

Introduction: Women and Ageing in Irish Writing, Drama and Film

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The subject of ageing figures prominently in Irish writing, drama and film yet has, until recently, been curiously overlooked in Irish literary and cultural criticism. The fact that this special issue is the first collection of articles devoted to representations of older age in Irish studies testifies to this omission.¹ In view of the need to establish age as category in Irish criticism, one might ask why this collection focuses exclusively on literary, filmic and dramatic explorations of *women's* midlife and older age. One central reason for this choice is that the gendered dimensions of ageing are particularly trenchant in Irish literature and culture, where images of a beautiful young girl or poor old woman have often been conflated with that of the nation. The most emblematic figure to illustrate the conflation of the old woman and the nation is Cathleen Ni Houlihan, the female allegory of Ireland, made famous by W. B. Yeats's and Lady Gregory's eponymous one-act play. In this play, set on the eve of the failed 1798 Irish uprising, Cathleen is presented as a Poor Old Woman lamenting the loss of her four green fields, who turns into a girl 'with the walk of a queen'² as young men move into battle to die for her sake. The human dimensions of ageing – a woman's bodily and mental changes, material and social conditions, losses and gains – are thus evaded in favour of what Eavan Boland refers to as a 'collective fantasy'.³ With regard to Francis Ledgwick's poem 'Lament for the Poets: 1916', in which the Shan Van Vocht mourns the dead leaders of the Easter Rising, Boland notes that 'in his attempt to make the feminine stand in for the national, he has simplified the woman in the poem almost out of existence. She is in no sense the poor old woman of the colloquial expression. There are no vulnerabilities here, no human complexities. She is a Poor Old Woman in capital letters. A mouthpiece. A sign'.⁴ For a long time, such simplified, if powerful, images of ageing and femininity

have shaped and overshadowed more complex representations of older women in Irish writing across all genres.

Such passive constructions serve to reinforce gender roles which locate women in domestic spaces while gendering the public sphere as masculine, thus contributing to women's cultural invisibility, as well as impacting on them in material ways that accumulate in old age. Despite prevailing postfeminist rhetoric, in contemporary neoliberal society the potential for empowerment through consumerism only serves to heighten gender dichotomies. Women's and men's social value is linked to their ability to maintain a youthful appearance through consumption. Men's experiences of ageing are also informed by socially prescribed notions of virility, physical well-being and economic success.⁵ In this regard, the consideration of ageing masculinities in post-Celtic Tiger works would provide a compelling study. However, a woman's value is so closely tied to her youth that this has contributed to the 'vanishing' figure of the ageing woman, compelled to 'pass' as younger, which gives rise to a critical urgency.⁶ Research in cultural gerontology and ageing studies, a new interdisciplinary field that views ageing not only as part of the life course but as socially, culturally and historically constructed,⁷ has shown that women and men age differently and face different preconceptions at different times of their lives. In many ways, the 'double standard' of ageing, detected by Susan Sontag in 1972, 'that denounces women with special severity', still applies.⁸ As the ageing woman is obscured in so many spheres – for example, in media representation, economic security, health and welfare, politics, socially and culturally – such a focus is particularly pertinent. Besides identifying and analysing dominant constructions of ageing, cultural gerontologists and age critics also explore how ageist images can be resisted, reimagined and revised. For example, recently emerged genres such as the 'progress narrative of the middle years'⁹ or the *Reifungsroman*¹⁰ counterbalance the culturally prevalent 'decline narrative'¹¹ with more positive and complex narratives of older women's progress, growth and wisdom. Yet more recently, age critics have argued that the emphasis on positive conceptions of 'successful ageing', enmeshed as they are with neoliberal notions of self-reliance, has inadvertently helped to further marginalise older people with physical and cognitive impairments.¹² Ultimately, there is a perceived need to do justice to the complexity, subjectivity and richness of the lived experience of ageing across the life course, and literary, dramatic and filmic representations are instrumental in bringing out the 'narrative complexity of later life'.¹³

