

The textual terrain: developments and directions in women's writing, 1500–1700

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ABSTRACT. *This article assesses our much-expanded view of the texts produced by early modern women in Ireland, surveying what is available to present-day researchers and considering emerging methodologies for the analysis of early modern female voices. The range of genres with which we now know early modern women engaged owes much to feminist literary historians' capacious approach to defining literature, expanding beyond traditionally elite genres (drama, poetry, fiction) to encompass writing in all its forms. Thus, the present corpus includes letters and petitions, life writing, devotional prose, legal depositions, as well as all kinds of verse and song, in multiple languages. Moreover, where the primary evidence in Ireland sometimes seems sparse, international perspectives have illuminated the currents of women's writing. Interpretative paradigms from other fields — book history and the history of reading, culinary and medical history, network analysis — are being applied to yield fresh insights about this material. The question of how early modern Ireland was experienced by women has been explored in studies that address such texts as articulations of subjectivity, in the light of the history of emotions. The wide range of situations and genres of women's writing in early modern Ireland is now firmly evident, inspiring a host of new approaches.*

In their 'Agenda for women's history in Ireland, 1500–1800', Margaret MacCurtain and Mary O'Dowd drew attention to the paucity of texts written by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century women.¹ The picture has changed greatly since 1992. This article assesses our much-expanded view of the texts produced by women in early modern Ireland and outlines the methodologies and approaches that have emerged for the analysis of female voices, opening up new seams of historical, literary and interdisciplinary research. The pursuit of this agenda has raised wider questions. What is it to be Irish in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? What is it to be a writer? How should we define writing in this period? These re-considerations of writing, authorship and identity have not been limited to the Irish context; they are part of wider international and global developments. Often the product of collaboration between literary scholars and historians, developments in the study of women's writing have contributed to book history and the history of reading, culinary and medical history, network analysis and the history of the

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¹ Margaret MacCurtain, Mary O'Dowd and Maria Luddy, 'An agenda for women's history in Ireland, 1500–1900' in *I.H.S.*, xxviii, no. 109 (May 1992), pp 6, 9.

subject, as well as literary history. Thus, the range of innovative directions that have emerged since the agenda laid down by MacCurtain and O'Dowd feeds into broader international and interdisciplinary imperatives.

I

Women's history is no longer confined to the study of women in history; rather, it has driven new research in a range of historical fields and should be understood in terms of that impact. The shorthand designations of the diverse communities living on the island of Ireland have retained their currency. The straightforward, if blunt, signalling of political, religious and cultural affiliations — Old/Native/Gaelic Irish, Old English/Anglo-Norman, New English, Ulster Scots — renders them easily legible to twenty-first century readers, while reminding them that early modern Ireland was a plural society. The study of women's writing in this period encompasses multiple languages and genres, and often demonstrates the extent to which boundaries of identity were mutually affective and porous. The realities of living in early modern Ireland compelled women and men to produce texts of self-representation, accounting for their own and others' actions. Thus, textual production might involve commissioning a scribe to frame a petition or letter, dictating a deposition, or writing oneself; and such texts might be produced in other countries by those who had come from, or were going to, Ireland.

MacCurtain and O'Dowd had already begun to remedy the problem by publishing *Women in early modern Ireland* (1991). That landmark collection opened up new vistas for scholars of women's writing and remains a valuable entry point to the field. Drawing attention in particular to exiles' experiences of continental Europe (Casway), questions of education (MacCurtain), the position of women in Gaelic society (Simms, Cunningham) and folklore, *Women in early modern Ireland* combined with the 'Agenda' to suggest likely avenues for future research, all of which have been developed in fruitful ways.² The situation was transformed by the publication of the fourth and fifth volumes of *The Field Day anthology of Irish women's writing* in 2002. Inspired by the palpable dearth of women writers included in the first three volumes published in 1991, the team of eight editors (including MacCurtain and O'Dowd) was assembled by the late Seamus Deane, who speedily acknowledged culpability and commissioned another volume (which became two).³

Not only did the later volumes amass a wealth and depth of texts authored by women of and in Ireland, the anthology expanded the frames of what was considered writing, what was considered authorship and what was considered of relevance to the study of women in Irish culture. For example, Máirín Ní Dhoonchadha's two sections, 'Courts and coteries', defined women's places and roles in Gaelic literary culture. Treating the medieval period from 600 to 1600, the first of these sections brought together the evidence for women's authorship and the social and literary contexts for women's cultural activities. The second, covering the period from 1500 to 1800 (for which there are more surviving texts by women), unfurled the

² Margaret MacCurtain and Mary O'Dowd (eds), *Women in early modern Ireland* (Dublin, 1991).

³ For a detailed account of this controversy and its outcomes, see Catriona Crowe, 'Testimony to a Flowering' in *The Dublin Review*, x (2003), pp 42–68.

range of female-authored poetry and song in early modern Irish.⁴ The editors assessed and presented the full range of texts produced by women — in Irish, in the oral tradition, in English — but they also supplied a stimulating range of contexts for understanding attitudes to women, as well as to women's literary production, and these crossed traditional ideas of literary periodisation. For example, 'Sexuality, 1685–2001' edited by the late Siobhán Kilfeather includes extracts from fiction, memoir, diary, journalism and letters by women and men, in order to consider 'how [sexuality] was cast into words'.⁵ Angela Bourke, editor of 'Oral traditions', outlined the ways in which travellers' storytelling traditions, song traditions and practices of lamentation interspersed with international folktales, legends, oral practices of spirituality and work.⁶ The effect was to explode our sense of what writing is and what kinds of writing are relevant to the understanding of women's literature and experience in Ireland. The recent publication of both volumes in electronic form should ensure their continuity of influence.

