

BOSTON COLLEGE | DUBLIN

FRANCO-IRISH SYMPOSIUM

# MOVING FROM THE MARGINS AND DISSOLVING BOUNDARIES: WOMEN AND IRISH POLITICS IN THE LONG 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

JUNE 27 2025

REGISTRATION:







9:00	WELCOME AND OPENING WORDS MIKE CRONIN, PAULINE COLLOMBIER
9:15	'I WAS THE ONLY WOMAN IN THE HOUSE': LADY CECIL CRAIG AND ULSTER UNIONISM. PROF. DIANE URQUHART, QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST
10:15	'[A] WORTHY AND SINGLE-MINDED NATIONALIST'? ELIZABETH DILLON'S LETTERS TO JOHN DILLON [...]. PAULINE COLLOMBIER, UR 2338 (IDEA), UNIVERSITÉ DE LORRAINE
11:00	COFFEE BREAK
11:15	BRIDGING TWO WORLDS: IRISH-SPEAKING WOMEN IN URBAN NORTH AMERICA DR. SÍOBHRA AIKEN, QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST
12:00	LUNCH BREAK
13:00	'[S]HE WROTE WITH A PEN FASHIONED OF DYNAMITE': THE ERA OF THE LADIES' LAND LEAGUE, [...]. DR. KATHRYN LAING, MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK
14:00	WOMEN ON THE IRISH STAGE: THEATRE, SOCIABILITY AND POLITICS IN THE LONG 19 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURY. DR. VIRGINIE ROCHE-TIENGO, CENTRE DE RECHERCHE TEXTES ET CULTURES, UNIVERSITÉ D'ARTOIS
14:45	AN ARCHIVAL EXAMINATION IN WOMEN'S LIVES IN THE 19 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURY [...] DR. SINÉAD MCCOOLE, HEAD OF EXHIBITIONS, LEARNING AND PROGRAMMING NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND, DUBLIN
15:30	COFFEE BREAK
15:45	'THE ENEMY SHOULD NEVER SEE US CRY': MARY MACSWINEY, TRAUMA AND THE BRIXTON HUNGER STRIKE 1920. DR. LEEANN LANE, DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY
16:30	TWO FRENCH WOMEN REPORTING THE IRISH WAR OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE CIVIL WAR: SIMONE TÉRY AND ANDRÉE VIOLLIS. DR. CLAIRE DUBOIS, UR 4074 (OEOILLE), UNIVERSITÉ DE LILLE
17:15	CONCLUDING REMARKS

# MOVING FORM THE MARGINS AND DISSOLVING BOUNDARIES: WOMEN AND IRISH POLITICS IN THE LONG 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY



9:00 - 9:15  
WELCOME AND OPENING WORDS  
MIKE CRONIN, PAULINE COLLOMBIER

9:15 - 10:15  
*'I WAS THE ONLY WOMAN IN THE HOUSE':  
LADY CECIL CRAIG AND ULSTER UNIONISM.*  
PROF. DIANE URQUHART, QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

Although attracting considerable press coverage and unionist acclaim for running the Ulster Women's Unionist Council (UWUC), the largest female political organisation in Ireland's history, and frequently deputising for her husband, James Craig in his position as the first as prime minster of Northern Ireland from 1921-40, Cecil Craig was side-lined from history. This paper uses Cecil Craig's extensive diaries and the contemporary press to investigate the development of her unionism. It also seeks to understand her significance to history and offer a comparison to other prime ministerial wives. Depictions of the latter range from 'all-embracing nurturer to stalwart partner, passive doormat, lickety-spit support staffer...[to] mischievous saboteur' (Elspeth Cameron, 'Ladies of the Hill', *Maclean's*, vol. 104, 43 (28 October 1991), p. 97). Cecil resides in the former two categories but, as an erstwhile supporter of politicising unionist women, might she also be described as a conservative feminist ?