While cultural and literary constructions of the figure of the ageing woman have become more frequent and diverse in recent Irish writing, this collection of

essays shows that complex gendered representations of ageing have preoccupied Irish writers, both men and women, at least from the mid-twentieth century on. As the contributions to this issue on the plays of Samuel Beckett, the poetry of W. B. Yeats, the autobiographical work of Kate O'Brien and the short stories of Mary Lavin demonstrate, these earlier representations of ageing women provide a rich field of study and pave the way for the subjective, embodied experiences and nuanced explorations of midlife and older age offered by contemporary writers such as Marina Carr, Anne Enright, Vona Groarke and Mary Dorcey, to name just a few of the authors discussed here. Contemporary poets, writers, filmmakers and playwrights have only just begun to reassess and subvert the powerful, mainly negative stereotypes attached to women 'past their prime' and to move the traditionally silenced older woman from the margins of visibility to the centre of their poems, plots, film screens and theatre stages. Each of the contributions in this special issue explores different angles of how the ageing female body, mind and perspective are written into the Irish tradition from the mid-twentieth century to the present and across a diversity of genres spanning poetry, drama, the novel, short fiction, life writing and film. In doing so, their analyses include literary, dramatic and filmic representations ranging from midlife to 'deep' old age. Exploring the process of ageing as well as its cultural representations and repercussions, the contributors analyse how both female and male authors have attempted to challenge dominant cultural constructions of gender and ageing as well as to give a voice to, and carve a space for, ageing women's subjectivities.

Although the figure of the ageing woman in Irish poetry is closely associated with that of the Shan Van Vocht, there are early twentieth-century poetic representations that offer alternative, more complex versions of the poor old woman. Margaret Mills Harper's contribution to this special issue explores 'The Problem of Crazy Jane', the character or rather voice at the heart of a series of poems William Butler Yeats penned while in his sixties and recovering from serious ill-health. In these poems, Yeats draws on the traditional image of a poor old woman to express his political and religious dissent during his later years as well as his increasing fears about his own ageing. Yet, despite to some extent ventriloquizing the poet's concerns, Crazy Jane is anything but an object or mouthpiece. As Mills Harper shows, the poet was as much possessed of her as his persona or mask was possessed of him. While the Crazy Jane poems may not provide insight into the subjective everyday realities faced by an old woman on the margins of society, they still express and vindicate an older woman's desire as well as her authority and wisdom. In Mills Harper's compelling analysis, it becomes obvious that Crazy Jane is also an embodied voice, disrupting

conventional mind-body duality, as it is her body that ‘sings on’, even from the grave. It is this sense of embodiment that links Yeats’s hypnotic Crazy Jane poems to later, more subjective poetic accounts of older women’s sexuality, desire and mortality, for unlike the iconic Poor Old Woman, Crazy Jane’s youth is not restored by either sex or sacrifice, and her desire and authority do not depend on her body’s youthfulness.

Throughout her poetic career Eavan Boland denounced what she calls the ‘simplified images of women’¹⁴ and the ‘inbuilt resistance to a woman aging’¹⁵ in the Irish poetic tradition. By writing poems ‘to grow old [. . .] and die in’,¹⁶ she paved the way for the next generation of poets, whose works explore the social, frequently gendered constraints of midlife in the post-Celtic Tiger era, where women’s visible signs of ageing tend to be viewed as symptoms of a ‘medical problem to be cured’.¹⁷ In this context, Katarzyna Ostalska’s contribution analyses how contemporary Irish women poets, both in their poetry and autobiographical prose, confront midlife anxiety and menopause on the one hand and reclaim sexual desire and fulfilment on the other. In doing so they reassess, retrieve and reinvent a poetics of mature desire and sexuality despite social expectations that may one day render them ‘too old / for such love songs’.¹⁸ Drawing on a broad range of poets including Sinéad Morrissey, Paula Meehan, Mary O’Malley, Moya Cannon, Vona Groarke and Mary Dorcey, Ostalska presents a multifaceted overview of the ways in which these diverse poets counter stereotypes about older women’s supposed asexuality and find ways to express their ageing speakers’ longing for and delight in desire and intimacy. Ostalska’s contribution is also an excellent example of how poetic analysis and empirical findings derived from social and cultural gerontology can be mutually enlightening, as both suggest that, contrary to prejudice, desire and sexuality remain crucial components of many older women’s identities.