Field Day was agenda-setting in the most forward-thinking sense, asking 'what is Irish women's writing?' and answering that question in capacious, provocative and inclusive ways. From the perspective of anthologies, however, the more traditionally literary form of poetry has prevailed. *Early modern women poets (1520–1700)*, edited by Jane Stevenson and Peter Davidson and published a year prior to *Field Day*, pioneered an archipelagic approach to poetry by women from the four nations (England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales). Showcasing the multilingual bases of poetic production in the British and Irish archipelago, this anthology includes verse in English, Welsh, Irish and Scottish Gaelic, Scots, Greek, Latin and French. Interspersed among 294 poems are three in Irish and five in English by women writing in Ireland. Andrew Carpenter's *Verse in English from Tudor and Stuart Ireland* (2003) models how a revised canon of Irish literature, attentive to women, linguistic currents and oral modes of transmission should look. Focused on poetry in English, this selection integrates the work of women associated with the settler community and court: Anne Southwell, Katherine Philips and the anonymous Philo-Philippa.⁷

II

Over recent decades, scholars engaged in recovery research — in Ireland and internationally — have reached beyond the traditional literary triumvirate of poetry, drama and fiction. This was in part driven by necessity: women had certainly composed in these genres but, excluded from formal education and discouraged from literary attention-seeking, texts produced by women were more often found in diverse places. The pioneering anthology *Her own life* (1989), for example, took

⁴ Máirín Ní Donnchadha, 'Courts and coteries I, c.900–1600' and 'Courts and coteries II, c.1500–1800' in Angela Bourke *et al.* (eds), *The Field Day anthology of Irish writing*, iv and v: *Irish women's writings and traditions* (Cork, 2002), iv, pp 293–457.

⁵ Siobhán Kilfeather (ed.), 'Sexuality, 1685–2001' in *ibid.*, iv, pp 755–1189, quote on p. 759.

⁶ Angela Bourke (ed.), 'Oral traditions' in *ibid.*, iv, pp 1191–1458.

⁷ Jane Stevenson and Peter Davidson (eds), *Early modern women poets (1520–1700): an anthology* (Oxford, 2001), pp 119–24, 164–7, 174–8, 325–33, 402–07, 436–9; Andrew Carpenter, *Verse in English from Tudor and Stuart Ireland* (Cork, 2003), pp 166–71, 361–6, 366–73.

a broad view of British women's autobiographical writing, showcasing diaries, meditative poetry, religious tracts and polemical pamphlets alongside the more traditional first-person retrospective relation of a life.⁸ The ensuing emergence of 'life writing' as the more appropriate term for texts engaged in self-articulation contributed to a wider recalibration.⁹ The range of genres in which we now know early modern women engaged owes much to feminist literary historians' capacious approach to defining 'literature', expanding beyond traditionally elite genres to encompass writing in all its forms. Thus, the present corpus of women's writing in Ireland includes letters and petitions, life writing, devotional prose and legal depositions, as well as all kinds of verse and song, in multiple languages — and scholars increasingly frame the picture as a multilingual one.¹⁰

This embrace of writing beyond the realms of poetry has brought literary scholars into closer than ever collaboration with historians, as texts are retrieved and recovered, examined not only in terms of their revelations of lived experience but also as crafted narratives. There has been significant growth in scholarly editions of writing by women born or resident in Ireland. Nineteenth-century editions of autobiographies by Mary Rich and Alice Thornton have been joined by modern editions of the memoirs of Ann Fanshawe (1979), Elizabeth Freke (2001), Alice Thornton (2014), and the biography of Elizabeth Cary by her daughters and son (2001). Editions of devotional writings, such as Frances Cook's providential account of near-shipwreck off Cork (2001) and Mary Rich's occasional meditations (2009), have been re-evaluated and integrated to the canon of early modern Anglophone writings.¹¹ Correspondence has proven a rich vein: Naomi McAreavey's imminent edition of the letters of the countess of Ormonde supplements her editorial retrieval of the letters of one Mrs. Briver, about the 1640s siege of Waterford. The letters of Dorothy Moore Dury, linchpin of Samuel Hartlib's circle, were published by Lynette Hunter in 2004.¹² These are soon to be joined by upcoming editions of the correspondence of Katherine Jones, Viscountess Ranelagh, by Evan Bourke and of letters by the women of the Boyle family by Ann-Maria Walsh. The

⁸ Elspeth Graham, Hilary Hinds, Elaine Hobby and Helen Wilcox (eds), *Her own life: autobiographical writings by seventeenth-century Englishwomen* (London, 1989).

⁹ See Danielle Clarke, 'Life writing' in Andrew Hadfield (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of English prose, 1500–1640* (Oxford, 2013), pp 452–67.

¹⁰ Most recently, Danielle Clarke and Sarah McKibben, 'Seventeenth-century women's poetry in Ireland' in Ailbhe Darcy and David Wheatley (eds), *A history of Irish women's poetry* (Cambridge, 2021), pp 57–73.

¹¹ *The memoirs of Anne, Lady Halkett and Ann, Lady Fanshawe*, ed. John Loftis (Oxford, 1979); *The remembrances of Elizabeth Freke, 1671–1714*, ed. Raymond A. Anselment (Cambridge, 2001); *My first booke of my life*, ed. Raymond A. Anselment (Lincoln, 2014); *Elizabeth Cary Lady Falkland: life and letters*, ed. Heather Wolfe (Cambridge, 2001); Frances Cook, 'Mrs. Cookes meditations' in *Life writings I. i, Printed writings, 1641–1700*, ed. Elizabeth Skerpan-Wheeler (Aldershot, 2001); *Occasional meditations of Mary Rich, countess of Warwick*, ed. Raymond A. Anselment (Tempe, 2009).

¹² *The letters of the first duchess of Ormonde*, ed. Naomi McAreavey (Toronto, 2023), and "This is that I may remember what passings that happened in Waterford": inscribing the 1641 rising in the letters of the wife of the mayor of Waterford' in *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, v (2010), pp 77–109; *The letters of Dorothy Moore, 1612–64: the friendships, marriage and intellectual life of a seventeenth-century woman*, ed. Lynette Hunter (Aldershot, 2004). See also Laurence Flanagan's compilation of letters from the nineteenth-century edition of the *State Papers of Ireland* in, *Irish women's letters* (New York, 1997).

chronicle of the Poor Clare order composed by Mary Bonaventure Browne in the 1660s was published in a modern edition by Celsus O'Brien (1993).¹³ And recovery continues apace: the rediscovery of a lost manuscript memoir by Alice Thornton has led to a new project, 'Alice Thornton's books', led by Cordelia Beattie and Suzanne Trill.

