

Highlighting the chasm between ageing women and how its presented

'One of the few advantages of age is that you can report on it with a certain authority; you are a native now, and know what goes on here'— Penelope Lively



NUI Galway
OE Gaillimh



Moore
Institute

Gender
ARC



Book Launch

Ageing Women in Literature & Visual Culture: Reflections, Refractions, Reimaginings

Cathy McGlynn, Maggie O'Neill, Michaela Schrage-Fruh

Launch by Prof Julia Twigg (University of Kent)

10 May 2018, NUI Galway, Moore Institute, Hardiman Building, G010
Lecture by Prof Julia Twigg, "Dress and the Narration of Life", 5pm
Book launch, Ageing Women in Literature & Visual Culture, 6pm
All welcome!



Dr Michaela Schrage-Fruh, Lecturer in German, NUI Galway



Dr Maggie O'Neill, Gender, Arc, UL and Moore Institute

It's with great pleasure that I bring welcome news of a very interesting event. Held over two days, the amount of preparation in advance of the opening registration on Thursday 10th May, is clearly evident in the remarkably interesting and varied programme. This is a quality event and although focused on the new interdisciplinary field of ageing studies, it's very much a reassessment of how cultural representations of ageing are a social and cultural construct. This is an area where there are already well established research centres such as the Irish Centre for Social Gerontology (NUI Galway) or the ICS21 (UCC). These centres are indications of the level of active, Irish scholars in this dialogue.

Events such as this one require an amount of dynamic input and dedication. These qualities are not found wanting in either Dr Maggie O'Neill, Gender, Arc, UL and Moore Institute

Visiting Fellow or Dr Michaela Schrage-Fruh, Lecturer in German, NUI Galway. These eminent scholars believe that gender itself is the one aspect that would truly benefit from specific foregrounding. It is their belief that such preliminary work is pertinent because the ageing woman is obscured in so many contexts – for instance, in media representation, economic security, health and welfare. Part of this raising of awareness in this regard is the symposium in May. As well as offering a range of life affirming talks, this event marks the inaugural meeting of the Women and Ageing Research Network, WARN as well as launching a collection entitled *Ageing Women in Literature and Visual Culture: Reflections, Refractions, Re-imaginings* edited by Cathy McGlynn, Maggie O'Neill and Michaela Schrage-Fruh.

This event carries forward the momentum of the international, interdisciplinary confer

ence on "Women and Ageing: New Critical and Cultural Perspectives", which took place in the University of Limerick in May 2015. The organisers are especially interested in the growing chasm between the experience of ageing and how it is culturally presented and

perceived. A well-chosen quote from the organisers comes from Penelope Lively's recent memoir *Ammonites and Leaping Fish: A Life in Time* (2013): "One of the few advantages of age is that you can report on it with a certain authority; you are a native now, and know what goes on here". In short then, this symposium concentrates and contextualises the diversity of women's experiences as they age which in turn counterbalances the mainly one-sided, negative re-inforcement of ageing as perpetuated by dominant cultural discourse. Over the two days, a number of highly regarded in their fields contributors will focus on a range of life writing including older women's diaries, journals, memoirs, letters and autobiography. Digital and visual forms of life narration will also be present.

The invited speakers include experts from the areas of sociology/cultural gerontology, education studies, as well as literary and cultural studies. Selected papers of the symposium will be included in two special journal issues, one on "Women and Ageing: Private Meaning, Social Lives", to be published in a peer-reviewed journal *Life Writing*, and another on "Women and Ageing in Irish Literature and Film", to be published in the peer reviewed *Nordic Irish Studies*. Both issues are edited by Dr Maggie O'Neill and Dr Michaela Schrage-Fruh. I'm very pleased to be included on the programme with such a range of themes. My own presentation "From Bone (Grave) to Blossom (Cradle)" is on Friday, 11th May (14.00 - 15.00). reviewed journal *Nordic Irish Studies*. Both issues are to be edited by Maggie O'Neill and Michaela Schrage-Fruh. The organisers gratefully acknowledge the support of the College of Arts, Social Sciences and Celtic Studies, NUIG, The Moore Institute, Gender Arc, and the Irish Research Council in bringing these projects to fruition.