In a similar vein, Eileen Casey’s contribution counters the dominant cultural decline narrative by celebrating an ageing woman’s journey in terms of transformation and transcendence. Her autobiographical, reflective piece, which draws on her own poetry and fiction alongside a broad range of examples from the realms of popular music, philosophy and criticism, oscillates between the two opposing poles of bone (death) and blossom (birth), suggesting that these two sources of energy can and must co-exist; only through transformation can an ageing woman achieve transcendence and rebirth. At the heart of her essay are Casey’s own poems, mainly taken from her collection *From Bone to Blossom*, with images by visual artist Emma Barone, two of which are reprinted in this issue. Casey’s poems show how the visible signs of ageing constitute a challenge

for women culturally conditioned to define themselves by their youthful appearance. For instance, the speaker in 'Bones' ponders the alienating experience of seeing 'a woman with sharp corners'¹⁹ in the mirror, where her younger-looking reflection used to be. Another poem, 'Subjunctive',²⁰ shows that this unsettling discrepancy between biological and felt age may have its roots in society's ageist preconceptions. The speaker questions her doctor's ready-made assumption that her '*Subjunctive Hemorrhage*' could have a variety of age and health-related causes such as 'Increase in blood pressure'. Instead, she suggests that her blood-flooded eye could just as likely be caused by 'Laughter (the belly wobbling kind) / Sex (strenuous) / Dance (Hip Hop, Salsa, Tango)', all pleasurable activities palpably missing from the doctor's list. At the end of the poem, the speaker rejects her doctor's suggestion that she cover her eye with an eye patch, instead transforming what is traditionally regarded as a negative, age-related condition into 'all manner of life-affirming alternatives'.

While Ostalska's and Casey's contributions focus on their poetic speakers' experiences of midlife, reclaiming sexual desire, pleasure and possibilities for growth, Michaela Schrage-Früh's contribution considers poetic representations of 'deep' old age with regard to the ageing mother. Drawing on selected poems by Mary Dorcey and Paul Durcan in conjunction with research from cultural and social gerontology, her essay explores the ways in which these poets address and come to terms with the physical and mental decline of their mothers as well as their own concomitant sense of loss. Given the iconic status of the mother in Irish culture, such depictions gain particular pertinence; if the mother has traditionally been silenced and objectified in Irish literature, how can a poet convey the condition of the ageing mother retreating into silence and death? And how can such poetic representations find a language and perspective that does not diminish the dying mother's dignity, agency and personhood? One striking strategy employed by both poets, as identified by Schrage-Früh, is their subversive use of the dominant cultural trope of old age as a second childhood. Schrage-Früh's article argues that these poets' attempts to give expression to experiences of physical and mental disintegration can contribute to reimagining the iconic image of the mother as well as the 'social imaginary of the fourth age'.²¹ Their poems thus offer much-needed varied and nuanced cultural representations of 'deep' old age, highlighting the need for intergenerational connection and care as well as providing insight into our shared vulnerability.

The articles exploring drama similarly revisit influential twentieth-century constructions of older women as part of exploring how age is culturally configured. Well-known characters conceived by J. M. Synge and Samuel Beckett

are shown to embody the double standards of ageing, standards which are heightened in contemporary drama by the polarising tendencies of twenty-first-century neoliberal, postfeminist society. However, such representations are not uncritical, and the visual and audible entities of age in these plays serve to highlight cultural assumptions, and to pre-empt the future discursive centrality of negative age-related characteristics.