However, the majority of these editions were not published as contributions to early modern Irish women's history. They are of interest to scholars of Irish history, but not exclusively so, and their Irish dimensions have not until recently been the rationale for their publication at all. This is both a strength — Irish women's writing has always been integral to scholarship on early modern women — and a weakness, insofar as the Irish dimensions of this writing have not always been acknowledged. For example, the poet Anne Southwell, who arrived around 1603 as a settler to Cork with her first husband, and remained in Ireland for approximately twenty-five years, was first published as an English woman writer in Jean Klene's important edition of 1997. Scholars have explored her work in the context of manuscript culture, Protestant theology and the defence of Eve, the poetry of sociability, and its articulation of the subject-position of a female poet.¹⁴ This is a woman writer who is of interest to Anglophone literary history in its broadest sense, as is reflected in her editing history: in a scholarly edition, an anthology of verse in Ireland, an anthology of verse in the four nations, an undergraduate introduction to early modern women, an anthology of women's manuscript poetry, an anthology on women and the Fall.¹⁵ Although the Irish aspects of Southwell's writing have been present, then, they have not always been the focal point of Southwell scholarship. Such penetration of more widely pitched anthologies points to a valuable set of connections that have opened up far beyond the domains of strictly Irish history.

III

If the definition of 'writing' has expanded to include all kinds of surviving texts, and that of 'writer' to include those who dictated and sang as well as wrote, the

¹³ *Recollections of an Irish Poor Clare in the seventeenth century*, ed. Celsus O'Brien (Galway, 1993).

¹⁴ See *inter alia* Jean Klene, "'Monument of an endless affection": Folger MS V.b.198 and Lady Anne Southwell' in *English Manuscript Studies*, ix (2000), pp 165–86; Elizabeth Clarke, 'Anne Southwell and the pamphlet debate: the politics of gender, class and manuscript' in Cristina Malcolmson and Mihoko Suzuki (eds), *Debating gender in early modern England, 1500–1700* (New York, 2002), pp 37–53; Victoria E. Burke, 'Medium and meaning in the manuscripts of Anne, Lady Southwell' in George Justice and Nathan Tinker (eds), *Women's writing and the circulation of ideas: manuscript publication in England, 1550–1800* (Cambridge, 2002), pp 94–120; Sarah C. E. Ross, *Women, poetry, and politics in seventeenth-century Britain* (Oxford, 2015), pp 63–99; Danielle Clarke, 'Animating Eve: gender, authority, and complaint' in Sarah C. E. Ross and Rosalind Smith (eds), *Early modern women's complaint: gender, form, and politics* (Cham, 2020), pp 157–81.

¹⁵ *The Southwell–Sibthorpe commonplace book: Folger MS V.b.198*, ed. Jean Klene (Tempe, 1997); Carpenter, *Verses in English*; Stevenson and Davidson, *Early modern women poets*; Helen Ostovich and Elizabeth Sauer (eds), *Reading early modern women: an anthology of texts in manuscript and print, 1550–1700* (New York, 2004); Jill Seal Millman and Gillian Wright (eds), *Early modern women's manuscript poetry* (Manchester, 2005); Michelle M. Dowd and Thomas Festa (eds), *Early modern women on the fall* (Tempe, 2012).

vagaries of textual survival also mean that many single-surviving texts by women are best considered in their European contexts rather than an Irish frame. The sole surviving Irish nuns' chronicle, for example, is most fully understood in the context of Counter-Reformation developments among the religious orders across Europe. The tropes and innovations of this work emerge more clearly when considered alongside the more prolific contexts of Italy and Germany. Similarly, the only two known poems in Latin by an Irish woman — two praise poems by Eleanora Burnell published as prefatory material to her father Henry's play *Landgartha* (1641) — appear to be without parallel in the Irish context but enjoy healthy and prolific company amidst women's neo-Latin writing in continental Europe.¹⁶ The location of such texts within contemporary European trends sees them as types rather than aberrations.

Scholarship on Irish-language women's writing has benefited from seminal work by Máirín Nic Eoin and Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha. Nic Eoin's *B'ait leo bean* (1998) mapped the traditions of and attitudes toward women's literary production from pre-Christian times through to the nineteenth century, reclaiming texts and tracing women's cultural marginalisation.¹⁷ Ní Dhonnchadha's 'Courts and coteries' sections in *Field Day* supplied field-defining discussions of women's place in Gaelic literary culture as authors, patrons and participants. The genre of *caoineadh*, in particular, has benefited from widespread attention, given that textual and oral iterations survive in manuscript and folklore, as well as having attracted the attention of travellers to Ireland remarking on the rituals of funeral lamentation. Ní Dhonnchadha's *Field Day* selection includes critical editions of the *caointe* of Caitilín Dubh and Fionnghuala Ní Bhriain, while Bourke's section on 'Oral traditions' includes those by later authors Cáit de Búrca and Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill.¹⁸

Serious consideration of the oral tradition has opened up new questions for textual scholarship and editorial work, challenging ideas of the authentic text by emphasising instead the iterative nature of performance in which each recitation changes and adapts both words and melody.¹⁹ This offers a different perspective on the reception history of women's compositions, as songs are transmitted and transformed. On the one hand, this mitigates against preservation of editorially stable versions of well-known songs and promotes multiple competing versions. On the other, it ensures cross-generational dissemination and its strikingly performative nature ensured its notice in travellers' accounts of early modern Ireland.²⁰

¹⁶ *Landgartha: A Tragic-Comedy*, ed. Deana Rankin (Dublin, 2013), pp 74–7; Jane Stevenson, *Women Latin poets: language, gender, and authority from antiquity to the eighteenth century* (Oxford, 2005), pp 384–5.

¹⁷ Máirín Nic Eoin, *B'ait leo bean: gnéithe den idé-eolaíocht inscne i dtraidisiún liteartha na Gaeilge* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1998).