Prof. Diane Urquhart is the chair of gender history at Queen’s University Belfast. She is President of the Women’s History Association of Ireland, an elected member of the Royal Irish Academy, a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and deputy editor of the *Women’s History Review*. A graduate of Queen’s University Belfast, Diane spent close to twenty years working in the Institute of Irish Studies of the University of Liverpool. Diane has published widely on Irish women’s history. Her monographs include *Women in Ulster Politics, 1890-1940* (Irish Academic Press), *The Ladies Londonderry, women and political patronage, 1800-1959* (Tauris/Bloomsbury) and co-authored with Lindsey Earner Byrne, *The Irish abortion journey, 1920-2018* (Routledge). Her latest book, *Irish divorce: a History*, published by Cambridge University Press, won the international James S. Donnelly, Sr. Prize for the best book in the Humanities and Social Sciences in 2020. She is currently working on the first full-length study of the criminal conversation legal suit in Ireland.

## 10:15 - 11:00

‘[A] WORTHY AND SINGLE-MINDED NATIONALIST’?  
ELIZABETH DILLON’S LETTERS TO JOHN DILLON  
AND WHAT THEY REVEAL OF HER ROLE AND IDEAS.

PAULINE COLLOMBIER, UR 2338 (IDEA), UNIVERSITÉ DE LORRAINE

Since the late 1980s, there has been a noticeable increase of interest from historians in the question of women’s involvement in Irish nationalism and politics. However, maybe because they were deprived of the right both to vote and to sit in Parliament and because leading figures of the IPP such as Parnell, Dillon or Redmond proved hostile to women’s open participation in politics, there has been little focus on the connexion between women and home rule as well as between women and constitutional nationalism. And yet, Senia Paseta, who recognises that being a female nationalist ‘did not necessarily mean commitment to Irish separatism’ and that ‘the history of advanced nationalist women is (...) much better known and understood than the history of constitutional nationalist women.’<sup>1</sup> Working on women and their connexions to home rule entails many possibilities, notably investigating or re-investigating women that were intimately close to some of the leaders of the Irish parliamentary. One of these women was Elizabeth Matthew, who married John Dillon in 1895 after meeting him in 1886. Matthew left a diary, an edited version of which was published in 2019 (from an estimated 800,000 words in her 38 journals, preserved among the Dillon papers in Trinity College Dublin). The Dillon papers at TCD also include a couple of short leaflets she penned - including one written on the Irish question - and a sizeable correspondence with John Dillon. None of these sources have been extensively examined. This paper intends to focus on Elizabeth’s letters to John Dillon so as to show what role she envisaged for herself, which political ideas she expressed, and what role she played for and in relation to her husband.

<sup>1</sup> Sénia Paseta, *Irish Nationalist Women, 1900-1918* (Cambridge: CUP, 2018) pp. 7 & 63.

Prof. Pauline Collombier was recently appointed (Sept. 2024) Professor at the University of Lorraine (Metz), where she teaches British and Irish history. Previously, she was a Senior Lecturer (MCF) at the University of Strasbourg. Her research work focuses on Irish nationalism in the long nineteenth century, home rule and Anglo-Irish relations, Ireland and the British empire. One of her latest publications is a book entitled *Imagining Ireland’s Future, 1870-1914: Home Rule, Utopia, Dystopia*, published by Palgrave Macmillan in January 2023. Her current research involves a project examining the role played by women throughout the campaign in favour of Irish home rule (1870-1914).