Thus, in her article on attitudes to women's age and ageing in the Midlands Trilogy and *Marble* by Marina Carr, Mária Kurdi refers to Synge's depiction of Nora Burke in his 1903 play *The Shadow of the Glen* as pinpointing the gendered and economic aspects of ageing; financially cut-off and banished from the house by her husband, the vulnerabilities of ageing will surely be intensified. When Nora states, 'It is a pitiful thing to be getting old, but it's a queer thing surely',²² this draws attention, as Kurdi notes, to the state of old age which is unimaginable to the young – thus attesting to the paucity of cultural representations of ageing. Turning to Carr, Kurdi attends to how generations of female characters perform (or un-perform) their age, as she contextualises the social heritage of ageing stereotypes, constraints and double standards. In all the plays in the Midlands Trilogy and in *Marble* the protagonists' ageing bodies are central to the identity crises they experience in midlife. The protagonists of the Midlands trilogy choose death in their refusal to live in a world dominated by inequity and ageism. Moving from rural to urban life, *Marble* provides an account of middle age attending to the superficiality, uncertainty, and emotional emptiness created by the affluent setting of the Celtic Tiger. While the two couples at the heart of the play seem to have it all, a happy marriage, healthy children and material wealth, their façade of happiness crumbles when Art begins to have erotic dreams about his best friend Ben's wife, Catherine, and vice versa. Catherine soon becomes addicted to the world of pure fulfilment symbolised by the room of white marble in which they meet, a fulfilment attainable only in dreams or in death. This death, the play seems to suggest, is preferable to the meaningless worldly affluence symbolised by the exclusive marble tiles polished daily by Art's wife Anne. As Kurdi shows, set in 'modernising' Ireland, the Midlands plays and *Marble* see a continuation, perhaps an intensification, of the gender and class-inflected perils of ageing and its disproportionate effect on women foreshadowed by Synge more than a hundred years ago.

In her article in this collection, Brenda O'Connell focuses on the problematics of Beckett's representation of the ageing feminine, with attention to *All That Fall* (1957) and *Not I* (1972). Beckett, incidentally, is another major influence on Carr's writing, notably in Carr's emphasis on the tragic circularity of

the human condition. O'Connell focuses on Beckett's radio play *All That Fall*, in which, she argues, the culturally 'invisible' older woman becomes paradoxically visible through the medium of sound, as the audience hears the ageing protagonist Maddy Rooney suffer and yet persist. Thus, the character of Maddy is revealed beyond the trope of sexual older women as comedy characters. In fact, Maddy's desire and sexuality remain vital to her embodied being. O'Connell also turns to the televised adaptation of *Not I* (the version starring Billie Whitelaw), to consider the significance of how Mouth, who tells the story of a seventy-year-old 'hag already', closely resembles a vagina.²³ Drawing on Kristevian abjection, O'Connell argues that Mouth confronts the viewer with a profoundly abject and vulnerable, yet powerful and resistant, symbol of the feminine. In both plays the body is inescapable, and hence female ageing and sexuality overflow the representational boundaries of contemporary culture. Such symbolic excesses provide a valuable source for recuperation on the path to accommodating older women's subjectivity in Irish culture.

Anne Fogarty, in her article on femininity and ageing in the work of Anne Enright, considers how Enright's novels and short stories contextualise the marginalisation of women in Western culture and in Irish society, and how *The Green Road* (2015) strips away preconceptions to explore the lived, material experiences of ageing. Fogarty reveals how, in this novel, Enright upturns maternal archetypes, symbols of the woman as Ireland, and common cultural tropes of ageing women, opening out space in which to circumscribe a deeply psychological portrait of the desiring subject in old age. As in Kurdi's essay on Carr, Fogarty also explores the affective gaps and connections between generations, observing how the daughters' lives correlate to, as well as branch off from, their mother's lives. Generational connection, along with recollections and reminiscence, are some of the attributes of ageing which, when explored in narrative, often disrupt form.²⁴ Such disruption is revealed in *The Green Road*, wherein, as Enright challenges recognisable cultural tropes, she also interrupts the expectations of the realist novel, notably its often-linear design. In this regard, Fogarty describes how Enright appropriates the modernist form. The internal worlds and streams of consciousness of the members of the Madigan family are revealed as the narrator waves in and out of the perspectives of individual characters. An external structuring mechanism is provided in the spatial and geographical co-ordinates of the novel. The author also implicates herself within the landscape of the text, embedding in it the name Ballynahown, the place in which she worked on the novel. Thus, *The Green Road* is paradigmatic of a pattern revealed across the articles in this special issue, in which stylistic experimentation

is integral to authors' engagement with defying and altering what is 'known' about ageing.