¹⁸ Bourke et al. (eds), *Field Day anthology*, iv, pp 358–447, 1365–97; Angela Partridge [Bourke], 'Wild men and wailing women' in *Éigse*, xviii (1980), pp 25–37 and 'More in anger than in sorrow: Irish women's lament poetry' in Joan Newlon Radner (ed.), *Feminist messages: coding in women's folk culture* (Chicago, 1993), pp 160–182; Sarah McKibben, *Endangered masculinities in Irish poetry 1540–1780* (Dublin, 2010), pp 99–125; Julie Henigan, *Literacy and orality in eighteenth-century Irish song* (2012, repr. London, 2016), pp 91–110; Doireann Ní Ghriofa, *A ghost in the throat* (Dublin, 2020).

¹⁹ Tríona Ní Shíocháin, *Singing ideas: performance, politics, and oral poetry* (New York and Oxford, 2018).

²⁰ For a discussion of such accounts, see Marie-Louise Coolahan and Wes Hamrick, "Their lamentable hone": Irish women's funerary song in the seventeenth and eighteenth

Archipelagic history and criticism offers another methodological approach that is attuned to language-traditions and Ireland's place in relation to the writing produced in neighbouring countries. Focused on the history of the four nations (England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales), this approach highlights the archipelago as the framing context for understanding the events and culture of the islands of Britain and Ireland. First conceived of by J. G. A. Pocock as encompassing the British Commonwealth (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, parts of Africa and North America, as well as the islands of northwestern Europe), its adoption by historians and literary scholars has emphasised Britain, Ireland and the Atlantic. In challenging Anglocentrism, this has embodied a corrective function, as is clearly seen in the context of women's writing, which has almost inevitably been absorbed to the project of English recovery research. Thus, Stevenson and Davidson's 2001 anthology avowedly aimed 'to bring the ethnically and linguistically distinct Celtic provinces as well as the writings of exiles for their beliefs to the attention of our readers'. The inclusion of the vernacular languages — Scots Gaelic, Welsh, Lowlands Scots, Irish, English — as well as poetry in French, Greek and Latin demonstrated that 'this has always been a multilingual archipelago'.²¹ The forthcoming *Women's poetry from Ireland, Scotland and Wales, 1400–1800: an anthology* will provide translations of non-Anglophone material to enable readers unfamiliar with one or more of the vernacular languages of the four nations to read and compare verse produced by women. Kate Chedgzoy's *Women's writing in the British Atlantic world* (2007) is a large-scale study which, like the work of David Armitage and Nicholas Canny, proposed the Atlantic Ocean as a connecting space. Embracing both the particularities of place and the expanded archipelagic worldview, Chedgzoy's study is grounded in questions of memory as revealed in multiple genres and in multiple languages, juxtaposing known and canonical authors such as Aphra Behn, Anne Bradstreet, Lucy Hutchinson and Mary Rowlandson with song composers of oral and bardic culture in Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Indeed, the archipelagic frame may be the most appropriate for English-language poetry produced by women in Ireland. Thus, 'hinge figures' (to adopt Willy Maley's term for the ideally archipelagic author) such as Anne Southwell (discussed above) illuminate the vulnerability of the settler class as well as their importation of English culture to new Irish milieux.²²

For Irish-language verse and song, the comparison with the Scottish Gaelic context, for which women's song and poetry survives in vastly greater numbers, is instructive and demonstrates the value of the wider, archipelagic perspective. Moreover, such comparison can recast our attitudes toward anonymity. Thomas Owen Clancy, for example, has used the large number of anonymous poems attributed to women in the Scottish tradition in order to challenge assumptions that anonymous but female-voiced poems in Irish could not have been authored by women.²³ Questions of anonymity, pseudonymity and the gendered poetic voice

centuries' in Moyra Haslett, Lillis Ó Laoire and Conor Caldwell (eds), *The Oxford handbook of Irish song, 1100–1850* (Oxford, published online Nov. 2021, <https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/38849>).

²¹ Stevenson & Davidson, *Early modern women poets*, pp xxix–xxx.

²² Willy Maley, 'The English Renaissance, the British problem, and the early modern archipelago' in *Critical Quarterly*, lii, no. 4 (Dec. 2010), p. 28.

²³ Thomas Owen Clancy, 'Women poets in early medieval Ireland: stating the case' in C. E. Meek and M. K. Simms (eds), *The fragility of her sex? Medieval Irishwomen in their European context* (Dublin, 1996), pp 43–72.

are emerging as new critical directions in the field of women's writing more broadly, and these inform new ideas about anonymous verse in English in Ireland as well.²⁴ For example, the much-anthologised praise poem attributed to 'Philo-Philippa' (lover of Philips) addressed to the Anglo-Welsh author Katherine Philips, then resident in Dublin, has long perplexed readers — not least its addressee, Philips herself. The poem's articulation of proto-feminist positions has made it appealing to modern readers, and debates about its authorship have ranged from arguments that it was the work of a biologically female author, of a collective of young buck lawyers parodying Dublin court culture, and an emblematic problematisation of pseudonymous and signed authorship.²⁵

The establishment of life writing as a category has brought together feminist recovery research, the history of the subject, correspondence and the history of ideas, with social history and network analysis. For early modern Ireland, where women (and non-elite men) turned to writing as a means of ameliorating their situations, this range of interpretative frameworks has opened up a host of new ways to think about and analyse their textual traces. In attending to the different ways in which early modern Irish women gave account of themselves, this work has drawn attention to subjectivity and self-articulation as the defining features of much writing of the period. As Julie Eckerle and Naomi McAreavey observe in their 2019 collection, *Women's life writing in early modern Ireland*, such texts evince common themes that embrace a host of methodological approaches: 'rhetorical techniques like the manipulation of memory and epistolary convention; the self-accounting that is nearly universal in life writing of this period; writers' attempts to come to terms with the economic and political changes unique to seventeenth-century Ireland; and the invaluable role of networks, whether those of family, epistolary correspondents, or confessional community'.²⁶

The study of women's letters has enjoyed a great surge of interest internationally over the past two decades, and this impetus has simultaneously energised the study of Irish women's letters.²⁷ Primary texts have been recovered and edited, and this continues apace. Women's letters have been analysed in terms of political agency and patronage; those of female settlers in terms of the plantation experience. The

²⁴ Marcy L. North, *The anonymous Renaissance: cultures of discretion in Tudor-Stuart England* (Chicago, 2003); Rosalind Smith 'Fictions of production: misattribution, prosopopoeia, and the early modern woman writer' in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 1, no. 1 (Jan. 2020), pp 33–52.

