthermore, an attempt to reassert the significance of the prosopographical genre as more than the ephemeral memorialising of the dead inevitably encounters the usual challenges faced by retrieval activities. The prioritization of lesser-known subjects, while intended as a means of bringing them to prominence and critical attention, at the same time may remind the less sympathetic reader of their 'immaturity' when judged by the norms of what is known and valued. The index of choice and 'how to make it' remains a key challenge for scholars of women's history, just as earlier prosopographical studies oscillated in revealing ways between the

exemplary and the representative poles, between 'illustrious' or 'characteristic' women. In Alison Booth's words, 'What is a woman, if she differs enough from the ahistorical feminine ideal to be narratable and if she differs from other renowned or obscure women enough to retain a name?'[42] Yet clearly and powerfully at stake in the life work of E. Owens Blackburne are forms of affiliation and identification – what she terms 'patriotism' – that carry also, inevitably, an affective investment. In turn, the retelling of the life of Elizabeth Casey may be judged as a form of literary whimsy, or a salutary historical tale, or a chapter in the preservation of the names and achievements of gifted scholars.

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[1] Alison Booth, *How to Make It as a Woman: Collective Biographical History from Victoria to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 183.
[2] Lawrence Stone, 'Prosopography', *Daedalus* 100 (Winter 1971), pp. 46-71, p. 46; quoted by Booth, p. 11.
[3] Booth, p. 3.
[4] See most notably John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
[5] 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), preface to Volume I. All page references will be given in the text.
[6] Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.104.
[7] Booth, p. 3.
[8] See Booth, p. 181; for a study of Jameson's Canadian narrative, see Lisa Vargo, 'An "Enlargement of *Home*": Anna Jameson and the Representation of Nationalism', *Victorian Review* 24 (1998), pp. 53-68.
[9] Gerardine Macpherson, *Memoirs of the Life of Anna Jameson* (Boston: Roberts, 1878); cited by Booth, p. 178. Other noteworthy collections by Jameson include *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Sovereigns* (1831) and *Memoirs of the Loves of the Poets* (1829).
[10] Harriet Martineau, *Biographical Sketches* (New York: Leypoldt and Holt, 1869), p. 117; quoted by Booth, p. 185.
[11] See Mary O'Dowd, 'Interpreting the Past: Women's History and Women Historians, 1840-1845', *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* V (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001), p. 1102. A new edition of *Woman and her Master* was edited and introduced by Riana O'Dwyer in 1998 as part of the Routledge/Thoemmes Press Irish Women's Writing series edited by Maria Luddy.
[12] Julia Kavanagh *Woman in France during the Eighteenth Century* 2 vols (London: Smith and Elder, 1850), *Women of Christianity, Exemplary for Acts of Piety and Charity* (London: Smith and Elder, 1852), *French Women of Letters: Biographical Sketches* 2 vols (Leipzig: Tauchnitz; London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862) and *English Women of Letters*: *Biographical Sketches* 2 vols (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1862; London: Hurst and Blackett, 1863).
[13] Kavanagh's biographical and fictional works gained international popularity through their publication in Tauchnitz editions; a comprehensive life of her writings is provided by Rolf and Magda Loeber in their *Guide to Irish Fiction: 1650-1900* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), pp. 672-6. Kavanagh's Irish background and affiliations have been explored by Noreen Higgins in 'Julia Kavanagh (1824-1877) – A Novelist from Thurles', *Tipperary Historical Journal* (1992), pp. 81-3 (http://www.tipperarylibraries.ie/ths/thj1992.htm).
[14] *Woman in France during the Eighteenth Century*, I, pp. 1-2.
[15] Kavanagh's work was an important influence on B. G. MacCarthy's two-volume study of *The Female Pen: Women Writers: Their Contribution to the English Novel 1621-1744* (Cork and Oxford; Cork University Press and Blackwell, 1944) and *The Later Women Novelists 1744-1818* (Cork and Oxford; Cork University Press and Blackwell, 1947). For discussions of Kavanagh, see also Catherine J. Hamilton, *Notable Irishwomen* (Dublin: Sealy, Bryers and