## 11:00 - 11:15

COFFEE BREAK

## 11:15 - 12:00

BRIDGING TWO WORLDS:  
IRISH-SPEAKING WOMEN IN URBAN NORTH AMERICA  
DR. SÍOBHRA AIKEN, QUEEN’S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

This paper takes as its starting point a striking feature of US subscriptions lists to the Gaelic League from the 1890s to the 1910s: the number of donations from single women, many of whom were domestic servants. Reflecting the conference theme of ‘moving from the margins’, this paper assesses the migratory trajectories of Irish-speaking women from predominantly rural communities to urban centres in North America. The paper considers the particular challenges these women faced as Irish-speaking migrants in an anglophone society but also explores how some Irish-speaking women became engaged in Irish cultural and political activities in the diaspora. This paper also addresses the methodological challenges of reconstructing the day-to-day linguistic realities of the long nineteenth century due to gaps and erasure in the official records – a challenge well-known to historians of women more generally during this period.

Síobhra Aiken is a Senior Lecturer in Irish and Celtic Studies at Queen’s University Belfast and a member of the Young Academy Ireland (YAI). Her first monograph, *Spiritual Wound: Trauma, Testimony and the Irish Civil War* (2022) was awarded Royal Historical Society Whitfield Prize and the ACIS Michael J. Durkan Prize for Books in Language and Culture.

12:00 - 13:00

LUNCH BREAK



13:00 - 14:00

*‘[S]HE WROTE WITH A PEN FASHIONED OF DYNAMITE’:  
THE ERA OF THE LADIES’ LAND LEAGUE, IRISH WOMEN WRITERS,  
ARTISTS AND PRINT CULTURES*

DR. KATHRYN LAING, MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

Hannah Lynch’s fictional portrait of a ‘girl revolutionist’ wielding an editorial pen ‘fashioned of dynamite’ offers a very different version of early representations of members of the Ladies’ Land League as either harridans or ‘sweet girl graduates’.<sup>2</sup> Sustained critical attention of turn-of-the twenty-first century historians and literary scholars continues to overturn assumptions about this short-lived movement and membership. Gaps and silences in the historical narrative have been addressed. Understood now as ‘a watershed moment in Irish women’s history’, for example, the Ladies’ Land League has also been identified as ‘a training ground for women writers as well as activists’.<sup>3</sup> Several of these activist women were artists, writers and editors, and many who were not involved in the Ladies’ Land League but who wrote about the Land War period from a feminist and nationalist perspective, were also imbricated in the nascent cultural revival in the 1880s, in all its manifestations. In this talk I will examine these imbrications in more detail, focusing on a nexus of women writers, some of whom had also been artists in training, including Rose Kavanagh, Katharine Tynan, Anna Parnell, Hannah Lynch and Rosa Mulholland. Specific attention will be paid to publishing networks as well as editorial roles, to literary activities which included championing women and the arts, and to the diversity of nationalist publications through which they fashioned their multifaceted literary, cultural and political identities.

Dr Kathryn Laing (Department of English Language and Literature, MIC, University of Limerick) is co-founder of the Irish Women’s Writing Network (1880-1920) <https://irishwomenswritingnetwork.com> and general editor with Dr Sinéad Mooney of two series, *Key Irish Women Writers* and *Irish Women Writers: Texts and Contexts* (EER Publishers). Recent publications include: Laing, Kathryn and Iliana Theodoropoulou. ‘Lost and found in the archives: Hannah Lynch and Dimitrios Vikélas; Dublin, Athens, Paris: literary crossings and collaborations’, *Irish Studies Review* 31.4 Nov 2023, 1-19; Laing, Kathryn, Sinéad Mooney, Caoilfhionn Ní Bheacháin, Anna Pilz, Whitney Standlee, and Julie Anne Stevens. “Connecting Voices: An Introduction to Irish Women Writers’ Collaborations and Networks, 1880–1940.” *English Studies* 140, no. 5 (2023): 1–21; Laing, Kathryn and Mary Pierse, eds. *George Moore: Spheres of Influence* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2023); Laing, ‘F. Mabel Robinson, Vernon Lee, and George Moore: The Aesthetics of Sympathy and Texts of Transition’ in *Re-Reading the Age of Innovation: Victorians, Moderns, and Literary Newness, 1830-1950*, ed. Louise Kane (London: Routledge, 2022); and Laing, ed. *Hannah Lynch’s Irish Girl Rebels: ‘A Girl Revolutionist’ and ‘Marjory Maurice’* (Brighton: EER, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Hannah Lynch, ‘A Girl Revolutionist’ in Laing, ed. *Hannah Lynch’s Irish Girl Rebels: ‘A Girl Revolutionist’ and ‘Marjory Maurice’* (Brighton: EER, 2022), p.193; William O’Brien, *Recollections* (London: Macmillan, 1905), p. 38, respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Tina O’Toole, *The Irish New Woman*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 86.