²⁵ Marie-Louise Coolahan, *Women, writing, and language in early modern Ireland* (Oxford, 2010), pp 212–8; Andrew Carpenter, "'Philo-Philippa" and Restoration Dublin' in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland / Iris an Dá Chultúr*, xxxiii (2018), pp 11–32; Kate Lilley, 'Katherine Philips, "Philo-Philippa" and the Poetics of Association' in Patricia Pender and Rosalind Smith (eds), *Material cultures of early modern women's writing* (Basingstoke, 2014), pp 118–39.

²⁶ Julie A. Eckerle and Naomi McAreavey (eds), *Women's life writing in early modern Ireland* (Lincoln, NE, 2019), p. 11.

²⁷ For example, Jane Couchman and Ann Crabb (eds), *Women's letters across Europe, 1400–1700: form and persuasion* (Aldershot, 2005); James Daybell, *Women letter-writers in Tudor England* (Oxford, 2006); Julie D. Campbell and Anne R. Larsen (eds), *Early modern women and transnational communities of letters* (Farnham, 2009); James Daybell and Andrew Gordon (eds), *Cultures of correspondence in early modern Britain* (Philadelphia, 2016).

letters of women enmeshed in the wars of the mid-century, in particular, have been explored in terms of their understanding of audience and polemic, as well as for the light they shed on the experience of siege, warfare and displacement. The correspondence of an author like Katherine Philips offers a window into cosmopolitan Restoration Dublin and its literary culture. Estate management and the cultivation of networks come to the fore in the correspondence of aristocratic landed Irish women. The letters of women such as Dorothy Moore Dury and Katherine Jones, Viscountess Ranelagh, are best understood in the context of their wider scientific networks and the history of ideas. Moreover, the reliability of the metadata associated with letters (senders, recipients, dates, places) is ideal for social network analysis, which is breaking new ground in early modern studies; for example, in demonstrating the centrality of Dury and Ranelagh as opinion-formers and conduits of information in Samuel Hartlib's circle.²⁸

The 1641 depositions are perhaps the most visible and bountiful example of the vastly increased availability of texts since 1992. Accessible only in microfilm until 2010, the launch of the 1641 Depositions Online, the product of a three-year collaborative project led by Aidan Clarke, Jane Ohlmeyer and Micheál Ó Siochrá, transformed the possibilities for working with this material. The Irish Manuscripts Commission print series had seen the first six volumes published at the time of writing (2013–2021).²⁹ Scholars of women's writing have analysed these materials in terms of literacy, life writing and linguistics.³⁰ Most recently, the depositions have benefited from approaches that explore them as trauma narratives and in terms of the history of emotions.³¹

²⁸ See, for examples of these, respectively, Vincent Carey, "'What's love got to do with it?': gender and Geraldine power on the Pale border' in Michael Potterton and Thomas Herron (eds), *Dublin and the Pale in the Renaissance c.1540–1660* (Dublin, 2011), pp 93–103; Marie-Louise Coolahan, 'Ideal communities and planter women's writing in seventeenth-century Ireland' in *Parergon*, xxix (2012), pp 69–91; McAreavey, "'This is that I may remember what passings that happened in Waterford'"; Marie-Louise Coolahan, 'Irish women's letters, 1641–1653' in James Daybell and Andrew Gordon (eds), *Women and epistolary agency in early modern culture, 1450–1690* (London, 2016), pp 167–81; Paul Trolander and Zeynep Tenger, 'Katherine Philips and coterie critical practices' in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, xxxvii (2004), pp 367–87; Ann-Maria Walsh, *The daughters of the first earl of Cork: writing family, faith, politics and place* (Dublin, 2020); Naomi McAreavey, 'Female alliances in Cromwellian Ireland: the social and political network of Elizabeth Butler, marchioness of Ormonde' in *I.H.S.*, xl, no. 167 (May 2021), pp 22–42; Ruth Connolly, 'Viscountess Ranelagh and the authorisation of women's knowledge in the Hartlib circle' in Johanna Harris and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann (eds), *The intellectual culture of Puritan women, 1558–1680* (London, 2010), pp 150–61.

²⁹ '1641 Depositions' (<https://1641.tcd.ie/>) (28 June 2021); *1641 Depositions*, ed. Aidan Clarke (6 vols, I.M.C., Dublin, 2013–21).

³⁰ See Nicci MacLeod and Barbara A. Fennell, 'Lexico-grammatical portraits of vulnerable women in war: the 1641 depositions' in *Journal of Historical Pragmatics*, xiii (2012), pp 259–90; Coolahan, *Women, writing, and language*, pp 141–79 and "'And this deponent further sayeth": Orality, print and the 1641 depositions' in Marc Caball and Andrew Carpenter (eds), *Oral and print cultures in Ireland 1600–1900* (Dublin, 2010), pp 69–84.

³¹ Naomi McAreavey, 'Re(-)membering women: Protestant women's victim testimonies during the Irish rising of 1641' in *Journal of the Northern Renaissance*, ii (2010) (<http://northernrenaissance.org/re-membering-women-protestant-womens-victim-testimonies-during-the-irish-rising-of-1641/>) (29 June 2021); Clodagh Tait, "'Whereat his wife tooke great

Such work points us toward the value of life writing in uncovering the history of the subject in early modern Ireland — a direction that dovetails with the wider revision of historical accounts of the emergence of the modern subject to accommodate the relational and fragmented articulation of subjectivity in the medieval period.³² The cognate field of the history of emotions, already firmly established in the study of Renaissance and early modern Europe, offers another direction ripe for consideration by scholars of early modern Ireland and women’s writing. In moving from the recovery of marginalised voices to their analysis, close attention to the ways in which the self is formulated and emotions are represented will contribute to the wider development of these historical fields. These approaches are not limited to women’s narratives *per se*; they demonstrate the interdisciplinarity of such innovative work, feeding both literature and history, both women’s and non-elite forms of writing in early modern Ireland.