Turning to the short story, Elke D'hoker's article on 'Experiences of Ageing in Short Stories by Irish Women Writers' expands critical knowledge on age and narrative experimentation. Attending closely to the narrative strategies and emphases which inform depictions of old age in a range of stories by Irish women writers, D'hoker identifies a collective set of stylistic devices. As she notes, the scarce critical attention paid to representations of ageing in Irish literature has so far been mainly focused on the novel, as a genre that shares with life stories a concern with temporality. Hence, D'hoker's choice to focus on a small corpus of short stories by Irish women that explore the experience of ageing from an older character's perspective provides a pioneering approach. As her comparative analysis of eight short stories by writers as diverse as Mary Lavin, Mary Beckett, Val Mulherns, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, Anne Enright and Mary Costello reveals, these writers, despite evident differences in subject matter and tone, draw on recurrent narrative strategies and structural devices characteristic of the short story, such as juxtaposition of past and present scenes, the use of symbolism and dream imagery, and the turning-point, to represent the 'complex psychological processes involved in growing old'. Thus, D'hoker demonstrates the necessity of complementing the present critical focus on the novel in literary ageing studies with investigations of the short story and other forms, as part of challenging the prevailing myths of women and ageing.

This project of foregrounding women and ageing in Irish writing, drama and film necessarily foregrounds ways of seeing, as older figures are often veiled by the expectations of dominant discourse. It thus involves expanding the generic framing of literary texts, as well as broadening the field of literature. Hence, Margaret O'Neill's article in this collection explores life writing as a genre which, incorporating the fictional and the autobiographical, represents a vital mode of inscribing subjective experience. O'Neill's article considers Kate O'Brien, predominantly known for her fiction, focusing on the author's correspondence and her memoir *Presentation Parlour*, a text which intermingles the author's family history, her childhood and the lives of the five aunts who helped to raise her. This article draws a portrait of the author in her older age, a portrait which is often overlooked in favour of youthful images. As the author experiences and imagines her way into older age, O'Neill demonstrates, older characters such as her aunts emerge more vigorously in her memoir than in her fiction. Furthermore, the life writing of the author's later years illuminates the process of identity formation in older age, as the author experiments with the inward and backward gaze as part

of articulating her self-identity and her relation to the world. Approaching O'Brien by way of life writing places the vision and voice of the older author centre-stage and provides for reconsidering how old age is embodied and understood.

In an Irish context, images of womanhood young and old hold historical resonance in their role in visualising the nation. Women have been appropriated as symbols to imagine a nation free of colonial rule, as well as a vulnerable woman in need of wooing away from Irish nationalism. Such symbols, as they serve to legitimate a national imaginary, are activated by the powerful process of visualisation through literature as well as the visual culture of the public sphere. In her article on 'Ageing Iconography: Non-normative Representations of the Irish Maternal Body', Luz Mar González-Arias attends to the inability of canonical iconography to represent and define women, through considering two short films from Ireland: Ken Wardrop's *Undressing My Mother* (2004) and Evan Barry's *Walking Dreams* (2008). Her article brings to the fore the intersections of age with gender and nation which are an underlying preoccupation in the articles across this collection. Attending to motherhood and disability, González-Arias argues that the filmmakers' portrayals are inspired by the need to inscribe the ageing body, the sexual body and the disabled body, bodies which have been edited out of the official State-sanctioned narratives. These films, González-Arias notes, are contextualised within debates about women's rights to bodily autonomy. In an authoritarian Irish State, religiously framed attitudes to women shaped conservative laws which served to deny their political identity and bodily autonomy, instead inscribing the ideal woman in terms of virtuosity, motherhood and domesticity. Centralising the non-normative body, González-Arias illustrates how national iconography ages, thus opening out a space for subversive, inclusive and more realistic imaginings of women and ageing in 21st-century Ireland.