14:00 - 14:45

*WOMEN ON THE IRISH STAGE:  
THEATRE, SOCIABILITY AND POLITICS IN THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY.*  
DR. VIRGINIE ROCHE-TIENGO, UR 4028 (CENTRE DE RECHERCHE TEXTES ET CULTURES),  
UNIVERSITÉ D’ARTOIS

The role of women in Irish theatre in the long nineteenth century is deeply intertwined with sociability, politics, and national identity. Irish theatre, particularly through institutions such as the Abbey Theatre and the Gate Theatre in Dublin, provided a space for women to engage in public discourse, challenge societal norms, and shape national consciousness. We will first explore how women playwrights such as Lady Gregory (1852-1932), actresses and theatre practitioners such as Máire Nic Shiubhlaigh (1883-1958), Helen Laird (1874-1957) or Sara Allgood (1879-1950) were instrumental in playwriting, management and dramaturgy in the early days of the Irish Literary Theatre (1899) and played a crucial role in shaping Irish theatre with the creation of the Abbey Theatre in 1904. We will see how they explored and sometimes contested the ‘woman as nation’ thesis. We will then look at Ireland’s revolutionary sisterhood to show how women had dual roles as artists and activists and were politically active, engaging in nationalist movements, including Cumann na mBan. Although women’s voices were often sidelined in the male-dominated nationalist narratives of the time, we will unearth their stories and show how they moved from the margins and dissolved boundaries on the Irish stage. Because the 1920s saw the rise of female playwrights such as Teresa Deevy (1894-1963), whose works (Katie Roche, 1936) challenged conventional gender roles. Finally, while focusing on sociability and the Women Writers’ Club led by *Dorothy Macardle* (1889-1958), we will explore the challenges faced by Irish women playwrights such as Mary Manning and co-founder of the Gate theatre, Daisy Bannard Cogley (1884-1965) during the conservative post-independence era which limited opportunities for women in the theatre and entailed a diasporic exodus of Irish women playwrights to Britain and the United States.

Dr. Virginie Roche-Tiengo, is an Associate Professor in Irish Studies at the University d’Artois. She has published articles on Irish drama, in particular the work of Brian Friel, Thomas Kilroy, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Marina Carr, Frank McGuinness, Charles Macklin and Richard Brinsley Sheridan. She is a member of scientific committees for the organization of international colloquia in Ireland, the United States, France, Spain and Argentina, and has chaired debates at conferences in Japan, Italy, Ireland and France. Her research also focuses on the interaction between law and theatre.



## 14:45 - 15:30

*AN ARCHIVAL EXAMINATION IN WOMEN'S LIVES IN THE 19TH CENTURY - WHAT DOES THE VISUAL RECORD TELL US OF IRISH WOMEN IN THE 19TH CENTURY?*

**DR. SINÉAD MCCOOLE**, HEAD OF EXHIBITIONS, LEARNING AND PROGRAMMING,  
NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND, DUBLIN

This illustrated presentation looks at the narratives of women's lives in the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the fragmentary visual archive. Looking at the archive of remaining photographs, prints, drawings and political cartoons collections in Ireland and the US, this paper examines the politicalization of women as demonstrated by a fragmentary archive. Examining what it tells us, and what it presents about the margins and boundaries across Ireland. It asks what the canon tells us of Irish women and politics and how successful they were in dissolving the restrictions of the society of 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland. It looks at sources and why they suggest that we need to rewrite the way in which we look at those traditional narratives with new understanding and insights across the 1800s.