Recent years have witnessed tremendous growth in the area of food culture and its material traces, offering a new set of contexts for the many recipe (or ‘receipt’) books that survive, usually associated with women and transmitted through generations.³³ Manuscript compilations of culinary and medical recipes offer a textual space that connects the history of material and food culture with the history of science and women’s writing. The increasing professionalisation of medicine in the later seventeenth century had masked the more fluid and open practice of science in the 1640s and 1650s and, concomitantly, women’s extensive contributions to the field. Lynette Hunter, for example, first drew attention to Lady Ranelagh as an exponent of the mid-century shift in (English) scientific culture, opening up a line of scholarship most recently culminating in Michelle DiMeo’s *Lady Ranelagh: the incomparable life of Robert Boyle’s sister* (2021). Evan Bourke has examined the controversy among the Hartlib Circle caused by Dorothy Moore Dury’s plan to open a medical shop.³⁴ Madeline Shanahan has mapped

grief & died”: dying of sorrow and killing in anger in seventeenth-century Ireland’ in Michael J. Braddick and Phil Withington (eds), *Popular culture and political agency in early modern England and Ireland: essays in honour of John Walter* (Woodbridge, 2017), pp 267–84 and “Kindred without end”: wet-nursing, fosterage and emotion in Ireland, c.1550–1720’ in *J.E.S.H.*, xlvii (2020), pp 10–35.

³² A. C. Spearing, *Textual subjectivity and medieval autobiographies: the “I” of the text* (Notre Dame, 2012); Sif Rikhardsdóttir, ‘Medieval emotionality: the feeling subject in medieval literature’ in *Comparative Literature*, lxix (2017), pp 74–90; Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, ‘Writing in medieval Ireland in the first-person voice’ in Liam Harte (ed.), *A history of Irish autobiography* (Cambridge, 2018), pp 23–37.

³³ Rebecca Laroche, *Medical authority and Englishwomen’s herbal texts, 1550–1650* (Farnham and Burlington, 2009); Michelle DiMeo and Sara Pennell (eds), *Reading and writing recipe books, 1550–1800* (Manchester, 2013); Madeline Shanahan, *Manuscript recipe books as archaeological objects: text and food in the early modern world* (Lanham, 2014); Wendy Wall, *Recipes for thought: knowledge and taste in the early modern kitchen* (Philadelphia, 2015); Elaine Leong, *Recipes and everyday knowledge: medicine, science and the household in early modern England* (Chicago, 2018).

³⁴ Lynette Hunter, ‘Sisters of the royal society: the circle of Katherine Jones, Lady Ranelagh’ in Lynette Hunter and Sarah Hutton (eds), *Women, science and medicine, 1500–1700: mothers and sisters of the Royal Society* (Stroud, 1997), pp 178–197; Michelle DiMeo, *Lady Ranelagh: the incomparable life of Robert Boyle’s sister* (Chicago, 2021); Evan Bourke, “‘I would not have taken her for his sister’: financial hardship and women’s reputations in the Hartlib circle (1641–1661)’ in *The Seventeenth Century*, xxxvii, no. 1 (2022), pp 47–64.

the genre of recipe writing and recipe books in Ireland from 1680 to 1830, assessing how they illuminate the material culture of the kitchen. That this culture of recipe compilation and composition was predominantly English in character and origin has been demonstrated by Shanahan and Regina Sexton.³⁵ Nevertheless, as Danielle Clarke (whose edition of Dorothy Parsons's recipe book is forthcoming with the Irish Manuscripts Commission) has argued, the networks that are consolidated and recorded in such manuscript recipe books are both English and Irish, revealing 'the provisional and emergent identities of New English settlers in Ireland, and the extent to which their alliances and connections spread to create networks that straddled the Irish Sea, and attempted to reconcile often very different and volatile political and practical realities'.³⁶ From this perspective, the recipe book is fundamentally concerned with the display of culinary, medical and textual authority; newly available commodities, global trade networks and the slave economy; and inter-generational, familial self-positioning. Thus, recipe books may be seen as a form of life writing as well as culinary and medical writing.

Protestant religious writing by women in Ireland was enmeshed in the range of devotional genres being produced in contemporary Britain — spiritual autobiographies and diaries, prose and verse meditations, conversion narratives. Authors like Mary Rich (born in Ireland; married into English aristocracy), Barbara Blaugdone (Quaker missionary to Ireland) and Frances Cook (Cromwellian who travelled to Ireland with her husband, the regicide John) framed their experiences of Ireland according to their particular confessional cast. For these women, who came to writing through the prism of genres advocated and shaped by protestant beliefs, Ireland often served as a useful counterfoil that signified an oppositional Catholicism.³⁷

³⁵ Madeline Shanahan, "'Whipt with a Twig Rod": Irish manuscript recipe books as sources for the study of culinary material culture, c.1680 to 1830' in *P.R.I.A.*, 115c (2015), pp 197–218; Regina Sexton, 'Elite women and their recipe books: the case of Dorothy Parsons and her *Booke of Choyce Receipts, all written with her owne hand in 1666*' in Terence Dooley, Maeve O'Riordan and Christopher Ridgway (eds), *Women and the country house in Ireland and Britain* (Dublin, 2018), pp 236–56. See also Susan Flavin, 'Domestic materiality in Ireland, 1550–1730' in Jane Ohlmeyer (ed.), *The Cambridge history of Ireland: ii, 1550–1730* (Cambridge, 2018), pp 321–45.

³⁶ Danielle Clarke, 'Dorothy Parsons of Birr: writing, networks, identity, 1640–1670' in *The Seventeenth Century*, xxxvii, no. 1 (2022), p. 24.