Walker, 1904); Janet Todd, *Dictionary of British Women Writers* (London: Routledge, 1979) and Booth, pp. 57 and 65.
[16] *French Women of Letters*, preface v-vi.
[17] *French Women of Letters*, preface v-vi. Maria Edgeworth, for example, while acknowledged as lacking the popularity and eminence of her French contemporaries such as Madame de Staël, is credited with helping 'raise the European fame which eclipsed her own' (v).
[18] See Loebers, *Guide to Irish Fiction: 1650-1900*, pp. 676-7.
[19] Booth's online annotated bibliography of 'Collective Biographies of Women' is an invaluable source in this regard (see http://womensbios.lib.virginia.edu), though not exhaustive: not all contents of collections are indexed, that of Elizabeth Owens Blackburne Casey being one example.
[20] Booth notes an interesting biographical relationship between Anne Ritchie and Virginia Woolf: Ritchie was the sister of Leslie Stephen's first wife and therefore Woolf's step-aunt (p. 229).
[21] O'Dowd, 'Interpreting the Past', p. 1103.
[22] *Guide to Irish Fiction,* p. 255. The Loebers describe Richard Blackburne as Elizabeth's grandfather, but other evidence would suggest great-grandfather: see C.E.F. Trench, 'E. Owens Blackburne: A Forgotten Slane Writer' in *The Summit* (Slane Community Newsletter) July 1997; my thanks to Dr Dervila Layden for this reference.
[23] S. Austin Allibone and John Foster Kirk, Supplement to *A Critical Dictionary of English Literature and British and American Authors, Living and Deceased* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1891), pp. 299-300.
[24] Charles Read and T. P. O'Connor, *The Cabinet of Irish Literature: Selections from the Works of the Chief Poets, Orators, and Prose Writers of Ireland* (London, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dublin: Blackie, 1879-1880), IV, p. 277.
[25] *Cabinet of Irish Literature*, IV, p. 277.
[26] See Margaret Kelleher, '*The Cabinet of Irish Literature*: A Historical View on Irish Anthologies', *Éire-Ireland* 38.3-4 (2003), pp. 68-89 and 'Women's Narratives, 1850-1890', *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* Vol. IV (Cork University Press, 2002) editors Angela Bourke *et al*, pp. 924-975.
[27] *Times*, 9 April 1894, p. 10; *Athenaeum* 14 April 1894, p. 480;
[28] *Cabinet of Irish Literature*, IV, p. 277.
[29] Casey also expresses personal thanks to Lady Wilde, Charles Reade (*sic*) and Alfred Webb.
[30] Dutton Cook, review of *Illustrious Irishwomen*, *The Academy* (10 November 1877), p. 444.
[31] Review of *Illustrious Irishwomen*, *Athenaeum* 2611 (10 November 1877), pp. 593-4.
[32] Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History 1800-2000* (Oxford: OUP Press, 2003), p. 36.
[33] Ibid., p. 593.
[34] Blackburne, *The Heart of Erin: An Irish Story of Today* (London: Sampson Low, 1882), 2 vols.
[35] For a fuller discussion of this and other Land League novels see '"Factual Fictions": Representations of the Land Agitation in Nineteenth-Century Irish Women's Fiction', in *Out of Context: Irish Women's Prose Writings* ed. Heidi Hansson (Cork: Cork University Press, 2006).
[36] *The Heart of Erin* Vol 2, pp. 134-5.
[37] *The Heart of Erin* Vol 2, p. 49.
[38] Review of *Heart of Erin, Athenaeum* 2847 (20 May 1882), p. 632.
[39] See File No. 2269, *Archives of the Royal Literary Fund* (London 1984). Other applicants in the fund's 128-year history included Charlotte Riddell, Katharine Tynan Hinkson, Felicia Hemans, Morgan Peter Kavanagh, William Carleton and James Joyce. Microfilm copies of the archives are held in the British Library and Cambridge University; see the accompanying volume by Nigel Cross, which includes an introduction to the Fund's history and archives, and an index of its applicants: *The Royal Literary Fund: 1790-1918* (London: World Microfilms Publications, 1984).

[40] London *Times* obituary, 9 April 1894.
[41] I was first guided to these volumes by the late Dr Siobhán Kilfeather, herself a highly influential feminist scholar.
[42] Booth page 4.