In an Irish State closely wrought in associations of youth and progress, any recalibration for a more just and equal society urgently requires more subversive, diverse representations of old age than historically provided. Regarding ageing women in particular, there is a need to exchange longstanding symbols for fresh critical appraisal of values and assumptions. Such recuperation, reimagination and analysis is particularly pertinent in view of the demographic changes that Ireland, like the rest of Europe, is currently facing, with Ireland's ageing population increasing dramatically.²⁵ A critical gaze on ageing in Irish culture can contribute to counterweighting ageist beliefs as well as to steering society away from denial and exclusion of the ageing population. Additionally, an ageing studies perspective attending to a shared vulnerability that spans all segments of contemporary society – as demonstrated in this collection where it considers, for

example, sexuality, motherhood, and disability – is crucial to future directions in Irish studies. Such a perspective promises to utilise bodies and minds in new ways to generate empathy and provoke active social and political change among populations increasingly segregated. We hope that the critical momentum demonstrated in this special issue will inspire continued investigations into the potential for an ageing-centred approach to intervene in the concerns of contemporary Ireland.

Notes and References

¹ Heather Ingman's recent book, *Ageing in Irish Writing: Strangers to Themselves* (London: Palgrave, 2018), is the first full-length study to explore ageing in Irish writing. Examples of individual articles about the theme of ageing in Irish literature and culture include Veronica House, "'Words We Can Grow Old and Die In': Earth Mother and Ageing Mother in Eavan Boland's Poetry', *The Body and Desire in Contemporary Irish Poetry*, ed. Irene Gilson Nordin (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006) 103-122; Carmen Zamorano Llana, "'Words We Can Grow Old and Die In': Female Reconstructions of the Literary Idiom in Eavan Boland's Later Poetry', *Women Aging Through Literature and Experience*, ed. Brian Worsfold (Lleida: DEDAL-LIT 4, 2005) 127-137; Carmen Zamorano Llana, 'From Loneliness to Solitude in a Post-feminist Age: Redefining Love in the Second Half of Life in Clare Boylan's *Beloved Stranger*', *The Polemics of Ageing as Reflected in Literatures in English*, ed. Maria Vidal Grau and Núria Casado Gual, (Leida: DEDAL-LIT 3, 2004) 177-199; Carmen Zamorano Llana, 'A Brave Old Age: Changes in the Irish Family Trope in Jennifer Johnston's Later Fiction', *Literary Creativity and the Older Woman Writer: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Núria Casado-Gual, Emma Domínguez-Rué and Brian Worsfold (New York: Peter Lang, 2016); Carmen Zamorano Llana, 'Looking Very Old Age in the Eye: A Nuanced Approach to the Fourth Age in Contemporary Irish Fiction: A Case Study', *Gerontologist*, Vol. 00, No. 00 (2018): 1-8; George Bornstein, 'W. B. Yeats's Poetry of Ageing', *Sewanee Review* 120.1 (Winter 2012): 46-61; Donald E. Morse, 'The Politics of Aging: Frank McGuinness's *The Hanging Gardens*', *Irish Theatre in Transition: From the Late Nineteenth to the Early Twenty-First Century*, ed. Donald E. Morse (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) 82-96; Burcu Güllüm Tekin, 'Ageing Men and Therapeutic Pints in Roddy Doyle's *Two Pints*', *Estudios Irlandeses*, 12 (2017): 129-139; Margaret O'Neill, "'This is How Time Unfolds When You Are Old": Ageing, Subjectivity, and Joseph O'Connor's *Ghost Light*", *Ageing Women in Literature and Visual Culture: Reflections, Refractions, Reimaginings*, ed. Cathy McGlynn, Margaret O'Neill and Michaela Schrage-Früh (Cham: Palgrave, 2017) 289-302; Michaela Schrage-Früh, "'Embararking, Not Dying": Clare Boylan's *Beloved Stranger* as *Reifungsroman*', *Ageing Women in Literature and Visual Culture* 55-71; Theresa Wray, 'A Certain Truth in Fiction: Perceptions of the Ageing Process in Irish Women's Fiction', *Ageing Women in Literature and Visual Culture* 181-193; Margaret O'Neill and Michaela Schrage-Früh, 'Ageing, Families and Contemporary Irish Fiction', *The New Irish Studies: Twenty-First-Century Critical Revisions*, ed. Paige Reynolds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018 [forthcoming].