³⁷ Mary Rich's diaries and autobiography, edited in the nineteenth century as *Memoirs of Lady Warwick: also her diary, from A. D. 1666 to 1672* (London, 1847) and *Autobiography of Mary countess of Warwick*, ed. Thomas Crofton Croker (London, 1848) (British Library (B.L.), Add. MSS 27,351–5; 27,357); Barbara Blaugdone, *An account of the travels, sufferings and persecutions of Barbara Blaugdone* (London, 1691); Frances Cook, *Mrs. Cookes meditations* (London, 1650), edited in Skerpan-Wheeler, *Life writings*, and extract in Suzanne Trill, Kate Chedgzy and Melanie Osborne (eds), *Lay by your needles ladies, take the pen: writing women in England, 1500–1700* (London, 1997), pp 169–75. For examples of critical work on these authors, see Ramona Wray, '[Re]constructing the past: the diametric lives of Mary Rich' in Henk Dragstra, Sheila Ottway and Helen Wilcox (eds), *Betraying our selves: forms of self-representation in early modern English texts* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp 148–65; Anne Fogarty, 'Reading dislocation and emotion in the writings of Alice Thornton, Ann Fanshawe, and Barbara Blaugdone' in Eckerle & McAreavey, *Women's life writing*, pp 51–77; Coolahan, *Women, writing, and language*, pp 228–31.

Nuns have emerged as a major new direction for scholars of early modern women in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the New World, as well as Britain and Ireland.³⁸ Indeed, these non-Irish contexts are invaluable for understanding that of Ireland, for which surviving texts and sources are not commensurate with the number of religious communities which persisted. The most obvious point of connection is England whence, following the dissolution, the first exiled foundation was the Benedictine convent of Brussels in 1598. Thereafter, twenty-two further English convents sprang up in France and the Spanish Netherlands, and Irish women joined these convents, as well as those in Iberia.³⁹ These communities produced texts framed for their specific audiences: annals, obituaries, religious lives, constitutions and rules, letters and translations. The challenges of accessing these texts, often still in use at convents with under-resourced archives, have been overcome by initiatives such as the transformative ‘Who were the nuns?’ project. Led by Caroline Bowden, this project collated the memberships of all exiled English convents, presenting them in an open-access, online prosopography.⁴⁰ Across Europe, commitments to the foundation of women-only devotional spaces regularly ran up against attack and displacement, and Ireland was no exception. From an Irish perspective, the chronicle of the Poor Clares may be profitably considered alongside Irish narratives of the Confederate wars such as that of Richard Bellings and the anonymous *Aphorismical discovery of treasonable faction*. From a European perspective (and the chronicle was written from exile in Spain by Mary Bonaventure Browne), it benefits from discussion alongside accounts by nuns of other countries.⁴¹

Continental exile, of course, was a reality for many Irish women and men who were not members of religious orders, and this has become a major research area for historians of early modern Ireland, as the *Irish in Europe* series among other recent works has amply demonstrated. Again, circumstances compelled such exiles to account for themselves in new ways, and the Spanish archives preserve a substantial

³⁸ For example, Mary Laven, *Virgins of Venice: broken vows and cloistered lives in the Renaissance convent* (New York, 2002); Charlotte Woodford, *Nuns as historians in early modern Germany* (Oxford, 2002); Kate J. P. Lowe, *Nuns’ chronicles and convent culture in Renaissance and Counter-Reformation Italy* (Cambridge, 2003); Claire Walker, *Gender and politics in early modern Europe: English convents in France and the Low Countries* (Basingstoke, 2003); Elizabeth A. Leffeldt, *Religious women in golden age Spain: the permeable cloister* (Aldershot, 2005); Amy E. Leonard, *Nails in the wall: Catholic nuns in Reformation Germany* (Chicago, 2005); Silvia Evangelisti, *Nuns: a history of convent life, 1450–1700* (Oxford, 2007); Asunción Lavrin, *Brides of Christ: conventual life in colonial Mexico* (Stanford, 2008); Jaime Goodrich, *Faithful translators: authorship, gender, and religion in early modern England* (Evanston, 2014); Jennifer Hillman, *Female piety and the Catholic Reformation in France* (London, 2015); Emilie L. Bergmann and Stacey Schlau (eds), *The Routledge research companion to the works of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (New York, 2017).

³⁹ See Andrea Knox, *Irish women on the move: migration and mission in Spain, 1499–1700* (Oxford, 2020) and Bronagh Ann McShane, *Irish women in religious orders, 1530–1700: suppression, migration and reintegration* (Woodbridge, 2022).

⁴⁰ ‘Who were the nuns? A prosopographical study of the English convents in exile 1600–1800’ (<https://wwtn.history.qmul.ac.uk/>) (29 June 2021); Caroline Bowden (ed.), *English convents in exile, 1600–1800* (6 vols, London, 2012–13); Caroline Bowden and James E. Kelly (eds), *The English convents in exile, 1600–1800: communities, culture and identity* (Farnham, 2013).

⁴¹ See Coolahan, *Women, writing, and language*, pp 78–101.

number of petitions submitted by Irish female exiles — the wives and orphans of mercenary soldiers and Gaelic leaders — as first investigated by Micheline Kerney Walsh, Gráinne Henry and Jerrold Casway (all namechecked in MacCurtain and O’Dowd’s original ‘Agenda’). More recently, my own work on women’s petitions to the Spanish state has focused on their rhetorical positioning, Ciaran O’Scea has examined exiled lay women religious and refugee literacy in Galicia, and Thomas O’Connor has considered women’s accounts as part of his study of Irish experiences of the Inquisition.⁴²

IV

MacCurtain and O’Dowd anticipated a number of these directions back in 1992. In their survey of sources, they suggested that women’s texts might be found among the Irish chancery petitions, the 1641 depositions, family papers, private correspondence and diaries; they advocated for research on women’s political patronage and influence, experiences of plantation and settlement, of war and emigration, on religion and work. What has emerged advances significantly our understanding of all these areas (with the exception of chancery petitions). We are in a good position in terms of the visibility of women’s writing in Ireland. Building on the landmark scholarship of the *Field Day anthology*, collections such as *A history of modern Irish women’s literature* (2018) and *A history of Irish women’s poetry* (2021) have consolidated the field and included the medieval and early modern with the more prolific scenarios of later centuries.⁴³ The interested student or scholar now encounters a topographical landscape which presents women’s texts in breadth and depth. What has become ever more clear is that the canon of early modern literature in Ireland is fluid and dynamic; new discoveries and editions are still being made, and this pertains to male-authored writing as well as that of women. Moreover, popular histories of women have found eager audiences. Anne Chambers’s biography of Gráinne Ní Mháille (Grace O’Malley), first published in 1979, has been reissued nine times to 2012; that of Eleanor, countess of Desmond (1986), was reprinted in 1987 and 2011. Clodagh Finn’s 2019 volume, *Through her eyes: a new history of Ireland in 21 women*, is part of an emerging ecosystem of popular books on women in history; it includes Katherine Jones, Viscountess Ranelagh. The HerStory initiative, through its annual light festival, community and television outputs, has put the spotlight on women’s history and placed it firmly in the public consciousness in Ireland.⁴⁴