Dr Sinéad McCoole joined the National Library as Head of Exhibitions, Learning and Programming in November 2023. As a Curator of exhibitions on Irish history and Irish art both Ireland and the US. A member of the Expert Advisory Group on the Irish Government's Decade of Centenaries from 2012-2023. Sinéad worked as Historical Advisor to the Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme. She curated *Mná 1916 – Women 1916* (2016) the national centenary exhibition which toured venues in Ireland as well as being showcased in the Irish embassies in Washington DC and Nairobi. In 2018 she was an Ex-Officio member of Vótáil100 and to mark the 1918 centenary on the introduction of voting rights for woman and their rights to stand in parliamentary elections: Sinéad devised as part of the Irish Government Decade of Commemorations Programme based in the Commemorations Unit: *A Pop Women's Museum – 100 years of Women in Politics and Public Life*. A specially adapted versions of this exhibition toured every Irish province from 2018-2020. From 2021-2023 Sinéad led the women's strand, curating the online platform [www.Mná100.ie](http://www.Mná100.ie). This online platform has films, podcasts, photo-essays, hosted international webinars and 'in conversations and roundtable discussions. It highlighted the work of historians, poets and visual art as well as a spotlight on the collections in the National Cultural Institutions and the Local Authority Decade of Centenaries Network. It was noted for its original historical research and for showing unseen material which was focused on the final phase of the Decade of Centenaries 1921-1923. She has written extensively in the area of modern Irish History. Her play, *Leaving the Ladies*, was published by Arlen House (2019). This play was adapted for an installation at the Mansion House in 2022 and was premièred in France by students at L'Université Toulouse Capitole. An accomplished script writer she has written for television documentaries and worked on films and *A Father's Letter* (Swansongs Films, 2016). Currently, Sinéad is a Board Member of the International Association of Women's Museum and an invited member of FIRN, a global network funded by the Canadian Government which sets out reimagining gender justice through creative and art based adult education, research and curation in museums, libraries, heritage sites, universities and communities.

## 15:30 - 15:45

COFFEE BREAK



## 15:45 - 16:30

*'THE ENEMY SHOULD NEVER SEE US CRY':  
MARY MACSWINEY, TRAUMA AND THE BRIXTON HUNGER STRIKE 1920*  
**DR. LEEANN LANE**, DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

Mary MacSwiney was one of the most uncompromising opponents of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Her unyielding adherence to the ideal of full republican independence was a stance she maintained during the civil war and after the Sinn Féin split in 1926, right down to her death from heart failure in 1942. To this day she is viewed as politically one-dimensional. Such was MacSwiney's outer reality, a political materiality that was in no small way informed by the gender norms of the period in which she lived. MacSwiney was not, however, as this paper argues, merely a cipher for the extreme element within republicanism during the Treaty debates and in the years up to her death; to work towards an understanding of her inner reality facilitates a more holistic portrayal of an individual life and the emotions that animate political actions.

MacSwiney was a woman who suffered ultimate loss in Brixton jail in 1920 as her brother Terence starved to death on hunger strike. Her witnessing of, in the words of her sister Annie, scenes that were 'agonising beyond anything I could describe', changed the trajectory of her life. The fact that MacSwiney's trauma did not manifest as pathology but rather in an impetus to ensure that the cause of full independence for which her brother had given his life was achieved facilitated the perception of her as a 'virago'. This outer manifestation of MacSwiney elided the human responses to a traumatic experience; she became increasingly in contemporary political discourse a caricature of republican extremism.