² 'Cathleen Ni Houlihan', *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats: Volume II: The Plays*, ed. David R. Clark and Rosalind E. Clark (New York: Scribner, 2001) 93.

³ Eavan Boland, *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time* (London: Vintage, 1996) 129.

⁴ Eavan Boland, *Object Lessons* 142-143.

⁵ See Toni Calasanti et al. (2018) 'Rationales for Anti-Aging Activities in Middle Age: Aging, Health, or Appearance?' *Gerontologist*. 58.2, 233-241: 234 doi:10.1093/geront/gnw111

⁶ See Jeanette King, *Discourses of Ageing in Fiction and Feminism: The Invisible Woman* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

⁷ See Julia Twigg and Wendy Martin, 'The Challenge of Cultural Gerontology', *The Gerontologist* 55.3 (2014): 1-7.

⁸ Susan Sontag, 'The Double Standard of Aging', *The Saturday Review*. (September 23rd 1972): 31. *NZ.org: Periodicals, Books and Authors*. <http://www.unz.org/Pub/SaturdayRev-1972sep23-00029>

⁹ Margaret Morganroth Gullette, *Declining to Decline: Cultural Combat and the Politics of the Midlife* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1997), 77.

¹⁰ See Barbara Frey Waxman, *From the Hearth to the Open Road: A Feminist Study of Aging in Contemporary Literature* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990).

¹¹ Gullette, *Declining to Decline*.

¹² See Carmen Zamorano Llana, 'Looking Very Old Age in the Eye' 2.

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- ¹³ William L. Randall, 'Aging, Irony, and Wisdom: On the Narrative Complexity of Later Life', *Theory & Psychology* 23.2 (2013): 166.
- ¹⁴ Boland, *Object Lessons* 151.
- ¹⁵ Boland, *Object Lessons* 208.
- ¹⁶ Eavan Boland, 'A Woman Painted on a Leaf', in *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), 210-211, 210.
- ¹⁷ Kathleen Woodward, 'Introduction', *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations*, ed. Kathleen Woodward (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999) xvi.
- ¹⁸ Vona Groarke, 'Love Songs', *Spindrift* (Loughcrew: Gallery Press, 2009) 49.
- ¹⁹ Eileen Casey, 'Bones', *From Bone to Blossom* (Dublin: AltEnts Press, 2011), 36.
- ²⁰ Eileen Casey, 'Subjunctive', in *Reading the Future*, ed. Alan Hayes (Dublin: Arlen House, 2018), 97.
- ²¹ Amanda Grenier, Liz Loyd, and Chris Phillipson, 'Precarity in Late Life: Rethinking Dementia as a "Fraild" Old Age', *Sociology of Health and Illness* 39.2 (2017): 325.
- ²² J. M. Synge, *The Shadow of the Glen*, *Collected Works, Plays I*, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (London: Oxford University Press, 1968) 51.
- ²³ Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986) 380.
- ²⁴ On reminiscence, see Kathleen Woodward, *Telling Stories*. With responses by Andrew E. Scharlach and Marilyn Fabe. Occasional papers for the Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities, no. 9 (1997), 13.
- ²⁵ See Sheelah Connolly, 'Contextualising Ageing in Ireland', *Ageing Through Austerity: Critical Perspectives from Ireland*, ed. Kieran Walsh, Gemma M. Carney, and Áine Ní Léime (Bristol: Policy Press, 2015). As Connolly points out, 'while Ireland's population is ageing, it remains young relative to other high-income countries. [. . .] [H]owever, a catch-up is projected by 2050, when the proportion of Ireland will surpass that of other countries' (18).