From a historian’s perspective, this offers an excitingly diverse expansion of sources and interpretive frameworks. If literary scholars have moved to think laterally and beyond inherited canonical genres, so they and historians are broaching

⁴² Coolahan, *Women, writing, and language*, pp 128–39; Ciaran O’Scea, *Surviving Kinsale: Irish emigration and identity formation in early modern Spain, 1601–40* (Manchester, 2015), pp 87–120; Thomas O’Connor, *Irish voices from the Spanish inquisition* (Basingstoke, 2016), esp. pp 179–96.

⁴³ Heather Ingman and Cliona Ó Gallchóir (eds), *A history of modern Irish women’s literature* (Cambridge, 2018); Darcy and Wheatley, *A history of Irish women’s poetry*.

⁴⁴ Anne Chambers, *Grannuile: the life and times of Grace O’Malley, c.1530–1603* (Dublin, 1979) and *Eleanor, countess of Desmond, c.1545–1638* (Dublin, 1986); Clodagh Finn, *Through her eyes: a new history of Ireland in 21 women* (Dublin, 2019); ‘herstory’ (<https://www.herstory.ie/home>) (29 June 2021).

new methods for understanding what the full range of sources can tell us. The 1641 depositions, for example, offer a seventeenth-century space where oral testimony encounters state record processes — a space for historians to reflect on the appropriate combination of methodologies to engage fruitfully with both survivor and state-generated accounts.⁴⁵ The reconstruction of the processes by which depositions were taken down and revised reminds us that institutional documentation shapes the historical record according to its own imperatives, just as an individual account is informed by that person's memory and experiences. Oral transmission challenges us by defying the pursuit of any ur-text or definitive event, but we have developed ways to analyse such texts on their own terms and value them as an important part of the historical record. The diversity of voices requires a variety of approaches and offers the possibility of more inclusive — and, therefore, accurate — histories. The study of women as a group (or multiple groups) in relation to the historical contexts of being a woman has been and remains a compelling reason to frame this research explicitly in relation to women. Moreover, as a category, women can be a useful and pragmatic delimiter of research parameters. But there is a danger in the implication that scholarship not labelled 'women' occupies a normative position — a view that masks the inherited gender-specific nature of much scholarship that focuses exclusively on men and obscures the impact of sex and gender on male experiences and actions. Much of the innovative work and fresh insights yielded from scholars of women in early modern Ireland (and beyond) are, happily, being integrated to our histories.

V

In terms of writing by women in early modern Ireland, the increasing availability of a much wider range of texts has brought Irish-language material into rigorous focus and facilitated new approaches that bring Irish perspectives to bear on cutting-edge scholarship that is being conducted internationally: the recalibration of literature, performance and the oral tradition; archipelagic history and criticism; the history of the subject; the history of emotions; life writing; social network analysis; culinary and medical culture; the history of migration and literacy; and the history of religion. These are inventive fields that will repay much more research from an Irish perspective. Furthermore, there is huge scope for fresh discoveries; petitions, for example, remain an under-investigated genre of writing, as demonstrated by the work of Frances Nolan on Jacobite women's engagements with Williamite confiscations and Emily Allen's research on Tudor women's petitions in the state papers.⁴⁶ The pioneering work of Thomas Truxes on the Prize papers in the National Archives (Kew) has yielded letters by female servants, amongst others, working in 1750s Bordeaux, pointing the way for archival researchers

⁴⁵ As explored by Naomi McAreavey in 'Portadown, 1641: memory and the 1641 depositions' in *Irish University Review*, xlvii, no. 1 (May 2017), pp 15–31 and 'Building bridges? Remembering the 1641 rebellion in Northern Ireland' in *Memory Studies*, xi, no.1 (Jan. 2018), pp 100–14.

⁴⁶ Frances Nolan, 'The representation of female claimants before the trustees for the Irish forfeitures, 1700–1703' in *Hist. Jn.*, lxiii, no. 4 (Sept. 2020), pp 836–61; Emily Allen, 'Irish women's petition letters from 1541–1583', (Ph.D. thesis in progress, University of Galway).

with open minds.⁴⁷ Opportunities presented by the digital humanities encompass both the qualitative and quantitative. We might look, for example, to the Pulter Project — based on the poetry and fiction of Hester Pulter (1605–78), born in Dublin — as a model for innovative, multiple digital editions of individual texts.⁴⁸ At the other end of the spectrum, the scaling-up facilitated by methodologies, such as social network analysis, points to new possibilities for cutting through to fresh insights. Of course, new methods and directions will evolve as such work is conducted and influenced by wider scholarly developments. This is material for all of us — historians and literary scholars of all stripes, as well as interdisciplinary inbetweeners. What we do with it will diverge, but the material must be accommodated. It is not by any means limited to the history of women; not only is it to be expected that such work is integrated to mainstream histories, it draws the attention of scholars who are not explicitly working on Ireland. Scholars of women's writing in early modern Ireland have found fruitful collaborators and attentive audiences beyond the domain of strictly Irish history; that mutual exchange is testament to the far-reaching impact of MacCurtain and O'Dowd's agenda setting.

⁴⁷ Thomas M. Truxes (ed.), *Ireland, France, and the Atlantic in a time of war: reflections on the Bordeaux-Dublin letters, 1757* (New York, 2018); Thomas M. Truxes, Louis M. Cullen and John Shovlin (eds), *The Bordeaux-Dublin letters, 1757: correspondence of an Irish community abroad* (Oxford, 2013).

⁴⁸ 'The Pulter Project: Poet in the Making' (<https://pulterproject.northwestern.edu/>) (29 June 2021).