This paper is concerned with the emotional response of MacSwiney to her brother's death and the way such informed her political actions after 1920. The paper focuses on the experience and feelings of Mary and the wider MacSwiney family as they watched day after day as their beloved brother became weaker and inched towards death. Terence's medical notes show the suffering he endured but they also illuminate the trauma experienced by Mary, his wife Muriel, and his other siblings as they watched him slowly die.

Brief statements in MacSwiney's testimony in Washington in December 1920 before the American Commission on Conditions in Ireland give an insight to the pain and extreme suffering she endured in Brixton. She noted how medical and official appeals were to encourage Terence to take food were made less to Muriel than to her and Annie, continuing:

They had the grace to leave his wife alone. I think her youth and beauty appealed to them. Perhaps they thought we were not feeling it so much. But we got the brunt of it to bear, and it was not easy.

There was, Mary stated, ‘a limit to human endurance, and some of us have had to go quite close to it’.

Dr Leeann Lane is a lecturer in the School of History and Geography, Dublin City University. She is the author of *Mary MacSwiney* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2025), *Dorothy Macardle* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2019) and *Rosamond Jacob: Third Person Singular* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2010). During the Decade of Centenaries, Dr Lane was a member of the Irish government appointed Expert Advisory Group.

## 16:30 - 17:15

### TWO FRENCH WOMEN REPORTING THE IRISH WAR OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE CIVIL WAR: SIMONE TÉRY AND ANDRÉE VIOLLIS

DR. CLAIRE DUBOIS, UR 4074 (CECILLE - CENTRE D’ETUDES EN CIVILISATIONS LANGUES ET LETTRES ETRANGERES), UNIVERSITÉ DE LILLE

This paper intends to analyse the war journalism produced by Simone Téry and Andrée Viollis, two women who reported the conflict in Ireland and whose work reflected both their personal circumstances – including their gender – and their political agenda. The daughter of two journalists (including Andrée Viollis), Simone Téry (1897-1967) was invited to report on the Irish War of independence in August 1921 at a time when many foreign correspondents – including famous French ones like Joseph Kessel and Henri Béraud – had already been sent there. Writing for *L’Œuvre*, left-leaning daily newspaper edited by her father Gustave Téry, she spent months in Ireland and secured interviews with the main Sinn Féin and Unionist leaders. In October and November 1922, *Le Petit Parisien*, a French republican newspaper published a series of articles describing the trip to Ireland by one of its reporters, Andrée Viollis (1870-1950). Téry and Viollis were among the few women foreign correspondents in France in the interwar years.

Both wrote reports that were rooted in the lived experience of both civilian populations and soldiers, and emphasized human suffering in close-up images of the war. Carefully prepared, their reporting sought new sources to challenge the canonical reading and interpretation of events of their time. Interspersed with many interviews, physical descriptions and on-site depictions, their reporting bridged the gap between the foreign world and the readers, triggering emotions and reactions. It also seems that their trips to Ireland shaped their political engagement and their perception of colonialism – both were leftist, became communist later in their lives, and were sent to cover the Spanish Civil War. Viollis went on to report the situation in India, but also French Indochina.

They produced visual images of the situation in Ireland with particular concern for women. The Irish War of Independence and the Civil War were described as conflicts that erased or blurred the frontier between frontline and home front. Both journalists also shared a clear feminist stance, and analysed women’s situations in a transnational perspective, sensitizing the readers to the pain of others.

Dr. Claire Dubois wrote a PhD on representations of the Gaelic Past and their use in the construction of Irish identity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She is an Assistant Professor in Irish Studies at Lille University, in France. She works on visual culture, architecture, the press, travel writing, national identity and its expressions. Her book, *L’art comme arme en politique. Les combats de Constance Markievicz*, was published in 2024. She is currently working on the representation of Ireland’s revolution in France.

## 17:15- 17:30

CONCLUDING REMARKS



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# MOVING FORM THE MARGINS AND DISSOLVING BOUNDARIES: WOMEN AND IRISH POLITICS IN THE LONG 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

JUNE 27 2025

REGISTRATION:



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