New writing from Ireland

Another event I'm proud to be associated with is the appearance of *Reading the Future: New Writing from Ireland* (Arlen House), a wonderful book of poetry and prose which is published to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Hodges Figgis. In turn, Hodges Figgis is synonymous with celebrating and supporting Irish Writing. HF has sold millions of books over the centuries and is also a very reputable publisher of books and journals. HF is the official bookseller to Trinity College, the Royal Dublin Society and the Royal Society of Antiquaries. Indeed, it's fitting that Arlen House be the publisher of this magnificent tome (over 700 pages) which includes 250 writers from all corners of the globe (include the US, UK, Italy and Singapore). Editorial informs that the age range of the writers stretch from 23 to 93. The combined

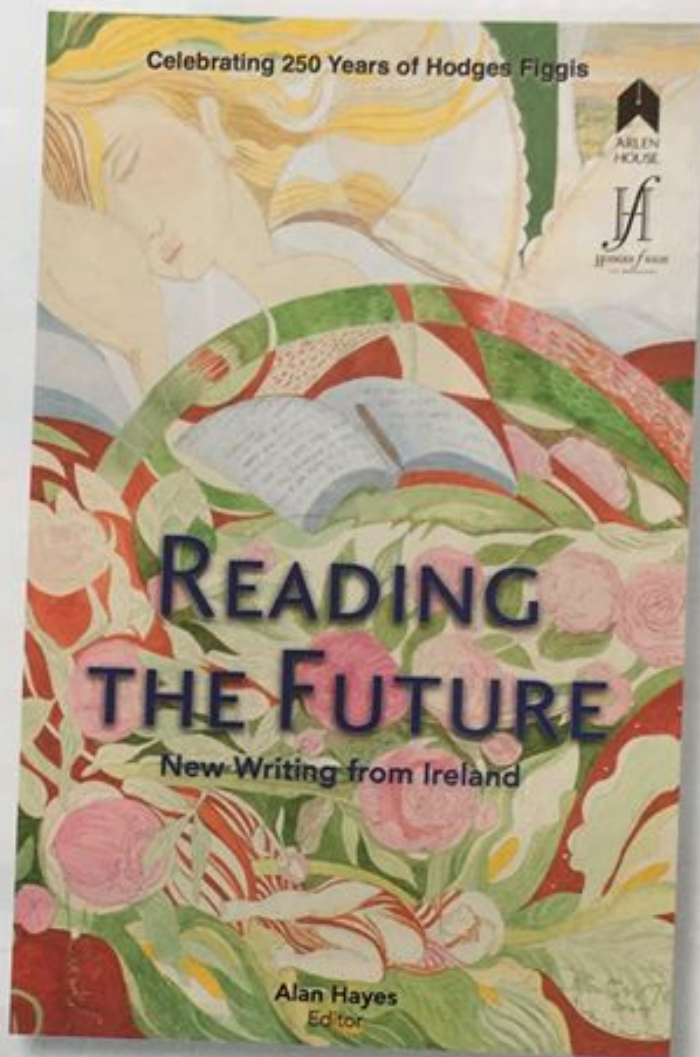
achievements of the writers resulted in the sale of millions of books, the winning of many awards (Booker, Kavanagh Prize, Costa and the Dublin Literary Award) and also, some of the work received the Oscar and the Bafta.

What's really amazing about *Reading the Future: New Writing from Ireland* is that all the proceeds are going to a fund which will help the literary community. The cover image by Pauline Bewick, is stunning, as would befit one of our most prestigious artists. What makes this book so very attractive is the inclusion also of first time work from two literary giants. Shortly before he died (autumn 2017), J.P. Dunleavy offered a chapter from his final novel, *A Letter Marked Personal*, which The Lilliput Press will publish in 2018. There's also ground-breaking drama from Maeve Binchy. Interspersed throughout the book are a series of images from HF publications from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. A short history of HF is given and the anthology ends with recommended

readings by all of the contributors. This book is well worth the purchase price of 20. Not only is it a comprehensive index of contemporary writing but it's also a historical gem in terms of reminding us how important reading and books truly are.

Impossible Dream from Poolbeg Press

Finally, new out from Poolbeg comes 'Impossible Dream' by Gemma Jackson. This story begins in 1898 in a Dublin orphanage. This author is no stranger to praise. Her previous books, including 'Through Streets Broad and Narrow,' earned five star reviews. Jackson's new book is aptly titled. The fifth of seven children, although the family had little money, big dreams were encouraged. Reared in Dublin's inner city, this author grew up being advised to reach for the stars while at the same time, having her ears boxed! Her early memories are around storytelling, sitting on the stairs with gangs of children while stories were being



Another event I'm proud to be associated with is the appearance of *Reading the Future: New Writing from Ireland* (Arlen House), a wonderful book of poetry and prose which is published to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Hodges Figgis.